TOE PICKS AND HOCKEY STICKS: CHILDREN AND THE GENDERING OF
FIGURE SKATING AND HOCKEY

by

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Abstract

Figure skating and hockey are two sports that currently are gendered as feminine and masculine, respectively. This study originated in my concern that gendered sports may be a discouragement to youth participation. This research project was undertaken in order to understand how figure skating and hockey are gendered in a community arena in rural British Columbia and how this might impact youth involvement. My methods included participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. The data from these ethnographic techniques are interpreted according to the concept that people both actively reinforce and resist the gendering of their sport. As a result of the study, I found that gendering hockey as masculine was often contested by female hockey players. Although females in recreational hockey seem to be largely accepted and welcome on mixed teams, the opposite was the case for females pursuing hockey competitively alongside their male peers. Gendering figure skating as feminine was largely uncontested, in part due to the lack of males participating in the sport. In addition, the interactions between hockey players and figure skaters frequently served to reinforce the gendering of these two sports. The key recommendation from this study is for both groups to be aware that the gendering of their sports seems to be a subconscious deterrent and they should take steps to counteract this trend.
Preface

This research was conducted with approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia Okanagan on February 14, 2011 (UBC BREB Number H10-02490).
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii
Preface ........................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................... iv
List of Figures ............................................................................................... vi
Glossary .......................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................... x
Dedication ....................................................................................................... xi

Chapter 1 Introduction .................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Background and Significance of Gender and Sports .................................. 2

Chapter 2 Literature Review ......................................................................... 7
  2.1 Sport ........................................................................................................ 7
  2.2 Children in Sport .................................................................................. 8
  2.3 Sport and Gender ................................................................................ 10
  2.4 Figure Skating and Gender .................................................................. 12
  2.5 Hockey and Gender ............................................................................ 16
  2.6 Summary .............................................................................................. 20

Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology ......................................................... 22
  3.1 Participant Observation ......................................................................... 23
  3.2 Focus Groups ...................................................................................... 24
  3.3 Interviews .......................................................................................... 26
  3.4 Interpreting the Data .......................................................................... 26

Chapter 4 Evidence of Gendering in the Community Arena ....................... 29
  4.1 Findings from Participant Observation .................................................. 30
    4.1.1 Who is On the Ice and What are They Wearing? .......................... 31
    4.1.2 Who is Watching and What are They Doing? ............................. 34
    4.1.3 What Happens on the Ice? ......................................................... 36
    4.1.4 Figure Skating vs. Hockey .......................................................... 39
  4.2 Findings from Interviews ...................................................................... 41
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Findings from Focus Groups</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1</td>
<td>The Focus Group Drawings</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>Interpretation of the Data</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Hockey as Masculine (Mostly)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Figure Skating as Feminine</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Hockey vs. Figure Skating: A Moment of Gender Salience</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Research Findings</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Avenues for Further Research</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Focus Group Pictures</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1</td>
<td>Recommendations for the Local Figure Skating Club</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.2</td>
<td>Recommendations for the Local Hockey Association</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.3</td>
<td>Recommendations for the Local Parks and Recreation Commission and Manager</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 4.1. The community arena. (sketch by author) ................................................................. 30
Figure 4.2. Mural inside community arena. (photograph by author) ........................................ 31
Figure 4.3. Types of skates. (photographs by author) ................................................................. 31
Figure 4.4. Hockey player drawn by a male hockey player ....................................................... 54
Figure 4.5. Figure skater drawn by a female figure skater. ....................................................... 55
Glossary

Figure Skating Terms

**Singles:** Competitive discipline wherein one male or one female compete. Programs mainly consist of jumps, spins, and footwork.

**Pairs:** Competitive discipline wherein a male and a female pair compete together. Programs include a variety of jumps, spins, lifts, and footwork.

**Dance:** Competitive discipline wherein a male and a female compete together. Essentially ballroom dancing on ice.

**Footwork:** A sequence of steps, turns, hops, and other movements that go from one end of the rink to the other or in a large circle around the center.

**Spiral Sequence:** A series of long held movements on one leg during which the leg that is off the ice is held above the level of the hip.

**Field Movements:** Movements that are not jumps, spins or footwork. Spirals are an example, as well as other held positions.

**Short Program:** Shorter in length than the long program with specific elements including jumps, spins, and footwork that must be completed. The first part of competition for elite level skaters.

**Long Program:** Although the rules include jump maximums and some required elements, skaters have more freedom in their choice of elements. The second part of competition for elite level skaters.

**School Figures:** Turns and edges completed on figure eights. Once the focus of figure skating, the sport now focuses on freeskate. School figures were dropped from international competitions in the early 1990s.

**Freeskate Program:** The routine performed at competition by skaters below the elite level. Lengths and skills required vary by the skater’s level.

**Tests:** Skate Canada offers four areas for skaters to test: Freeskate (focus is on jumps and spins), Interpretive (focus is on interpreting the music), Dance (set dance steps and music which are usually tested with a partner), and Skills (set steps to music that teach edges and turns).

**Canskate:** The learn-to-skate program administered by Skate Canada figure skating clubs.
**Junior**: Can refer to the level below Senior in elite figure skating or, at the local club level, the program for beginner figure skaters.

**Intermediate**: At the local club level skaters who are beginning to work on tests and/or beginning to compete.

**Senior**: Can refer to either the top level of elite figure skating; or at the local club level the skaters more advanced in either testing and/or competing. The placement of skaters in Junior, Intermediate or Senior level is up to the coach and depends on skaters’ abilities as well as the number of skaters registered in each session.

**Private Lesson**: The coach works one-on-one with a skater.

**Semi-private Lesson**: The coach works with two skaters who have a similar skill level.

**Group Lesson**: All skaters are taught as a group by a coach.

**Hockey Terms**

**Recreational (rec) or ‘house’ hockey**: Hockey played at the local level and in the surrounding area. The main goal of the program is fun.

**Rep hockey**: Hockey played at the local level wherein a team “represents” the town and competes against many other towns. This is the more competitive division and players may have the goal of advancing toward or are competing at elite levels.

**Novice**: Hockey for seven and eight year olds.

**Atom**: Hockey for nine and ten year olds.

**Peewee**: Hockey for eleven and twelve year olds.

**Bantam**: Hockey for thirteen and fourteen year olds.

**Midget**: Hockey for fifteen and sixteen year olds.

**Junior**: The first level of elite competitive hockey. Players are usually finishing high school or just out of high school. Players may/may not be paid.

**Stick Tape**: Tape wrapped around the top of the hockey stick for grip and sometimes around the blade of the hockey stick. Often re-applied before every game and comes in many colours and patterns.

**Line**: Either the lines painted on the ice that are there in relation to certain hockey rules; or to players who usually are on the ice together. For example two players may make up one defensive “line” and another two players another defensive “line.”
**General**

**Amateur:** An athlete who is not paid to participate in their sport (although this definition is changing as sport organizations allow athletes to accept money for performing in shows, endorsement deals and the like).

**Professional:** An athlete who is paid to participate in their sport. Usually their sport is their primary means of income.

**Elite (athlete):** An athlete who trains extensively in their sport and competes at high levels, usually with the goal of making it to the top of their sport.
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This thesis is dedicated to my fellow ‘rink rats.’ I chose to do this research because of our shared love of the ice and the glide that ties us together.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Every day thousands of people across Canada and around the world lace up their skates in order to step out onto the ice in pursuit of recreation, competition or money. For some, their steps are small and unsure; for others, each step begins a glide that carries them easily around the ice. Whether the ice is a backyard rink or the community arena, a frozen pond, lake or canal, or even an Olympic-sized arena, people of all ages step onto the ice in pursuit of the glide. It is the glide that makes skating different from any other activity.

From its humble origins in Scandinavia, where the first skaters strapped bone blades to their boots to glide along frozen rivers, to today’s high tech world of tempered carbon steel blades and indoor arenas, people have been developing the skill of skating. Two directions skating has taken are figure skating and hockey. Figure skating began in Europe around the early 18th century. Hockey was to have later origins, beginning around the late 19th century in Canada. These two sports are the most commonly found ice sports in Canada and both have changed through time to become the sports we know today. Like many other sports, they have become gendered, with figure skating seen as feminine and hockey seen as masculine (Adams 2007; Gruneau and Whitson 1993; Kestnbaum 2003).

This research is partially motivated by my personal experience. The community arena figure skating club has had only a handful of male figure skaters in the last 20 years and, although the youth hockey club has had some girls, it is dominated by boys. The gendering of these sports is worrying because it could potentially prevent some children from participating in a sport they may otherwise enjoy. Both hockey and figure skating require many skills that can benefit children and anything that acts as a barrier to their participation is a cause for concern. This is particularly important in today’s world wherein childhood obesity and inactivity are seen as growing health problems and participation in sport as one way to counteract this trend (Messner 2009:9-10).

The purpose of the research is to identify barriers that prevent children from participating in hockey and figure skating. In particular, this study is focused on how figure skating and hockey are gendered and what effect this gendering has on children’s participation in these sports. The questions guiding the research asked how the day-to-day interactions in the arena gender figure skating and hockey and how those gender boundaries are enforced. Do children recognize the gendering of these sports and does this effect their
decision as to what sport they choose to participate in? Is it parents who perceive the gendering of figure skating and hockey and choose to place their child in the “gender appropriate” sport?

This thesis aims to explore examples of gendering in figure skating and hockey in a rural community arena. I expected gendering would not be overt but most commonly seen in how the sports are structured as well as how people discuss the sports. The second goal of this research was to provide recommendations and possible solutions for the figure skating club, minor hockey association and arena management to educate these groups about how gendering of these sports occurs and why this gendering needs to be addressed.

1.1 Background and Significance of Gender and Sports

Sports have not always been seen as an important area of research. Gratton and Jones (2010:2) point out that, “In an area such as sport, which – despite its enormous social economic, cultural and political significance – has emerged relatively recently as an area of academic interest, research is vital.” Sport affects almost everyone, as Prettyman and Lampman (2011:1) state sport, “is in our clothing, in our media, in our textbooks and schools, in our music, and in our language.” Millions of people participate in sport, especially youth, and millions of people watch sports being played by others. The widespread popularity of sport marks it is as imperative to study as does its place as a microcosm of society at large (Eitzen 2009a:1) since sport “mirrors the human experience” (Eitzen 2009b:10) as well as our society.

Gender in sport is also a critical area for study. Young and White (2007:xv) argue that sport is structured in ways that privilege certain ‘types’ of people, and in ways that open doors for some but close doors for others. One of the most impacting of these structuring mechanisms is gender.

The gendering of sport means that certain sports are marked by society as being appropriate for either one gender or the other, although some sports are viewed as appropriate for both, such as swimming and soccer. Metheny (1967) was one of the first to conduct a study on how sports are associated with certain genders. She argued that the stereotyping of sports was related to gendered expectations in society. In general, sports requiring extensive body contact or the use of physical force are seen as more masculine than those that include an aesthetic component, which are seen as feminine. These trends have continued, with both Colley et al. (1987) and later Hannon et al. (2009) conducting research asking teenagers to
identify what sports were more appropriate for men, women or both. These studies show that, despite a 20 year gap between the studies, people still believe some sports are more appropriate for one gender than the other.

Gendering sports creates restrictions on who can and cannot participate. As Daniels (2009:7) argues

The fact that sports themselves are as gendered as the people who play them is an interesting consideration. It establishes a double bind for women who choose to participate in ‘men’s’ sports and for men who want to participate in ‘girl’s’ sports.

This double bind is a barrier to participation. Depending on the sport, some barriers athletes might encounter due to the double bind include: rules that do not allow them to play, few or no teams or groups to participate with, lack of support or even harassment from family, friends, and society, and the groups that organize participation.

Figure skating and hockey are two sports wherein this double bind has been felt by some athletes who participate in them. Few studies have analyzed both hockey and figure skating together, although many studies focus on one or the other. Wiley et al.’s (2000:22) study of how leisure involvement is gendered is one example of a study that focuses on both figure skating and hockey. Their reasoning for using these two sports is that

These two common winter sporting activities both are highly gender-stereotyped in Canada, with figure skating being a popular activity for girls and women, and hockey being not only a prominent part of Canadian sport culture but also one that is ‘quintessentially masculine.

I chose to study hockey and figure skating because they are the two most popular sports in the local arena of my British Columbia rural community of about ten thousand. Hockey in the community includes a minor hockey association, an adult men’s hockey league, an adult female hockey league, as well as drop in hockey. There is one figure skating club which teaches ‘learn-to-skate,’ as well as several levels of recreational figure skating. There is also a ringette association, a neighbouring community speed skating group that uses the ice occasionally, as well as public ice sessions. I chose not to include ringette in this study because their rules changed recently to include men as well as women and it seemed premature to examine if gender related barriers may be preventing males from participating in ringette.
In order to answer the research questions, I employed three qualitative methods including participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Participant observation was chosen because I am a skater and this method provides with an inside look at the culture of an arena that genders figure skating and hockey. Focus groups with children in hockey and figure skating were employed to find out their views on these sports. In addition, interviews were conducted with parents, coaches, and adult athletes. These methods provided data insight into what I observed in the arena, as well as how adults and children themselves understand and interpret what is happening in the arena. Using three different methods enables data from each to triangulate each other, whether this means that ideas are reinforced or are contested.

I followed sport sociologist Messner’s (2009:22) lead in the analysis of the information gathered through participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. In his study of youth sports, he describes his research goals to discover, “what are the social processes that sustain this sex segregation?” and, “what might be happening that might serve to destabilize and possibly change this sex segregation?” (sic). Although Messner was focused on the positions of adults in youth sports, his method of analysis is useful when studying the culture of the arena including how children and adults gender figure skating and hockey as well as how they are destabilizing this gendering. Messner describes social processes as “how people, in their routine daily interactions, reproduce (and occasionally challenge) patterned social relations” (5). He argues for a mix of qualitative methods in order to understand these social processes. Messner (2009:22) also argues that, “people are not passive dupes in gender systems; rather, we are active participants in creating gender”. Being an active participant means that people exercise agency and that agency can be reproductive or resistant. Reproductive agency is, “when our actions are consistent with traditions and conventions of existing gender differences and hierarchies” (2009:22) and resistant agency is, “when our actions contradict or challenge existing gender differences or hierarchies” (2009:22). While conducting the research I found numerous examples of both reproductive and resistant agencies employed to gender hockey and figure skating.

Analyzing the social processes that gender figure skating and hockey in the arena requires understanding the current conventions of femininity and masculinity. However, I would argue that people should be embraced as ‘polygendered,’ in other words, “We are all a
mix of those characteristics, interests, behaviours, and appearances that have traditionally
been used to sort females and males into exclusive categories called feminine and masculine”
(Daniels 2009:1-2). These characteristics are not inherently feminine or masculine; they are
assigned a gender and a value by society. Femininity and masculinity interact with other
categories that people are placed into, including race, ethnicity, age and class. As an
immediate approach to make figure skating and hockey more accessible to their minority
gender, removing or changing some of the gendered practices around these sports may be the
first step. In addition, it would be ideal for people to embrace the idea that participating in a
particular sport does not challenge a person’s gender or provide reasoning to exclude them
from participation.

In anthropology, as well as in other disciplines, researchers clearly identify how they
are situated within their research, because a researcher’s position affects how they conduct
their research as well as how they interpret their findings (Fife 2005:149-150). I am a mid
20s, white female living in a small town in British Columbia, Canada. I have participated in
my local figure skating club since I was six years old. Unlike the rest of the skaters in the
club, I only competed once because my parents could not afford competition fees when I was
younger; however, I continue to work on passing the tests in the Skate Canada Starskate
program. I have little past experience in the world of hockey; thus I approached hockey from
a different perspective than figure skating.

In addition, the geography of where the research was conducted is important. As
mentioned, my research was conducted in an arena located in a rural town in British
Columbia. This site was chosen because of my experience there and a desire to do
anthropology at home. Whether this site is representative of rural Canadian arenas, or
whether it is a unique site remains to be seen. Without conducting further research, it is
impossible to know whether conclusions drawn from research at the site can be applied
elsewhere; however, it is my hope that if those in other arenas observe similar conditions,
they may be able to draw from the recommendations and solutions contained within this
thesis. Doing anthropology at home requires one to examine their own culture as opposed to
another culture, which can be difficult because the researcher must notice and examine the
everyday events, not the exotic realms of traditional anthropology.
This thesis consists of six chapters. In chapter two, I explore previous research on the study of sport in general, children in sport, and gender in sport, including the research that has been completed on figure skating and hockey. Chapter three elaborates on the data gathering methods used including participant observation, focus groups and interviews, as well as the theoretical perspective for analyzing the data. The fourth chapter outlines the data from each part of the research and begins to extract the principal themes. Following this, chapter five presents the results and demonstrates how figure skating and hockey are gendered in the arena, as well as how this is being contested. Finally, chapter six summarizes the findings, provides recommendations for the figure skating club, the minor hockey organization, and the arena management as well as avenues for future research. Appendix A contains scans of the pictures children drew in the focus groups and Appendix B consists of recommendations for the various arena users.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Sport

Sport is, indeed, not only universal but perhaps one of the best indicators or expressions of culture. (Sands 1999:3)

Sport is a worldwide phenomenon. The rules of international sports are the same, regardless of nationality, religion or language. Events such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup unite people as they cheer and support their athletes. Local variations of sports provide an outlet for cultural expression by making sport relevant to local culture. Sport is found throughout history and around the world in many forms; however, in the early 19th century in Western culture sport took on specific elements which then spread throughout the world to become modern sport. Schirato (2007:43) drawing on Guttmann (1978), defines modern sport as having the following elements: secularism, equality, specialization, bureaucratization, rationalization, quantification, and records. This means that in modern North American sports the following are present: sport and religion are removed from each other, everyone has an equal opportunity to win, athletes specialize as athletes, sport is run by a bureaucracy and is rationalized, there is a focus on quantifying what athletes do and how they do it, as well as a focus on keeping records.

Although modern sport is found throughout the world, many other types of sports are still found. In order to describe all forms of sport, anthropologist Sands (1999:3) put forth the following definition of sport as

A cultural universal having the following features: a human activity that is a formal and rule-directed contest ranging from a gamelike activity to a highly institutionalized structure; competition between individuals or teams or can result in internal competition within an individual; a basis in physical skills, and strategy, chance or combination of all three; and potential tangible rewards for the participants, monetary, material or status.

This definition is designed to cover anything that might be considered a sport, from games played by children to events in the Olympics.
Blanchard (1995:59), another anthropologist put forward this definition:

Sport, then, is a physically exertive activity that is aggressively competitive within constraints imposed by definitions and rules. A component of culture, it is ritually patterned, gamelike and of varying amounts of play, work, and leisure. In addition, sport can be viewed as having both athletic and nonathletic variations, *athletic* referring to those activities requiring a greater amount of exertion.

There is no succinct way to define sport, since what is identified as a sport is continually debated. Sport can be anything from playing marbles to hockey, from chess to figure skating. Which are sports and which are not? These detailed definitions are the only way to include all variations of sports.

Sports occupy a particular place in Western culture. For approximately the last 150 years, urbanization, accompanied by an expanding middle class, led to many people having the time and money to participate, or view many sporting events (Schirato 2007:42). At the same time, sports were encouraged in schools in the belief that it would improve the morals and health of students (2007:57). In the present day, children and adults participate in a multitude of sports as well as consume sport through various media. In addition, municipal recreation departments arose in order to organize and provide recreation, leisure and sport opportunities in their communities (Frisby et al. 2007:126). Whether fully acknowledged or not, sport affects almost everyone as it has become a major pillar of North American culture (Prettyman and Lampman 2011:2).

### 2.2 Children in Sport

Few researchers in anthropology and sociology study both children and gender in sports. Kelly et al. (2008) are one of the few authors who do study this in their work with teenage female skateboarders. Baron’s (2007) analysis of youth sports does not mention the impact of the gendering of youth sports, but instead focuses on parental involvement, fair play, abuse, sport psychology, and the commercial aspect of sports. Messner (2009) studied gender and children’s sports, but he focused on how the positions that adult volunteers take on are gendered, with coaches being mostly male and team parents being mostly female. Team parents organize snacks, the end of the year party, and a gift for the coaches. Messner (2009:15) does bring up one point that directly relates to children’s sports and gender when he discusses how, when forced to include girls, Little League Baseball created Little League Softball for girls to play. Messner (2000) has one article that exclusively focuses on children
and gender in sports wherein he outlines how children constructed gender at the opening ceremony of the community soccer league. This moment of “gender salience” (2000:766) included the reaction of four and five year old boys to girls the same age dancing around their Barbie mascot. The boys began by watching until they realized that other boys were watching as well and then they began shouting of “No Barbie!” Eventually, since the girls ignored them at first, they ran through the girls’ space and interrupted their dancing. The parents of the children read the situation as showing how different girls and boys behave; however, Messner sees the gendering as only occurring because of the structure of the situation, which separated girls and boys onto separate teams, as well as on cultural symbols such as Barbie. What the parents define as biological differences, Messner identifies as cultural influences that shape how male and female children act.

Miller (2010) used autoethnography, as well as traditional ethnography, to interrogate her experiences as a female athlete in a masculine coded sport: wrestling. She argues for understanding gender as both performed and fluid. Miller (2010:179) also highlights how

The resources that any child has available to negotiate her sense of gender vary tremendously from each person to the next. Slight variations in those resources – a team that simply wouldn’t allow her to compete, team-mate animosity or indifference, no support from friends or family – would make it much more difficult, if not impossible, for her not only to compete, but also to do so in a way that made sense within any understanding of gender or sex.

One of the goals of the research is to provide both male and female athletes with more of the resources they need to participate in the sport they would like to try.

Although there have been few studies that focus on sports, gender and children, there has been significantly more research on children and gender. Thorne (1990, 1993) conducted ethnographic research in two elementary schools and found that “children actively come together to help create, and sometimes challenge, gender structures and meanings” (1993:4). Thorne’s research shows that children do not passively adopt the gender assigned to them; they usually contest it by doing things associated with the other gender and only partially adopt the gender assigned to them based on their sex. Walkerdine (1990) came to similar conclusions in her work in nursery schools. In addition to conducting ethnographic research at a preschool, Davies (1989) read feminist stories to children in order to understand their perceptions of gender roles. She found that even as early as preschool age, children are well aware of appropriate gender roles for boys and girls and realized that just reading children
feminist stories was not going to be enough to help them challenge their assigned gender roles. This led to further research, wherein Davies (1993) and her research assistant, Banks, held workshops with fifth and sixth grade children. In these workshops the group discussed gender and its relation to them. In addition, students created their own stories, which were to not follow the “dominant discourses” (1993:6-7). This research shows that children are much more cognizant of what is gender appropriate than adults usually realize. Whether at school, on a sports field, or in an arena, children know what gender performance is expected and although at times they contest these gender performances, they also perpetuate them.

2.3 Sport and Gender

Sport is gendered. Sport in general, particularly in Western culture, is gendered as masculine (Avery and Stevens 1997; Cahn 1994; Daniels 2009; Lenskyj 2003; Messner 2002, 2009; Messner and Sabo 1994; Pronger 1990; Therberge 2000). According to Western culture, sport is for boys and men. This concept evolved from the history of sport, as Schirato (2007) describes, wherein the famous Greek Olympics were the beginnings of sport as it is found in North America today. From the Greeks, to the Romans, to medieval Europe, through the Renaissance and on through the Victorian period, sport was a way in which boys and men could develop skills that usually related to war, as well demonstrate and establish their masculinity. Women participated in sports during this time as well, but much like today their participation was usually limited and trivialized. In the last 150 years, sports as they are recognized by North American culture developed into what they are today (Schirato 2007).

During this time the women’s movements in the 1920s and 1960s included movements to increase sport participation among women. Women’s participation in sport was heavily contested by the public at large, as doctors argued that hard athletic endeavors would displace a women’s uterus and thus injure her ‘primary’ function, which was to bear children (Cahn 1994; Schirato 2007). This led to the creation of sports modified for female participants. Ringette and netball are two examples of sports modified for female participants: they are the modified versions of hockey and basketball. The main difference between the two versions is that the sports created for girls and women have rules against body contact and body checking, which are found in the men’s game, and rules forcing more passing which creates a more teamwork oriented game.
It was also during the time of the women’s movements that some sports became
gendered as feminine, frequently due to their association with aesthetics. Sports such as
gymnastics, figure skating, cheerleading, dance, and synchronized swimming are examples
of sports that include an aesthetic component. In contrast, sports gendered as masculine
usually focus on concrete, measurable athletic feats, such as goals scored, distance ran, or
opponents knocked out. Several sports currently perceived as feminine were previously seen
as men’s sports, including figure skating and cheerleading; however, as conceptions of what
is masculine and what is feminine changed, the gendering of these sports did as well (Adams
2007; Grindstaff and West 2010; Koivula 2001).

The gendering of sport as masculine or feminine is very problematic. Although an
increasing number of sports are seen as gender neutral and suitable for anyone of any gender,
many sports are still seen as appropriate for one gender and not the other. This is troublesome
because when sports are gendered, it becomes very difficult for an individual not of the
socially appropriate gender to participate. For example, women have played hockey since its
creation; however, because it is seen as a masculine sport, women do not have access to the
same opportunities that men do in hockey (Avery and Stevens 1997; Etue and Williams
1996; Gruneau and Whitson 1992; Therberge 2000). A lack of equal ice time and funding as
well as professional, competitive, and recreational leagues to participate in are just some of
the barriers with which female hockey players have to contend. In addition, females face
interpersonal conflict for choosing to play a sport that is associated with another gender
(Avery and Stevens 1997; Therberge 2000). This will be discussed in more detail further in
the literature review.

Related to the gendering of sports is sexuality in sport. This area of study focuses on
the barriers created in sports through a culture that assumes heterosexuality. A cultural
assumption in North America is that athletes are heterosexual, unless they participate in sport
that is gendered differently than their own gender, in which case, the athlete is labelled a
homosexual (Cahn 1994; Daniels 2009; Kestnbaum 2003; Messner 2002). This is
problematic for many reasons. The primary issue is that a person’s sexuality has very little, if
anything, to do with a person’s sport preferences: heterosexual and homosexual athletes exist
in every sport (Buzinski and Zeigler 2007). Furthermore, assumptions about a person’s
sexuality based on their sport preference, results in athletes hiding their homosexuality in
order to be accepted in some sports or having to prove their heterosexuality in others (Daniels 2009; Kestnbaum 2003; Messner 2002). In masculine sports, homosexuals face a difficult environment because locker room banter and on field coaching draw on cultural assumptions of parallels between weakness and homosexuals in order to establish the athletes as masculine (Buzinski and Zeigler 2007; Messner and Sabo 1994). The cultural assumption that homosexuals are weak impacts not only the athletic environment, but also employment and sponsorship opportunities for athletes who do come out. Most professional athletes, especially males, do not publicly acknowledge their sexuality until after they have retired, due to the challenging atmosphere in sports. Other athletes give up long before they reach the professional level due to the environment (Buzinski and Zeigler 2007; Messner 2002). On the other hand, males in sports deemed feminine are assumed to be homosexual and those who are heterosexual have to constantly find ways to prove their masculinity (Kestnbaum 2003).

For female athletes, the accusation of homosexuality is tied to strength, as opposed to weakness. Females in traditionally masculine sports or females who are exceptional in their sport are frequently assumed to be homosexual. Those who participate in traditionally feminine sports are assumed to be heterosexual and, similar to their male counterparts, may feel the need to hide their homosexuality in order to continue to participate in their sport. Homosexuality among female athletes is frequently hidden because it is believed that women’s sport already has a hard time earning respect and having lesbian participants is considered to make earning that respect more difficult (Therberge 2000). In addition, there is the pervasive belief that players need to be feminine in order to attract and retain funding (Daniels 2009; Therberge 2000). Again, this creates a difficult environment for a homosexual athlete and even for heterosexual athletes who feel they need to defend themselves against accusations of homosexuality (Brackenridge et al. 2006; Buzinski and Zeigler 2007; Cahn 1994, Davison and Frank 2007; Johnson and Kivel 2006; Lenskjy 2003; Messner 2002, 2007; Messner and Sabo 1994; Pronger 1990; Russell 2006; Symons 2006; Therberge 2000).

What makes sexuality in sport so frustrating is that in the end, there is no correlation between sexuality and success or failure, no matter the sport.

2.4 Figure Skating and Gender

From its early roots in Europe in the 18th century to present day, figure skating has been linked to gender (Adams 2007; Kestnbaum 2003). Historically, speed skating was
encouraged on frozen canals and practiced by the working class; whereas upper class men made use of frozen lakes and ponds (Adams 2007; Kestnbaum 2003). This second style of skating focused on the creation of graceful edges and turns. The natural glide that is found in skating fit well into aristocratic notions of masculinity and grace. Women’s participation at this time was limited to being spectators, or being pushed in a sleigh by a male skater. During the 19th century, two styles of figure skating began to develop. The English developed a very technical and stiff style of skating that was scientifically precise. During the same period on the European continent, Jackson Haines, an American, drew on his dance experience and began fitting skating to music, as well as developing spins. It is primarily from this style of skating in Europe that Haines began from which modern figure skating has grown (Adams 2007; Kestnbaum 2003). Female figure skaters began taking to the ice during the 19th century, especially in Europe, where skating’s new ties to dance made it socially acceptable for women to skate. At the beginning of the 20th century, women began challenging the men at the world championships and a separate championship was created for the women in 1906 (Kestnbaum 2003).

During the early 20th century women’s skirts moved from ankle length to the much shorter mid-thigh length. This happened, in part, because women’s fashions in general were changing. However, the shorter skirt increased the spectator appeal of watching figure skating, as the female skater’s body become a site not only of athleticism, but of aesthetic and erotic appeal as well (Kestnbaum 2003:104). As Kestnbaum discusses, the “specularity” of figure skating contributed to its feminizing. She argues that, those watching figure skating, such as judges and spectators, pay attention to “the appearance of the skater’s body – as a central criterion of what constitutes good skating places the skater (male or female) in the structurally feminine role of object of the gaze” (2003:101). The specularity of figure skating was capitalized on by Sonja Henie, a Norwegian figure skater who began competing as a preteen in the 1920s. After winning several world championships, Henie used the spectator appeal of figure skating to create a major Hollywood career for herself that made use of her skating. In addition, she established and performed in numerous travelling shows. Henie’s exhibitions and movies were the first introduction to figure skating for many North Americans and this further contributed to the idea that figure skating was a feminine activity.
The feminization of figure skating was then further compounded by the large numbers of men who left the sport to fight in World War II and did not return to the sport after the war.

The history of figure skating contributed to it not only being feminized, but being a particular form of femininity that almost exclusively includes white, upper class women. In the 1960s, with the advent and growth of the television, figure skating became even more of a spectator sport. As figure skating’s audiences increased, the requirements of competition changed. The lackluster and repetitive school figures, which had made up the majority of a skater’s mark, declined in value, while the audience friendly and exciting freeskate program gained value. At the beginning of the 1990s, school figures were dropped from international and most national competitions, and figure skaters were judged on their freeskate and short programs. The combination of the audience friendly short and long programs is still the requirement for men’s and women’s singles competition (Kestnbaum 2003).

Figure skating’s current ties to femininity include the specularity of figure skating, as well as a gendering of rules, media representations of figure skating and the use of ‘overdetermined’ femininity to downplay the athleticism required in figure skating (Feder 1995; Kestnbaum 2003). The feminization of figure skating is problematic for both male and female competitors as it impacts the rules of the competition as well as how athletes are portrayed to the public. As Adams (2007:875) states, “There is, of course, nothing innately feminine or masculine about particular movements or styles of movement. Gendered adjectives are applied to movement in accord with historically and culturally specific norms.” The gendering of rules is apparent in the requirements for singles skaters.

In the short program, women are required to complete a layback spin. A layback spin is described by Feder (1995:29-30) as “Back arched, eyes closed, mouth slightly open, arms extended as for an embrace – in still photographs it’s like nothing so much as popular conceptions of female sexual arousal.” In the long program, women are required to complete a footwork sequence and a spiral sequence, while men are required to complete two footwork sequences (ISU 2010:97). A spiral sequence is a series of long held positions that emphasize flexibility. These elements are gendered feminine, even though male skaters are also capable of accomplishing them. Since spiral sequences are gendered feminine, it is only women who are required to do them, which then reinforces their femininity and the femininization of the sport. In addition, in the long program, the requirement for men is eight jumps, but for
The length of time is also different, as men have four and a half minutes for their long program whereas women have only four minutes (2010:90). There is no reason that women could not do programs as long as the men, especially since in pairs the long program is four and a half minutes (ISU 2010:90). In addition to the required movements, the rules governing clothing include that, in ice dance competition, female competitors must wear skirts and at some periods in the past all female competitors were required to wear skirts. The requirement for men is that they wear trousers, not tights (2010:89). Even the name for figure skating competition for women is particularly feminized. It is “ladies’” figure skating as opposed to “women’s” figure skating, unlike other sports such as women’s hockey or women’s speedskating. The terms “ladies” and “women” are also associated with class, wherein ladies are the upper class and women are the lower class. This ties back into notions of physicality, wherein the upper class ladies must never exert themselves, whereas the lower class women are expected to work hard and make use of their physical strength.

Media representations of figure skating are also gendered. Feder (1995:35), in analyzing media coverage of national and international figure skating events in the United States of America, states that, “Coverage of women skaters always seems to emphasize women’s vulnerability, both emotional and physical, rather than their strength and accomplishments.” This further associates figure skating with the upper class ladies. This is in stark contrast to their male counterparts who have their strength and accomplishments emphasized, as well as being cast in a “battle” for the title. Women, on the other hand, are “ice princesses” or “ice queens” defending their crown (Fabos 2001:189). Figure skating as a whole is cast as feminine by media representation such as the Olympic logo for figure skating, which is a female figure skater, wearing a dress with her hair in a bun, in the midst of a layback spin. This is a very feminine symbol and it is used despite the fact that equal numbers of men as women compete in Olympic figure skating events. Female figure skaters, as is unfortunately the case with most other female athletes, are frequently sexualized in the media (Carty 2004; Feder 1994; Kestnbaum 2003). Feder (1994:63) argues that, “overdetermined femininity” is maintained so that female athletes in figure skating, as well as in other sports, can keep their athleticism in the background and keep accusations of
lesbianism or mannishness from arising. The sexualization of female athletes is one way that overdetermined femininity is created and maintained.

The overdetermined femininity that is required by figure skating of its female competitors is found not only on the ice, but off the ice as well. Both Kestnbaum (2003) and McGarry (2004) note how a female figure skater’s performance off the ice can impact her on ice scores. McGarry (2004:8), in particular, illustrates how representations of figure skating in the Canadian media interpret female figure skaters’ success as a result of their conformity to “dominant, idealized norms of a socially appropriate femininity.” This idealized femininity includes the skaters being beautiful, graceful, classic, disciplined, passive, modest, and vulnerable (McGarry 2004). In her paper, McGarry specifically analyzes how Josée Chouinard had an increased presence in the media after changing training centers and developing, as several coaches commented, into a more feminine and refined skater. The idealized femininity seems to be found elsewhere in the world as well, especially in the United States, but McGarry seems to be the only author who has completed research on how the concept of idealized femininity is used in the media to judge success.

The gendering of figure skating as overtly feminine not only impacts the female figure skaters, but also impacts their male counterparts. Kestnbaum (2003:185) found that men in figure skating frequently feel the need to defend their masculinity. Many male skaters feel this way because in North American society it is assumed that male figure skaters are feminized by their participation which then leads to assumptions of homosexuality. This concept is so prevalent that many male figure skaters take steps to reinforce their heterosexual masculinity. They do this through several means, including taking on masculine characters in their programs, as well as taking part in stereotypical ‘masculine’ endeavors off the ice, such as martial arts or getting married. This is not true of every male skater, as some embrace the femininity of figure skating through elaborate costumes and the use of movements that are usually gendered as female.

### 2.5 Hockey and Gender

The year that hockey was first played is unknown. According to Gruneau and Whitson (1992), throughout the Maritime provinces as well as in Quebec and Ontario, a variety of sports were being played on ice from the beginning of the 19th century. These sports drew their rules from field hockey, rickets, shinny, rugby, and lacrosse. The games
played differed from town to town and there was very little organization. The first organized form of hockey with rules similar to modern hockey was created in Montreal in the 1870s. This is also when hockey began to move from outdoor rinks to indoor arenas and when a puck shape replaced the ball. From these early roots, Gruneau and Whitson (1992) outline how hockey spread from amateur teams formed across Canada and in the northern United States to the formation of paid, professional hockey teams. However, most organized hockey associations were geared towards male players with little thought for their female counterparts. Avery and Stevens (1997) note that the first recorded game of women’s hockey was in 1892, but it is most likely that women have been playing hockey just as long as men have. In the 1870s, early professional male hockey players travelled from rink to rink to play against each other as a form of entertainment (Gruneau and Whitson 1992:63). Several different professional leagues formed across Canada from 1907 onwards, including the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1917 (1992:91). From there, the NHL became the premier professional hockey league in North America. Other (male) professional leagues have been established throughout Canada and the world, in addition to the widely known NHL.

As Avery and Stevens (1997:63) note, women’s hockey was also popular around the turn of the 20th century. Teams across Canada attracted significant crowds. In the 1920s, women’s hockey experienced a significant increase in numbers, in part because travel across Canada to play tournaments was more affordable. Women’s hockey continued to grow throughout the 1930s; however, World War II forced many women’s and men’s teams to disband. The NHL, as well as many senior men’s community teams continued to play, despite losing many players, and they were supported through the notion that it gave people something to cheer for (1997:73-74). After World War II, support for women’s hockey became very difficult to find. It was not until the 1960s that women’s hockey began to grow again (1997:77). However, although several amateur opportunities now exist for female hockey players, such as national and world championships, as well as women’s hockey becoming an Olympic sport in 1998, few opportunities are available for women in professional leagues. A couple female hockey players have played on men’s professional teams around the world, but those opportunities are rare (Gruneau and Whitson 2006:94-95).
Much like figure skating is gendered as feminine, hockey is gendered as masculine and this has numerous repercussions for both male and female hockey players. One of hockey’s main ties to masculinity is through the violence and aggression it encourages. These ties, as well as its beginnings in North America have led to its masculinity being that of working class, white males. Paraschak (2007:141) writes that, “In much of North American sport, maleness is evaluated on a continuum, with the most physical, and/or most violent, and/or least artistic sport considered those that best represent masculinity.” This means that sports such as hockey, football, and boxing are seen as very masculine because they are very physical, violent, and not artistic. “Within this sub-culture, hegemonic masculinity is a form of masculine practice that generates and regulates the following commonsense cultural ideals linked with ‘being a man’: aggression, heterosexuality, muscularity, the suppression of fear, intentional physical demonstrations of power and dominance, and the subordinated role of women” (Gee 2009:581). Media reinforces the aggression and violence in hockey through producing videos, such as those made by Don Cherry, of the ‘hardest hits’ and ‘best fights’.

Gruneau and Whitson (1992) discuss the two main lines of argument by those within the hockey subculture for the continuation of violence in hockey. One argument that people make for the continuation of violence in hockey is that it acts as a “safety valve” that prevents worse violent acts from occurring. An example of this would be a fistfight acting as a safety valve that prevents a more dangerous attack with a stick. The second argument is that the ability of a player to be physically tough and have a “willingness to fight” is seen as an important part of a male hockey player’s character (1992:176). These arguments are echoed in discussions of sports as a whole. One of these arguments is that aggression in sport acts as a catharsis that prevents violence in other areas; for example, violence on the field releasing emotions that would otherwise be released off the field. However, there is a competing theory which states that violence in sports encourages violence elsewhere (1992:177). Examples of violence in sport encouraging violence off the field includes when fans watch a violent sport then proceed onto the streets and commit violent acts. In addition, some studies show that athletes who play aggressive and violent sports have higher rates of committing sexual assault and other violence off the field of play although more studies are needed on this issue (Crosset et al. 2009; Messner and Sabo 1994). In addition, Gruneau and Whitson (1992) argue that violence is more social and cultural than psychological or
This means that because violence in hockey is socially acceptable it continues, and the psychological and biological explanations for the violence are a weak explanation.

However, aggression and violence in sport are not straightforward concepts. Kerr (2005) proposes that not all aggression and violence are the same and that different types lead to different results. He divides aggression in sports into four types which are anger violence, thrill violence, power violence and play violence. Anger violence is usually reactive violence and frequently takes place in retaliation for something a player deems unfair or incorrect. Thrill violence is violence performed for the thrill of breaking rules or taboos. Power violence is purpose driven violence, with the goal of dominating or subjugating others. This is frequently slow to build up and may even include planning, as opposed to the previous two, which are usually spontaneous. The purpose of play violence is having fun, feeling mastery of skills, and experiencing power. In addition, play violence follows the rules and can be spontaneous or planned. One type of violence can change to another, depending of the conditions surrounding a player (Kerr 2005:39-43). Obviously, play violence is the goal in the sports; however, particularly in hockey, other kinds of violence are also present.

Gendering hockey as masculine also impacts females who play hockey. Analogous to men in figure skating, women in hockey are stereotyped by North American society as being butch lesbian, or at the very least, mannish. Also comparable to the men in figure skating, female hockey players feel the need to defend their femininity. Therberge (2000) in her study of female hockey players found they defend their femininity through off-ice performance, such as ensuring that they are dressed “femininely” and wearing makeup to demonstrate their femininity. However, Therberge also found that if female hockey players performed too femininely, for example, using excessive makeup or frilly underwear, other members of the team would tease them for it. The players, in turn have the difficult task of balancing the aggressive masculine traits required in hockey and the perceived need to perform as feminine off ice. In addition, female hockey players feel they need to be feminine off ice because there is the persuasive belief that, if they embraced the masculine traits that hockey encourages, then this would discourage other females from participating and alienate potential sponsors. Even women who are lesbian feel the need to hide their sexuality from the public in order to maintain the respectability of their sport (2000:82-90).
Furthermore, the masculization of hockey also means there are limited opportunities available for female hockey players particularly to play at elite levels. It was only in 1998 that women’s hockey was included in the Olympics, and since the Olympics in 2010, discussions arose that it should be removed (Lee 2010). The reason given for its removal is the fact that it is dominated by two teams, Canada and the United States. Women essentially have no professional hockey opportunities and at the lower levels females have even fewer options than males who play hockey. The analogy often used is that women’s hockey is the ‘little sister’ to men’s hockey (Etue and Williams 1996:38). This means that, “women in the game today are more tolerated than respected. Female players are still largely looked upon as the little sisters who don’t really belong in hockey” (1996:38). The result of this is that female players frequently have less access to ice time, or when they do have access, it is at poor times such as very early in the morning or last thing at night.

Similar to the women in figure skating, women in hockey play under different rules than the men. The main rule difference between men’s and women’s hockey is that women’s hockey does not allow body checking (Therberge 2000). It was removed from women’s hockey in about 1990, although the rules differed by area and age group before that. The argument for the removal of body checking was based on the fact that players were being injured. One of the reasons injuries were occurring was that girls in hockey were not taught how to body check properly, or not taught at all, so when they reached the leagues that do body check they lacked the skills needed to do it correctly and safely. In addition, because no professional women’s hockey leagues exist, the women who play, including those playing at elite levels, also have to be able to go to work the next day. Some female hockey players would like to see body checking brought back; whereas, as others prefer that the game requires a different type of skills than the body checking game does (Therberge 2000). The debate continues and is not likely to be resolved in the near future.

2.6 Summary

Although research has been undertaken on sport, gender and children, most has focused on one to two of these topics, but few have addressed all three. In addition, literature is available on figure skating and hockey, but not on how the two sports interact with each other and little examines the experiences of children in these sports. Several key themes arise
out the literature that can be applied to the intersection of figure skating, hockey, children and gender.

Both figure skating and hockey are gendered and this impacts females and males differently in each sport, but the two parallel each other as well. Gendering figure skating and hockey as feminine and masculine forces females and males to conform to hegemonic ideals of femininity and masculinity, no matter the age of the participants. Those outside this rigid boundary, principally males in figure skating and females in hockey, face social pressures to either conform or be ostracized. Although the boundary exists as it does today, historically these boundaries were different. Figure skating was masculine and hockey, despite official histories otherwise, has been played by females as long as males. The boundaries have changed over time; consequently, they can change again to embrace all genders and all ages.
Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology

In this chapter, I elaborate on the methods used to conduct the research including participant observation, focus groups and interviews, as well as the methods used to interpret the data collected. My research was based on the premise that both people and things, including sports, are gendered as masculine or feminine. The gendering of people and sports is conducted through people, who either reproduce or contest their own gendering and that of the world around them. Individuals reproduce or contest their gender through performance (Butler 1999); gender is an ongoing construction that may change in different circumstances and in relation to the performance of others. I am well aware that the binary construction of gender is limiting and that people and things do not neatly fit into either masculine or feminine categories. However, this is the premise upon which the world generally operates outside of academic circles. Contrary to what society would like to believe, I adopt Daniels’ (2009) concept that people and things are polygendered which means that they are made up of a mixture of traits, some of which are classified as masculine, some as feminine, and some as both or neither.

In order to understand how hockey and figure skating are gendered in a particular place, it is necessary to understand the interactions between people as well as how people perceive these sports. One way in which this can be assessed is through participant observation because this method requires that the researcher participate in the culture and observe what is happening in a particular place. In addition, by participating the researcher’s reason for being in a place is accepted by those around them so people are more likely to behave as they would normally, rather than changing their behaviour because they feel they are being watched. Another method of learning how people perceive the gendering of the world around them is to ask questions. Interviews and focus groups provide a way for questions to be asked ethically; the participants consent for their views to be shared in the study. Furthermore, the gendering of people and things not only happens to adults, but to children as well. Considering the fact that I was interested in how the gendering of sports is impacting children’s involvement, it would make sense to also ask children about how they perceive the gendering of the sports. In addition, according to the United Nations Declaration
on the Rights of the Child (1989:np)

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Pursuant to this, since the focus of the research is on how the gendering hockey and figure skating affects youth in those sports, it is essential that their views be part of the research.

In the interest of ethics which stipulate that children must never be alone with a researcher, and the desire for information free of the influence of parents, focus groups were chosen as a means to pursue children’s perspectives while maintaining ethical standards. In order to elicit as much information as possible from children, drawings were also employed in the hope that they would provide a window into how children perceive figure skating and hockey.

Generally, when describing those who participated in the focus groups, I use the term “youth” to include every person up to the age of eighteen. The term “youth” is preferred to the term “child” because “child” brings to mind very young children and those in the focus groups were in the eight to twelve year old range. In observations, the terms “preschool age,” “elementary school aged,” “middle school aged,” and “high school aged” are used to refer to children aged one to four, five to ten, ten to thirteen and fourteen to eighteen years old, respectively. These terms are used because they follow the ages of children in the local school system. In addition, the terms “boys” and “girls” are used to refer to the gender performed by youth and the terms “men” and “women” for the gender performed by adults (Butler 1999).

3.1 Participant Observation

I conducted two different types of participant observation during the research period, during which I sat in the stands and took notes on what was happening on the ice, as well as in the rest of the arena. I spent over 60 hours in the arena doing this, mostly during one month near the end of a skating season. Because it was near the end of the season, I observed different events than might be seen at the beginning or middle of the season. In addition, I continued to figure skate with my local club. For this aspect of participant observation, I took notes either directly after events, when I sat in the stands to watch the next group, or later at home. I did not take notes every time after my own sessions because the sessions were very
similar and saturation was reached quickly. In addition, I skated on public ice with friends and with the school classes of several family members. After these events, I wrote my notes either immediately while in the arena or once I returned home.

Sitting and watching events gave me a different perspective on what happens on the ice, as previously I was almost always on the ice when in the arena. One disadvantage of being in the stands that I found was that I usually could not hear what was being said on the ice unless it was yelled. This meant I could not hear what coaches said, or what youth or adults say to each other while they skated. As a member of the figure skating club, I had access to the dressing room and off-ice training but I did not have access to any hockey dressing rooms or off-ice training. I also endeavored to include in my notes some of the sounds, smells, and physical sensations encountered in the arena. My observations from the stands and on the ice provided ample data to interpret.

3.2 Focus Groups

Since a researcher cannot be alone with a child and having a parent present may affect a child’s responses, conducting interviews with children can be tricky. Focus groups provided an ethical way to learn how children understand the gendering of figure skating and hockey because I was never alone with a child and parents were excluded on that account. The focus groups included one group of females, one group of figure skaters, and one group of hockey players. The participants were aged eight to twelve years old. This age group was chosen because this is the age when youth have moved from general skate lessons into sport specific training. In addition, this is the age group that usually has the most participants, since many athletes begin to drop out of sports in their teenage years. The first focus group conducted was supposed to comprise a mix of female hockey players, female figure skaters, and a female youth who was involved in neither. Participants were found through snowball sampling. Unfortunately, not everyone who said they would come attended, so the group was a female hockey player and a former female figure skater who did not currently participate in figure skating or hockey. After that, instead of organizing the groups by gender, I chose to organize the groups by sport and take advantage of increased participation by holding the sessions after their practice sessions. This increased attendance greatly because parents were more willing to have their child stay after practice rather than bringing them at a separate
time, especially since many families have several children in multiple activities and their days are closely scheduled.

The sessions were held in a conference room in the arena. Participants for these focus groups were recruited by handing out information leaflets and consent forms to both youth in the programs and parents one to two weeks before the focus group. The figure skater group was comprised of three female figure skaters and one male figure skater. Although when I began my research no males figure skated with the club, at the time of the focus groups there was one who just started in the figure skating program. The group of hockey players comprised three boys and I was unable to get any female hockey players to participate in this session.

As part of the focus group, I asked each youth to draw a picture of a hockey player and a figure skater in order to see their conceptions of a figure skater and a hockey player. The reasoning behind the drawings was twofold. First, I wanted to learn the primary way that youth visualize a figure skater and a hockey player; second, I hoped that having the youth draw would make the focus group feel more fun and and they would be more relaxed answering questions. Visual methods can be an excellent way for a researcher to understand children’s perspectives (Clark 2004; Mitchell 2008). Mitchell does caution researchers to bear in mind that drawings are not inherently a child-centered means of conducting research and that power relationships still remain. In other words, although drawing can be an excellent way for researchers to learn about youths’ perspectives, it can also reproduce power relationships, such as placing researchers and children in traditional adult-child or teacher-pupil relationships (2008:65).

Before each focus group began, I reminded the youth of the purpose of the group, that they did not have to answer a question if they do not want to, and that they should ensure they respect the opinions of others. While the youth drew pictures, I asked questions in a semi-structured manner. Opening questions included what sports they played, what sports they liked to watch on television, and what they liked, disliked, or would like to change about the sports they played. The next questions probed the gendering of hockey and figure skating by discussing how I had observed more males in hockey than females and the reverse in figure skating, and then asking the youth why they thought this was so. Further questions
were asked as they came up as these topics were discussed. Each focus group lasted from about 30 to 40 minutes.

3.3 Interviews

I conducted interviews with a variety of individuals, including a figure skating coach, a hockey coach, a male hockey player’s parent, a female hockey player’s parent, a female figure skater’s parent (there was no male figure skater with the local club at the time of interviewing, so there is no parent of a male figure skater, although one did join near the end of the research), a male adult who was a figure skater, and a female adult who played hockey. This made for seven interviews, four with women and three with men. The interviews were semi-structured, which gave me the opportunity to ask specific questions, but with the freedom to ask more as the discussion developed. The interviews took anywhere from about 20 minutes to an hour. I asked each interviewee about their own and their children’s (if appropriate) current and past sport activities, followed by questions about their likes, dislikes or what needs improvement in their sport or their children’s sport, as well as their thoughts on the minority gender in their sport. The interviews were conducted in a local coffee shop.

3.4 Interpreting the Data

I draw heavily on Messner’s (2009) concept that through social processes, people actively reproduce and resist gender. The data gathered from participant observation, focus groups, and interviews provided numerous examples of how the gendering of figure skating and hockey is being both reproduced and resisted. In addition, Messner’s (2009) research on the positions of soccer parents was used to show how parents’ positions in hockey and figure skating are also gendered. He found that coaches are mostly male, whereas the team parent, more commonly referred to as the team ‘mom’ was usually female. In his discussion about why team parent positions are usually filled by women, whereas coaching positions are filled by men, Messner argues that, “what people often think of as ‘individual free choices’ are actually choices that are shaped (both constrained and enabled) by social contexts” (2009:47). This is what is happening in the community arena; although parents and their children are free to choose the sport they participate in and volunteer with, this choice is shaped by the cultural context of the arena, as well as the social world outside the arena.

For one section, I relied heavily on Messner’s (2000) three level analysis in order to bring together the data obtained from the participant observation, interviews, and focus
groups. Messner analyzes a particular event on an interactional level, the structural context level, and the cultural symbol level (2000:767). Gilenstram et al. (2008) also make use of a similar three level analysis to interpret how female hockey players see themselves. Gilenstram et al. see the three levels as power relations; however, Messner (2000) sees the levels as areas of social processes. Messner defines the interactional level as, “How do children ‘do gender’ and what are the contributions and limits of theories of performativity in understanding these interactions?” (2000:767). The structural context level is how the gender regime, in both the structure of the program and the structure of the event, provides an environment that both constrains and enables the interactions (2000:767). Finally, the cultural symbol level is

> How does the children’s shared immersion in popular culture (and their differently gendered locations in this immersion) provide symbolic resources for the creation, in this situation, of apparently categorical differences between the boys and the girls? (2000:767).

Messner applies this analysis to moment of “gender salience” that he observes during the opening ceremony of his child’s youth soccer league. I use this type of analysis to understand one moment of gender salience in the context of all the research data gathered.

Messner’s (2009) discussion of how there is a common belief that sports are a way for females to learn competitiveness; whereas, for males, sports complement their natural competitiveness is another way some of the data can be understood (2009:152-153). In addition, Messner discusses how, when there is a single girl on the team, she actually becomes a fictive boy and no longer challenges the gendering of the sport (2009:157). This ties in with Daniels (2009) argument that girls learn from a young age to restrict their movements; whereas boys are taught to move with an “I can” mentality (2009:16-17). Furthermore, as Therberge (2000) argues, females in sports that are seen as masculine frequently feel the need to emphasize their femininity when not playing their sport (2000:87-90).

Two other authors’ theories I also adopted include Curry’s (1991) discussion of the locker room culture that is frequently found in masculine sports, applied to an instance wherein male hockey dressing room culture spilled into the arena. Curry argues that there is a louder, performance style of locker room banter that treats women as objects; whereas, in small quiet groups, conversations about women as real people and relationships are also
discussed. Within the same event, Kestnbaum’s (2003) analysis of how the specularity of figure skating reinforces females as objects to be looked at, was also relevant and important to understanding what was happening in the arena.

When interpreting and presenting a summary of the drawings, I drew on the concepts found in visual discourse analysis. As Rose (2001:136) states, discourse refers to groups of statements which structure the way a thing is thought, and the way we act on the basis of that thinking. In other words, discourse is a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it.

In other words, I examined the images for what they show of the youth’s knowledge of figure skating and hockey, with a focus on gender. I chose not to code what was in the pictures because of the small sample size. Instead, each image is analyzed for what it can show about how children in the community see figure skaters and hockey players, while also determining the main themes found within the drawings. While analyzing the pictures, I applied my anthropological knowledge of the culture that I share with these children. For example, conventional symbols of femininity and masculinity are used by children (and adults) when drawing. In addition, unless definite symbols of gender were included by the children in their drawings, gender of the person they drew was categorized as undetermined.
Chapter 4 Evidence of Gendering in the Community Arena

This chapter is a summary of the data gathered, divided into sections based on how the data were collected. The participant observation section includes who is on the ice, what they are wearing, who is watching, and what happens on the ice. There is also a section that discusses incidents where figure skating and hockey were placed in contrast to each other. The section on interviews describes the main themes found, such as why the interviewees or their children participate in the sports they are involved in, what the interviewees like and dislike about the sports they are involved in, and what the interviewees said about gender in the sports they are involved in. The next section covers the findings from the focus groups which include why the youth participate in the sport they do, what they like, dislike, or would like to change about their sport, and any comments they made about gender. The last section covers the drawings that the youth made during the focus groups where I elaborate on the commonalities and differences among the drawings.

The following image, Figure 4.1, is a sketch of the layout of the arena which consists of two levels, with concession, office, and stands on the upper level; and the ice surface, dressing rooms, and conference room on the lower level. The heater that I usually sat under is on the left side of the stands. From this position, I could observe, although not hear, what was happening on the ice. From this vantage point, I could also observe what the rest of the audience was doing. The disadvantage of this position was that I could not observe what was happening in the hallway outside the dressing rooms. Although it was somewhat uncommon for someone to be sitting in the stands with a notebook, it was not unusual enough to concern others in the stands.
4.1 Findings from Participant Observation

The original of the following image, Figure 4.2, is the mural that is painted above the main stairs on the left side of the arena. The mural was painted to represent local groups that use the arena the most and utilizes the colours associated with local organizations. This image, as well as other materials in the arena such as brochures and posters, contributes to the gendering in the arena. The figure skater portrayed here is obviously feminine; whereas, the equipment of the other two figures obscures their gender. In contrast to this aspect of gendering are the colours used. Red is a strong saturated colour more commonly seen on things viewed as masculine, although in this image it is used on the feminine figure skater. In addition, purple, a colour commonly associated with femininity, is seen here on the hockey player. However, these colours were chosen based on the local community group colours, which means that the design of the image has more meaning than the colours used.
4.1.1 **Who is On the Ice and What are They Wearing?**

Depending on whose ice time it is, who is on the ice varies considerably throughout the different ice sessions. What those on the ice wear depends on which group is using the ice. The main types of sessions I observed were figure skating, hockey, public skating sessions, and school skating sessions. Figure 4.3 shows the types of skates that are found in the community arena.

![Image of different types of skates](image)

**Figure 4.3.** Types of skates. (photographs by author)

Image A is a pair of figure skates, B is a hockey skate, C is a recreational pair of skates with a figure skate type blade, D is a speedskate, and E and F are recreational skates.
with hockey style blades worn by children. As the picture shows, recreational skates tend to be gendered by the choice of colours used. Characters from television shows and movies are also commonly found on these types of skates.

It is easily apparent to even a casual observer that during figure skating every person on the ice is female, except for the one youth male figure skater and occasionally an adult male figure skater who comes to the arena in order for the figure skaters to practice their dances for tests. The coaches were usually female, as were the judges, during the local test day that I observed. During the Canskate program, a mix of male and female children were enrolled. There was usually one female coach on the ice, as well as a couple of female figure skaters who help out with the program.

Figure skaters take to the ice in skirts or dresses over nude tights, with form fitting sweaters or jackets on top. Pants and shorts are also seen; layering is essential and jackets come off as skaters warm up to reveal shirts or the rest of a dress. The colours of the skirts, dresses, and shirts on the skaters vary significantly, frequently with some sort of sparkle. Dresses and skirts include a sewn in panty that is worn over the tights. Jackets are most commonly black, as are the pants and shorts. Lightweight gloves are worn in a variety of colours, except on test day and competitions, when they have to be white or black. Also during test days, competitions, and shows, girls hair is pulled into a bun or other controlled hairstyle and makeup is applied generously. During practice, hair is pulled back into a ponytail or bun, with clips holding short pieces back. Makeup is seen on some teenage girls at practice and occasionally on a preteen. During the Canskate program offered by the figure skating club, male children wear either hockey skates or hockey style recreational skates and female children wear figure skates, recreational skates of either type or hockey skates. The children are dressed frequently in snowsuits when they are first learning, then pants and jackets, with some girls occasionally dressed in tights with dresses. The helmets worn are a mix of hockey helmets, skateboard helmets, bike helmets, and riding helmets in many different colours, along with a variety of gloves and mittens including hockey gloves. The older girls who are assisting the instructors are dressed the same way as when they skate, except pants over tights are more common because they are warmer. The coaches usually wear black pants and a dark coloured winter jacket.
During hockey practices and games, all but a few skaters are male. If a team has any female players, only one or two are seen per team of about a dozen players. The only hockey times that had a large number of female hockey players was the female hockey league and for a youth versus parents game. Drop-in hockey during the day had no females whenever I was present. The gender of a player is not always apparent at first glance, since once suited up into their gear, gender is made less visible. The only sign is usually a ponytail sticking out below the helmet, although this is not a guarantee. Sometimes females will use pink laces or stick tape, but this is becoming more common among male players as well. It is only once helmets are off that gender is apparent. In addition, all but two coaches were male for youth hockey, junior hockey, and female adult hockey. Adult male hockey seemed to rarely have coaches at all. In addition, for all types of hockey that had them, referees were exclusively male.

Hockey equipment is made up of several pieces, each of which is available in many colours. During my observations, the majority of helmets were black, with white being the next most common colour seen, although there were some blue, red, yellow, and pink helmets, as well as multicoloured goalie helmets. In the youth programs, helmets usually had a wire cage face protector. The Junior level team played with helmets that have clear half shields. The women’s league players wore either full face masks, wire cage masks or clear plastic and wire cage mixed masks. The men’s drop-in hockey included everything from no face protection to full masks. This is also where most of the coloured helmets were seen.

Depending on the group, jerseys worn were either the team jersey or the players own jersey. When wearing jerseys other than a team jersey, logos included those from hockey teams such as the NHL, other professional hockey teams, local hockey teams, Hockey Canada, and businesses. The colours for the jerseys, shorts, and socks were most commonly strong saturated colours, as opposed to pastel tones. The main colours, across all age groups and genders, included blue, black, white, purple, green, red, plus a few others in small numbers. It should be noted that the local youth hockey league colours are black, white, and purple. Sticks followed the same colour scheme, although pink sticks and pink tape on other coloured sticks were seen a couple times. Most of this I observed while watching the women’s hockey league, although some male youths also used pink stick tape. Skates were almost always black with white laces, but a couple pairs had pink laces. This was seen again
in the women’s hockey league and by some male youths. The numbers of women or youth with coloured laces and sticks was one or two per team on average. Coaches tended to wear dark tracksuits with helmets. Referees wore the familiar black and white striped shirts, black pants, and helmets.

Other ice users that I observed included several class skating sessions from the local elementary and middle school. In this group, there was a mix of female and male, both youth and adults, on the ice. The adults usually included a mix of teachers and parents. School skating is similar in equipment to the Canskate program: every male on the ice was in hockey skates or hockey style recreational skates; female skaters wore a mix of figure skates, hockey skates, or recreational skates of either type. Helmets were again an assortment of colours and types. Parents and female teachers on the ice usually did not wear helmets; however, the male teachers frequently did. Clothing was usually everyday clothing, such as jeans, tee-shirts and hoodies, with the younger classes generally in snowsuits and winter jackets.

Public ice time during the work week had on average five people per session. Generally more female than male skaters attended these sessions. The majority of the skaters were adults, although occasionally an adult would bring a preschool age child to skate with them. During the evening public skate, females numbered slightly more than male skaters, while the majority of skaters on the ice during this time were about nine to fourteen years old. The equipment worn during the evening public skate was the same as Canskate and school skating. During the day public skates, females wore either figure skates or figure skate type recreational skates. Males wore either hockey skates or speedskates. Most skaters did not wear a helmet; only the young children did.

4.1.2 Who is Watching and What are They Doing?

Generally, during figure skating, it is adult females who are watching. Some may be in the music box playing music and socializing, while others sit in the stands usually under the heater. Occasionally there will be an adult male or two who sit and watch, as well as a female or male youth. In addition, for most figure skating sessions, generally two to eight people sat or stood in the audience. During the Canskate program more people were in the stands and in the foyer area. Of about 10 to 20 people, there is usually a mix of male and female adults, with a few more females than males. In addition, frequently youth of both genders were in the stands.
Who is watching during hockey depends on the activity on the ice; the numbers in the stands constantly changed; as one group’s ice time neared the end, more people would show up to pick up or drop off players. During youth hockey, both male and female youth and adults spread throughout the stands. I did notice that the youth present were more often female than male, but this could be due in part to attending the same group’s session more than once, leading to the same families being present. The turnout in the stands during youth hockey ranged from about 8 to 22 people. Besides me, the adult drop-in hockey sessions that took place during the weekday usually had no audience. The adult league hockey, both male and female, had a similar type of audience to the youth hockey. However, the adult male hockey usually had an audience of less than 10 people, whereas the female adult hockey audience was closer to 20. In addition, the adult females had slightly more females in the audience than males. The one Junior level hockey game that I observed had too many people to count, since the arena was about two-thirds full. The audience included males and females of all ages, although teenagers seemed to be the most common age group. Those in the audience seemed very involved in the game as they cheered or groaned as the situation warranted. A group of teenagers behind me included some male teenagers who made comments such as, “If I was him, I would have…,” “This ref likes to call some fucking penalties, man” and “Fucking wheels.” Their comments on the game seemed to show that they were more involved in what was happening on the ice than the females with them, who seemed to spend most of the game on their phones. In addition, although the referees and coaches during the Junior hockey game were male, the two people selling tickets were female and there was one male selling merchandise.

For the school skating groups, usually there would be a couple of adults who had come to help tie skates or bring forgotten equipment, as well as a couple of youth who had forgotten their skates or did not want to skate. Most of the adults either stood in the foyer area or in the boxes to watch, while chatting with others, both on and off the ice. Slightly more females than males watched the children skating. Public skate sessions rarely had any audience, especially the sessions during the weekdays. Weekend sessions would have a few adults who had brought youth to skate, but chose not to skate themselves.

During all sessions, those watching tended to sit in small groups and talk, although some would sit by themselves. Those in the audience did not always watch either; some read,
worked on laptops, did things on their phones, and the like. Children were also frequently provided with books or personal gaming devices and teenagers frequently used cell phones. During hockey games, there was more enthusiastic behavior including cheering and shouting, especially after shots on goal. This behavior was frequently confined to just a few members of the audience during the recreation youth hockey games and the female adult hockey games; whereas, during the competitive hockey team games there was more audience involvement.

4.1.3 What Happens on the Ice?

From both personal experience and observation, most figure skating sessions begin with a few laps around the rink to warm up. The Junior level skaters then have a group lesson that frequently uses drills to work on skating skills, as well as field movements. This lesson was followed by a group lesson on spins and jumps and their skate time would end with some free time to work on what they choose. The Intermediate and Senior level skaters usually spent the first 15 to 30 minutes working on skills and dance, followed by a 15 minute stroking session taught by one of the coaches. This session included laps around the arena, followed by drills designed to improve cardio as well as basic skating skills and field movements. The skaters then stretch at the boards for a few minutes and freeskate for the rest of the session. During freeskate, skaters practiced spins, jumps, and footwork sequences as well as their solos, both with and without music. Skaters would go drink water and talk to other skaters throughout the session, although excessive chatting was discouraged by the coaches. Throughout the entire ice time, coaches conduct private lessons and semi-private lessons. Once a week, after their session, the figure skaters go to the conference room of the arena for their off-ice training with the head coach. This usually focused on jump technique, although spin technique, arm positions, goal setting, and competition review were also covered. During test days, skaters warm up their test as a group then immediately perform their test, either solo or with a dance partner. This is the setup for skills, dance, and freeskate. After their test, the skaters await their test sheet from the judges, to learn whether they passed or not, as well as the judge’s comments. Competitions are run similar to test days, but instead of passing or failing, the skaters wait for their placings from the judges.

Hockey has two main types of sessions, practices and games. During practices, as well as power skating sessions, players usually skate laps to warm up, followed by drills
determined by the coaches. Drills were a mix of exercises designed to improve skating and stick handling skills. Mini games are also quite common, especially during power skating. The mini games frequently differ from regular hockey, by having the nets back to back in the centre, rather than at the ends, or using a ball and no sticks. In between drills, youth are given the opportunity to drink water. During games, players warmed up on their half of the arena, then proceeded to play five-on-five plus a goalie at each end. Youth hockey had some body contact, as did the men’s and women’s league hockey. The Junior hockey game I observed had many hits that appeared to be harder than at any other level I observed. At all levels, sticks were put in front of other players, a move I observed the most during the women’s hockey league. Whether placing the sticks in front of other players was intentional or not is unknown. Adult drop-in hockey had no contact, except on one occasion wherein a one player jokingly bumped another at low speed. This session frequently only had one goalie if any, in which case “Shooter Tutors” were attached to the nets. These are heavy duty panels with a hockey goalie painted on them with holes left in the four corners of the net and one in the bottom center (between the goalie’s legs). At the end of the Junior game, the team that won mobbed together on the ice, and the team that lost left the ice headed straight to their dressing room. I did not note this behaviour at other games, generally teams shook hands or high-fived the other team at the end of games. This surprised me as I am used to coaching soccer when at the end of the game, all players high-five or shake hands with the other team.

Elementary school skating sessions normally had youth doing half hearted laps around the arena, although they were just as inclined to go whatever direction they pleased as they played games with friends. There was a range of abilities, from those who could hardly stand in their skates on the ice, to those who could move around confidently with good speed. Skating aids, which are metal frame supports used to help a skater balance, were widely used during this session. During middle school skating, one end of the arena to the blue line was marked off with cones and a mini hockey game was played there. Most of those playing hockey were boys, with one or two girls playing as well. The boys appeared to be a mix of those who play hockey regularly and those for whom this is one of the few times they played. The girls who joined appeared unused to playing hockey as the one who played the most wore recreational skates with figure skate blades, rather than hockey skates. The rest of the youth skated laps and played games such as tag. I noticed some skaters whom I knew to play
hockey regularly chose to skate with friends as opposed to play hockey at the one end. Almost all the youth in this group could balance on skates, although the spread of skill was from just being able to skate to skilled skaters who could move quickly and easily. Some of the youth seemed to stand around the ice in groups attending to their phones or taking pictures with them. There was an incident during one of the sessions wherein the youth used the skating aids. This was a problem because skaters who did not need them for balance used them to have more speed than they have control over, some others used the skating aids as ‘bumper cars,’ running into other skaters.

As noted, evening public skating was similar to school skating. Both groups skated around as they pleased, talking with friends. However, during one session five of the boys removed their shirts near the end of the session and skated around while another appeared to film them with their phone. The DJ then chose to change the song to, “I’m Too Sexy” by Right Said Fred. During the weekday public skate, most people skated laps and some female adults practiced figure skating moves.

Although participant observation focuses on what is seen, what is heard, smelled or felt is also important. The noise of the arena varies completely depending on the activity on the ice. During figure skating, there is always music playing and some noise of skaters talking to each other and their coach talking or yelling if the skater is further away. The music is instrumental and repetitive during part of the session and then a mix of pop music is interspersed with skater’s solo music.

Throughout hockey activities, the sounds in the arena are completely different. There is no music, except during stops in the clock at major games, such as the Junior team playing, or playoffs in the other leagues. The sounds during hockey are the jarring loud cracks of sticks hitting pucks, pucks hitting the boards, and the scraping noise of blades on the ice. Coaches yell to be heard over the noise the players make, players in the box cheer their team on by yelling, and those on and off the ice hit the boards or hit their sticks on the ice. The door to the box clicks and scrapes open and slams closed as players switch on and off the ice.

The noise during school skating is different again. The radio music being played through the speakers is almost completely drowned out by the mix of babble and yells the children make while on the ice. The weekend public ice is similar, although the music is
clearer, as fewer people are making noise on the ice. Weekday public ice is very quiet, with music playing and the odd conversation happening as skaters skate laps around the ice.

In general, probably because I have been coming to the arena for many years, I generally did not notice any particular smell. Sometimes there is the smell of cleaning materials in the dressing room, but on the ice there is no real strong smell. It does not help that being in such a cold place frequently causes congestion, making smelling anything difficult. When the concession is open, the smell of popcorn can occasionally noticeable. Opening one’s skating bag releases the smell of the leather of the skates, as well as a bit of stale sweat from the skates and tights. However, at other times more smells are noticeable. In fact, most of the high school aged hockey teams’ equipment smells strongly of sweat, infusing the whole arena after an intense practice or game.

The physical sense of being in the rink changes according to what one is doing. The hard plastic seats soon become uncomfortable when one has to sit in them for a long period of time. If skating though, there is pulling on the skates, lacing them up tight, retying them tighter so that they give the right support, doing this several times during the sessions, even when fingers start to burn from the rub of the laces. Then there is stepping on the ice; the glide from each step, which is completely different from walking on the ground and the breeze in the face increases as one skates faster and faster. There is a sense of freedom in the soul as the worries of the day slip away. Although falling does not always hurt, it definitely can; however, we all get up and try again because the glide is worth it.

**4.1.4 Figure Skating vs. Hockey**

I observed several specific events that set figure skating and hockey in opposition to each other; many of these instances included a gendered element. A basic outline of these events is given below with more detail provided in the interpretation section.

The first example I noted was when the figure skaters were moving from the dressing room to the conference room for off-ice training on a day where a couple female hockey players had used the coaches’ dressing room to start changing for their hockey in the next session. One of the figure skaters asked the coach if the hockey players were, “stinking it up in there?” The coach replied an affirmative. There have also been times where the figure skaters have commented on the (usually male) hockey players, including when the whole
arena smells after a Junior ice practice or after having to walk past the dressing rooms of players getting ready to skate or who just finished skating.

Several times during Senior ice practice, the male high school hockey players from the next session stood outside their dressing room, next to the ice surface, watching the figure skaters while talking amongst themselves. Normally I am on the ice and cannot hear what is being said because of the glass separating the ice from the stands and dressing room areas; however, one time I stepped off the ice during practice to move my skate bag out of the dressing room and overhead a player say, “Look at the ass on that one!” This incident is discussed in more detail in the interpretation section. Having the male players stand and watch the figure skaters is not uncommon, although this session seemed to make the figure skaters more uncomfortable than usual because only four figure skaters were on the ice that day and no coaches.

At that same practice, when it was time to get off the ice, the other three female figure skaters did not want to walk to their dressing room past the group of male hockey players alone, so we travelled as a group and the skaters purposely ignored the hockey players as we walked through their group. Once in the dressing room, some of the girls commented on the smell of the hockey players. This lead to a discussion of why hockey gear stinks and figure skating gear does not; the conclusion reached was that figure skaters’ gear is washable and is frequently washed, whereas hockey gear is difficult to clean. When we left the dressing room to head for our vehicles, the skaters again verbally chose to travel as a group. As we left, a hockey player said something to our group, but none of us made out what was said.

On one occasion I overheard a discussion between the male figure skater, his parent, and a female figure skater. The mother was telling the female figure skater that some youth have asked her son why he wears figure skates; she tells them he does so that he can do turns and spins. The son then said, “All they do is hit a puck,” to which the female figure skater replied that, “These skates are better.” Related to this is another event which occurred during a weekday public skate. A couple of female skaters were talking about skating with a man at the boards, during which conversation he commented that his (hockey) skates were ‘real’ skates. In addition, while talking with a female middle school age hockey player during school skating, she said that hockey players were faster than figure skaters. She also said that
figure skaters are those who chew up the ice. I do not have exact quotes for her, since we were on the ice at the time. Lastly, although I do not have a specific occasion where this was said, the saying, “If figure skating was easy, they would’ve called it hockey” is well known by the figure skaters of the local club. In fact, when I was younger I had a tee-shirt and a sweater with that saying printed on them.

4.2 Findings from Interviews

The following section outlines the main ideas and themes from the semi-structured interviews. Since I had such a small sample size and I am in a small community identifiers such as whether the respondent is male or female, or their position in sport is not given unless specifically relevant to the quote under discussion. By sampling individuals with different backgrounds in sport (parents, coaches, and athletes) I was able to learn different perspectives of figure skating and hockey.

One of the questions I asked to begin the interviews was about what sports the interviewee plays or played in the past, as well as their children, if applicable. Most of the interviewees are active themselves and so are most of their children. Sports named by the interviewees included hockey, figure skating, soccer, golf, karate, swimming, baseball, skiing, cross-country running, track and field, basketball, dance, tennis, and softball. Soccer was mentioned by almost every interviewee with children, which I believe is due in part to the affordability of soccer in the community. I also asked what sports the interviewees watch on television. Almost every interviewee responded with hockey. Other sports named were soccer, baseball, tennis, skiing, football, figure skating, and mixed martial arts. In addition, most of the interviewee’s watched whatever was showing during the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and were looking forward to watching the 2012 London Olympics. One interviewee mentioned that her family prefers to watch sports that they can relate to.

The primary reason interviewees gave for either their or their children’s participation in sport was exercise. Several people listed the competition/competitiveness as one of their favourite aspects of participating in the sport they participate in as adults or what they believe their child enjoys about their sport. Other favourite parts of their sport or their children’s sport include their child’s coach, the small community nature of the programs, memories of winning major games on home ice, making friends, travelling, training, and learning new skills/programs. Two adult athletes stated their favourite part of their sport is the actual
skating or ‘the glide.’ One stated that, “the edge, the glide….I think that is the biggest part of skating and that’s what I enjoy.” Another interviewee who still skates discussed how she is addicted to skating and if she stops, she feels physically sick. As a child, she remembered crying if she had to miss skating.

Parents also listed the emotional development, life lessons, and a sense of hard work their children learn from participating in figure skating or hockey, although one did add that this can come out of other sports as well. Those who coach youth discussed how they like giving back, one said to the sport, another said to the youth. In addition, one of the coaches liked sharing “that sense of high that you get when you…accomplish something and you are just dripping sweat and you’re tired and you’re exhausted, but you’re like, ‘wow that felt amazing I got through my whole program with landing all my jumps’ or whatever that goal is.”

When asked why they or their children play the sports they do, as well as what encourages youth to get involved in sports, there was a wide variety of answers. One reason that came up more than once was exposure to the sport. One interviewee chose to play hockey after watching the Canadian men’s and women’s teams earn gold at the Olympics. Another began skating because it was convenient for their mother as a form of babysitting, then they chose to continue to skate. That interviewee remembers watching famous figure skaters and now believes that one way to get people involved in figure skating is for them to watch people like Patrick Chan because he is so “ridiculously talented even non-skaters can recognize it.” Another skater did Canskate, then ringette, then switched to hockey after watching their younger brother play hockey. Most of the interviewees or their children have completed a year or two of Canskate prior to going on to either figure skating or hockey. Another parent stated that their children are in the sports they are because the child wanted to be in that sport. In addition, one parent noted that children have to be sport minded, they cannot be pushed to play sports.

A key question I asked the interviewees was what they did not like about their sport, as well as what, if any, barriers existed for participation in their sport. First I outline the main reasons given that do not directly relate to gendering, and then the responses that related to gendering. The most common barrier identified preventing youth from participating in hockey or figure skating was cost. Ice fees, equipment, travelling, and in the case of figure
skating, coaching, add up quickly. The local hockey association helps some families with ice fees if their child wants to play recreational hockey and some local programs can help with costs, but generally the cost to participate in either sport is very high. One interviewee mentioned that their sport equipment is the most expensive items they own, which is true for me as well (the skating dress that I bought new cost more than any other single item in my closet). Also, the more competitive an athlete is, the higher the cost. Rep (competitive) hockey teams travel more and players participate in hockey camps to improve skills. Competitive figure skaters travel to more distant competitions, which requires more coaching and ice time. Related to this is the fact that, in order to compete at a higher level, most skaters, both hockey players and figure skaters, have to join a team or training center to take their skills to the next level. The local hockey league splits its time between two communities because there is not enough ice time available at the local arena for all who want to use it. One parent suggested that the old arena, which currently is a dry floor space, have ice put back in, so the community can have two ice sheets over the winter and thus have more ice time for all the user groups.

Interviewees commonly cited the behavior of parents as something they disliked about their sport. The behaviour the interviewees cited included parents coaching from the stands, yelling at players on either their own team or the other team, or shouting at the officials. Interviewees also discussed that some of the parents believe that their child is going to be the next superstar or they push their child into the sport because they want to vicariously live out their own sport dreams. This creates problems. One interviewee noted how parents in the stands are very critical of the coaches on the ice; the interviewee wondered if they are so critical of what is happening, why do not they choose to coach. This last point came up more in interviews with hockey players, although from my experience in figure skating this critical behaviour can be the case in that sport as well. One coach also mentioned that, because they coached at a young age, they were not very good at handling some of the problems, and many of the problems with parents might have been prevented if the young coach had created boundaries from the start. Other concerns interviewees had with parents is the ‘pettiness’ and ‘nitpicking’ that takes place, such as not sitting with other parents of children on the same team. Lastly, one parent mentioned that while attending a hockey camp that had several former NHL players coaching, many of the parents focused
more on the former NHL players than on the instruction their children were receiving. In other words, the parent wanted the other parents to just let the coaches coach and not act like a fan club.

One interviewee mentioned that one of the reasons youth stop playing hockey is because of the competitiveness. According to the interviewee, this frequently happens with youth about 11 or 12 years old. Others discontinue their participation due to conflicts with other activities, especially those that families can do together, such as skiing. Related to this, the adult female hockey player discussed how few options were available for her to continue playing hockey once she finished high school. She is currently pursuing another sport at university, which she feels offers more opportunities. She would love to do both sports, but knows there are few opportunities available to her to continue hockey participation at a high level. For both sports, she wonders what she will do once she finishes university and the sport training opportunities it provides her.

A concern raised about figure skating was the potential danger to skaters when too many of differing abilities are on the ice at the same time. This is mainly a problem when skaters pay to skate an extra session before a competition or test day, which can result in more skaters on the ice than usual. As a parent, the interviewee has seen many close calls and wonders if other solutions are possible, such as encouraging skaters that want to skate extra sessions to make use of the least busy ice times, or having the club purchase extra ice before competitions.

One interviewee stated that the opportunities available for boys in hockey are available for girls as well. However, girls generally drop out of boys’ hockey and play girls’ hockey after the Peewee level. This interviewee believed that this is due to the increased physicality of hockey. They also discussed that more girls are in house leagues than in rep leagues, because house leagues are less competitive and physical than rep leagues. The interviewee was not entirely sure how to answer, although did state they did not know why so few girls are in hockey and wondered if they just do not want to play hockey. As part of this discussion, the interviewee remarked that ringette is popular. In contrast, one interviewee’s primary thing she did not like about hockey was how the boys were treated differently from the girls. Her example was from the year she joined hockey; because there was a high interest, there were enough players for an all girls team but, unlike the boys’ team,
their team did not get jerseys and socks. In addition, she is pretty sure that their ice time was shorter than the boys’ ice times. Her experience was from when she first started hockey several years before, so hopefully the coach’s comments show that the sport has changed. There are no all girl teams currently in the local hockey association for current comparisons to be made.

I asked the hockey coach if he thought that boys and girls were treated the same in hockey. He stated that, as part of coaching, there is a ‘speak out’ program, which is an anti-bullying and harassment program run by Hockey Canada. He continued how he would like to say that they are treated the same, but that, in reality, the expectations are not the same for boys and girls. Although expectations for boys and girls are the same at rep and house level, he found coaches at the house level sometimes try to be more competitive and may not treat the girls the same way. This is not as much a problem as it was in the past and he personally treated girls and boys the same. Another interviewee related that, when their significant other was at a coaching clinic, someone asked what they were supposed to do about all the girls in hockey. The instructor told them to embrace it, because the girls were here to stay and, moreover girls are generally easier to coach than boys because girls immediately apply what they have been told. In general, it seems, as one parent stated, although at times they feel the coaches do not take their daughter seriously, more of the problems are with parents.

An example of what some players experience with parents was particularly highlighted during one interview with the parent of a girl who plays hockey with boys at the rep level. Both the daughter and the parent have experienced many problems with parents, including incidents where the girls spot on the team was questioned, as well as having her attractiveness to boys disparaged. During one particular season that was the worst they experienced, other parents would say that the daughter was only on the team because her father was an assistant coach, even though for rep teams every player is ranked according to their skills at tryouts and she ranked near the top. In addition, during the season, whenever the daughter’s line did not do well, she was always the one blamed not the other player on her line by the other parents as well as teammates. During off-ice training, the other parents ignored the girls’s parent because they did not consider it worth befriending the parent because the daughter would not be there long. Parents and teammates would stare at the daughter when she exited the dressing room. On the ice, both opposing players and her own
teammates hit her; once she was hit behind the legs with a stick and punched in another instance. Furthermore, one parent who previously supported the girl playing hockey told her parent that boys will not like her because she plays hockey; boys like the girls who like to watch hockey. This girl was about 11 years old at this time.

The interviewee whose daughter plays rep hockey feels that her daughter does not like the politics; especially when she has to work harder than the boys she plays with to earn the same respect. The parent also discussed how some boys do not like having girls on their teams because they do not want girls to have crushes on them. The parent felt this feeling was even more common at the rep level because the players are more serious about hockey and do not want the distraction. However, because her daughter is serious about hockey she has earned the boys’ respect. In addition, another girl who was a goalie for an all girls team experienced some issues with other players when she attended goalie camps. She felt she got a hard time, particularly from the males in her own grade, although she does not remember the comments being specifically gendered. She also added that she went further in hockey than the boys did anyway.

Girls’ and boys’ hockey are perceived differently by those I interviewed. Boys’ hockey, particularly rep level, is seen as being more competitive at younger age levels than girls’ hockey. In addition, one interviewee said that a female player needs to be really strong to play on a boys’ team. Also, one player on an all girls team remembers that she and her team wished that they were allowed to hit like the boys do to “make it the same.” In addition, she noted that the hockey she played had many more stick penalties than boys’ hockey. She was content playing on all girls’ teams because she started late playing hockey and believes that it is natural that boys outmuscle girls at a certain point in development. She also never tried ringette because she thought it was “too girly.”

When the parent of a male hockey player was asked about their thoughts on girls in hockey, they said it was fine. It seemed that for them it was basically a non-issue. Their son’s team has both boys and girls in the house league every year. The interviewee also told a story about their son’s team playing a neighbouring community’s all girls team and that the girls’ team beat their son’s team soundly. It was suggested by the interviewee that I should join a female hockey team, especially since they believe that figure skaters can outskate hockey
players. This discussion led to the interviewee remembering a past local professional team that used to take figure skating lessons in order to improve their skating skills.

The male figure skater surprised me when I asked if he had issues related to being a male in figure skating; he said no. This surprised me because a commonly held belief is that male figure skaters frequently experience some harassment for being male in a sport that is seen as feminine. He felt he was lucky since he never really had problems relayed to being a male in figure skating; he never dreaded going to school. The only exception was during one year of high school when one male student gave him a hard time; but he considered that even if he had not been skating, this boy would have given him a hard time because he is such a shy person. His friends would occasionally joke with him about being a male figure skater; for example, while playing soccer with them, one would ask him if he had learned a particular move in skating. Although he did not have any problems, he is sure that it happens. This is promising, because this male figure skated in a small, rural community as well and his comments show that being male and a figure skater does not immediately mean the person will be harassed because of it.

4.3 Findings from Focus Groups

The following section is an amalgamation of the responses from the focus groups. Since the focus groups are small and draw from a limited pool of people, in order to maintain confidentiality, I am not precise as to which individual responded. To begin each focus group, after discussing the purpose and the guidelines of the focus group, the youth were asked to draw a figure skater and a hockey player. Plain paper, several packages of pencil crayons and sharpeners were provided. While they drew, I asked the group questions.

My opening question asked what sports the youth participated in. Soccer was the most common and was played by almost every youth. Basketball was second with swimming, baseball and track tied for third. Other sports mentioned were wakeboarding, downhill skiing, golf, gymnastics, ballet, badminton, and volleyball. These sports are a mix of those offered by community groups, participated in with family, and played at school.

Another opening question was what sports the youth watched on television. Hockey was the most popular, watched by both hockey players and figure skaters. The Olympics and figure skating were the next most common response, followed by football. Other sports mentioned were FIFI Women’s World Cup (soccer) and swimming. One of the hockey
players does not like to watch hockey because it just makes them want to play. In addition, one of the figure skaters commented that they liked watching figure skating on television because they can learn by watching and then try moves themselves after viewing.

The youth were then asked if they could participate in any sport, regardless of cost, or schedule or anything, what they would like to play. The male hockey players all wanted to try football. One explained that they want to try it because they would like tackling people and another explained that they play it in their backyard with family and it is fun. The rest of the answers were more varied and included lacrosse, volleyball, competitive swimming, basketball, rhythmic gymnastics, ballet, hockey, and speedskating. The last two answers were given by a figure skater who initially said hockey, then changed their answer to speedskating reasoning they could learn to skate faster.

The reasons the youth gave for why they began to play the sport they do were also varied. One learned to skate in the Canskate program and then moved to ringette, but decided to change to hockey after seeing her younger brother play hockey as well as being tired of the ‘girl drama’ in ringette. This ‘girl drama,’ she explained, was things like going into the dressing room and being told she could not place her bag in a spot because that is where one girl’s friend was going to sit. One of the figure skaters and one of the hockey players have an older sibling in the same sport and followed their older sibling into it. A hockey player had his mother talk him into playing, whereas another moved into the area and after watching hockey on television, thought it would be fun to play. Several of the skaters began in the Canskate program before moving into their sport, but not all.

When asked why they like their sport, most named something quickly and easily; however, the male hockey players took a while to answer. When they did, the answers included because it is fun, they like to skate fast and sometimes they like hits. The female hockey player talked about how she liked that hockey is Canada’s game, that their team is a big family and they do not care that she is girl. She also enjoys meeting new people at camps and learning what it is like to play hockey where they are from. The figure skaters like performing in front of people, getting exercise, their coach, twirling, falling, and jumps except for axels. One talked about how she likes the feeling she gets when in the air, “I like when you have that feeling of being in the air…it feels really cool.” Another skater immediately agreed this was their favourite part of figure skating as well. One of the skaters
also talked about how they liked having had a judge come up to tell them that they did a really good job at a competition. They also discussed that they know they have done a good job when they are panting at the end as it reminds them they “worked hard to be a winner.”

The youth were asked what they like about their coaches. Some of the reasons given include when the coaches encourage them, take the time to explain their answer to a skater’s question, protect them, start with something positive then discuss what needs to be improved, push them, but not too hard, know when they are needed because of a bad fall, and teach them new skills. The hockey players discussed how in the younger divisions the coaches are nicer, but as one gets older they are “kinda mean.” They said that this was a good thing because, “if you have a coach that just lets you figure skate around when you’re trying to play hockey, you are not going to improve in life. If you have a hard coach like ours, he’s going to make you skate, then you are going to get better.” Another player stated that they do not want a coach who is nice when a player does not do things in practice, but they also do not want a coach who will bench them for the rest of the period during a game if they make a mistake.

In addition, they were asked what they thought their coaches could improve. One of the hockey players suggested that the coaches change up the drills during practices more often. Another did not like it when the coach swore at the referees. In addition, one of the players did not like having to switch back and forth between defense and forward during a game. Both the hockey players and the figure skaters do not like it when their coach pushes them too hard. One of the figure skaters would like to be able to talk to the coach when they are in a private lesson with another skater if it is important. One of the other skaters replied that they cannot do that, because the skater’s parent is paying for that time, but the first skater argued that they would just do it if it was really important.

Several times the concept of competitiveness came up. For the former figure skater, the competitive side of the sport is one of the reasons she stopped skating. Another figure skater discussed how she does not like it when she falls, makes a mistake or gets deductions at competitions. On the other hand, the female hockey player talked about how, once one gets to the Peewee level in boys’ hockey, that is when it gets competitive; however, in girls’ hockey it does not get competitive until Bantam, which is one of the reasons this player
stayed in boys’ hockey. She likes the competitiveness. One of the hockey players described the type of person who plays hockey as someone who is competitive.

Another topic that came up repeatedly was the concept of hitting. The responses ranged from not liking it to wanting to hit. One of the male hockey player’s first response to what he does not like about hockey was hitting because he almost had two concussions in the past two months. In addition, he said he was body checked by someone twice as tall as him, which resulted in him doing “two front flips and two back flips” before hitting the ice and it really hurt. The female hockey player stated that she and her team the past year wished they were allowed to hit on Atom level rep teams because the referees would call it a hit if they went into the boards “funny,” especially if there was a size difference between the players. She does not get to hit until next year, but she has been practicing with a friend in their backyard rink. When asked about hitting in girls hockey, she said she does not really know because she does not play it, but some of her friends who do, have said they do not like that they have to wait until Bantam to be allowed to hit. Another hockey player talked about how in the one of the games they played, the referees let one team hit, but not the other team and called penalties on those who were hit as opposed to those doing the hitting.

The hockey players were asked if they would try ringette and one of the reasons they gave for not wanting to was because they do not allow hits. In addition, when discussing why more boys play hockey than girls, one of the hockey players said that more girls like figure skating or playing ringette because, “ringette can’t hit and hockey you hit a lot and girls don’t like to be hit.” This was countered by another player who said one of the girls on his team likes to be hit and another said that the girls like to hit. When queried further, the players told me that one girl likes to get hit, but when she gets the puck and everyone tells her to skate with it, she frequently passes the puck instead to the wrong person. They also said that more girls figure skate because girls like to dance on skates whereas boys like to hit on skates. The figure skaters stated a similar idea and said that boys like hockey because boys do not mind pushing and shoving, but girls do. One added that the boys in her grade are really violent and enjoy pushing and shoving. Furthermore, they argued that some girls do not like pushing, shoving and falling, which is why few girls play hockey. I pointed out that they fall when they figure skate, but the figure skaters replied they do not fall “like that,” which would hurt more. One girl added, “I’d rather not be shoved into the boards.”
One of the main ideas that came up that the youth did not like about their sport was problems between people, which contributes to people dropping out of a sport. One example described by the female hockey player was how one team she played on was very immature and some of the players were angry that their friends had more goals than they did, so they tried to get goals while on defense. Even some of the parents would ask her what was wrong with her, but she did not think it was a big deal that she did not have many goals because she played defense. Another example from hockey was problems with players who ‘hog’ the puck. The figure skaters also had problems with people that mostly centered around respect on the ice. Skating etiquette and rules state that skaters in a lesson have right of way, followed by the skater who is doing their solo with the music. Generally skaters also move out of the way of people who are doing their solos without their music, if they are practicing individual moves. The skaters had problems when a skater demanded that everyone move out of her way, even if both skaters where practicing their solo without music. The skaters also discussed that everyone knows where the other skater’s solos go and if they do not know, to just watch them a couple times. This ‘drama’ as some called it, was seen as people being mean, and was mentioned by all the focus groups as the reason why youth stopped participating in sport. Some of the youth also had solutions. One suggested that, if a person did not know anyone on the team, they should try to get to know them instead of quitting. Another said that they should look at the good side of sport, such as the exercise and the opportunity to meet new people. Another suggested that everyone should just get along.

Another concept that arose in the focus groups was the idea of fun. This came up for the hockey players as the reason they play their sport. They enjoy playing hockey together with their friends. When asked if that is why they play hockey I was told that they play hockey to meet people to become friends who have similar interests. A hockey player described a person who plays hockey as someone who likes to have fun. One of the figure skaters wanted to be able to do more fun things, such as playing games, during skating. She and another figure skater wished the focus was not always on training and getting ready for the next competition or test. This skater also likes the freeskate part of practice more than skills and dance, because there is more freedom to practice what they want in the order they desire.
The youth in the focus groups told stories that sometimes related to what we had been discussing, but other times less so. One story a hockey player told me was about how Jarome Iginla (NHL player) was training locally and some of the players they trained with dropped their hockey gear off before off-ice training and then told them that “We talked to Jarome Iginla and when he gave us the nod it was like and we were like oh my gosh he gave us the nod.” The hockey player responded to the other hockey players that was “cool.” The female hockey player talked about how many of her friends do not play sports, which sometimes makes her feel like a ‘loser,’ because they will have had a sleepover on the weekend, which does not bother her, but they come back new people because they know each other so much better. Another story a hockey player told was about their first hockey camp. The instructor told them they were going to work on puck handling the next day, but the player did not feel that they were ready for it, so they pretended to be sick. But, their mother figured it out, so they attended the afternoon of the camp and found they were not as bad at it as they thought they were. After I commented on how I felt puck handling was a difficult skill, they responded, “if you just practice, it comes to you right away.” Another hockey player told the following story;

Once one of my teammates stuck out his leg, um, on this one team where we had to watch for number ten and…we could, like, hit him or anything, ‘cause there would be a good penalty ‘cause it took out one of their best people on their team and then, um, this number eleven kid, when we were playing them…I forgot where it was, he got kicked out of the game from hitting from behind and…my coach told this kid (name) on my hockey team…told him to tell the refs that it was number ten so we could have more time.

Some concepts came up that related only to hockey. This includes that all the players in the focus groups primarily played defense, although one also played left wing. The female hockey player said she plays defense because she is not great at getting goals, but gets lots of assists. In addition, she feels more comfortable when playing defense; it is “more my thing I do, I guess.” She told me that she is not very confident when playing forward, although she will if her coach asks her to; the coach has told her she is a strong forward. All the male hockey players would like to play forward. Some of the hockey players also talked about how they do not like penalties because the one player feels his team gets too many. Only two of the figure skaters would try hockey, and another had tried skating in hockey skates and
found it uncomfortable. The one who would maybe try hockey has played it a little with her cousins, but does not want to try ‘real’ hockey.

In relation to figure skating, one of the skaters stated that they would not change anything about the sport, they like it the way it is. Figure skaters were also described by hockey players as someone who likes to spin a lot as well as someone who likes dancing and skating. The hockey players would not try figure skating, in part because they believe they would trip on the picks. When the figure skaters talked about why few boys figure skate, they said that boys think figure skating is stupid. “Oh like, all the boys in my class, they’ll go like, they’ll be rude to me and they’ll be like ta-da! I’m better than you. I’ll be like…really? Then I’ll show them all.” Another figure skater thought that the boys might think they have to wear pretty dresses and stuff like that, but they just wear a tuxedo, like going to a wedding and not a big deal. In addition, the figure skaters argued that if the boys got to know figure skating they would kind of like it, but because the boys do not care about it they do not even try to learn what they might like about figure skating, since it is not all pretty stuff. The male figure skater stated that boys do not like as much fancy stuff as girls do and, “Most boys like cool stuff instead of fancy.” Another figure skater pointed out that it would be good for a guy to take up figure skating because then it would be one guy with many girls. “They never think of that kind of stuff.”

One example of gendering that came up was the first thing one of the hockey players said when I re-explained the project at the beginning of the focus group and I was interested in their thoughts on their sport, what they liked, and what they would like to change. One hockey player immediately spoke up and stated that the hockey jerseys stink and that even the “jersey moms” cannot get the smell out of them. Another gendered comment occurred after I asked a female hockey player if being the only female on the team was unusual. She told me that she stayed in boy’s hockey because she liked the competitiveness. She also talked about how few girls her age like hockey; they only like to watch it with their family and do not feel ‘committed’ enough to play it. She does not mind being the only girl, especially since she already knew some of the boys on her team. In addition, she told me about her friend who played on her team the year before who was the ‘weird’ kind of girl who likes to bug boys, but the boys did not like it. She said that sometimes they want their space and she can tell because they just say ‘uh-hum’ or change subjects. However, if they
want to talk then they will “ask you questions and stuff.” During another focus group, when one of the male hockey players mentioned that his sister plays on his hockey team, one of the other hockey players said, “That would suck.”

I really appreciated the focus groups because they gave me real insight into how those in the sports interpret what is happening in their sports. In addition, the drawings that the youth completed during the focus groups yielded further insight into youth perspectives of figure skating and hockey.

4.3.1 The Focus Group Drawings

The drawings that I asked the youth to create provided an excellent lens into how they perceive the hockey players and figure skaters as opposed to the sport itself Similar to the general observation made during participant observation that, figure skating is more obviously gendered than hockey, almost all of the children’s drawings of figure skaters depicted them as female, whereas the children’s drawings of hockey players were a mix of male, indefinitely gendered and female. Figure 4.4 shows a hockey player drawn by one youth and Figure 4.5 shows a figure skater drawn by another youth. How children view hockey and figure skating is discussed below.

Figure 4.4. Hockey player drawn by a male hockey player.
Of the nine children that were in the focus groups, all but two drew their figure skater with conventional signs of femininity. These signals of femininity include the wearing of a dress or skirt, a ponytail, exaggerated eyelashes, full lips, and in one case, an obvious bust. One male hockey player portrayed the figure skater as a stick figure, without any signs of femininity or masculinity, and the male figure skater drew his figure skater as male. The drawings of hockey players were definitely more split, with three of the drawings showing a male hockey player, three showing a female hockey player, and three whose hockey player’s gender was not determinable.

When considered by gender, as opposed to sport, three of the five female children depicted their hockey player as female and one defined hers as male, whereas two of the four male children depicted their hockey players as male. In all the other drawings the gender of the hockey player was undetermined, although a weak argument could be made for them being masculine due to the colours used and hairstyle. The apparent links between the gender of the child and the genders of the images they drew is interesting. Almost every child except the male figure skater portrayed the figure skater as female, but female children were more likely to draw their hockey player as female and males were more likely to draw their hockey

Figure 4.5. Figure skater drawn by a female figure skater.
players as male. Similar to how hockey players’ gender is not readily apparent when they are on the ice, several drawings of the hockey players did not have a marked gender.

Other themes apparent in the drawings are symbols used to mark which sport the drawing depicts. Although some children chose to label their drawings, not all did. Hockey players hold sticks in five of the pictures; these were all the pictures except those by female figure skaters and the former female figure skater. In summary, those in hockey and the male figure skater saw the hockey stick as a key feature. In the female figure skaters drawings, the cage mask has been drawn as marking the athlete in the picture as a hockey player. The cage masks were also in one of the male hockey player’s pictures, the male figure skater’s picture, and the female hockey player’s picture. Two of the male hockey players and the female former figure skater did not include a helmet of any type. Sport specific equipment was not limited to hockey players; jagged toepicks, or pointed blades (as opposed to the rounded ones on the hockey players) were included by five of the children.

These seem to demonstrate, in part, what participants in each sport see as different between the sport they play and the sport they were asked to draw. Figure skaters stop wearing helmets once they move out of the Canskate program and frequently complain about having to wear helmets when they skate with their classes. Helmets, and other protection, are seen almost as a symbol of weakness. A mix of hockey players and figure skaters see the toepick as an important feature of figure skating and, in discussions, hockey players are nervous about trying figure skates due to a fear of tripping on the toepicks. In addition, the overwhelming majority of children portrayed their figure skaters in a dress or a skirt. The exceptions were a stick figure drawing by a male hockey player, a neck up drawing by a female figure skater and a male figure skater drawn by the male figure skater. Although dresses and skirts are frequently worn by female figure skaters, fitted shorts and pants are common sights at practices. Also, some international figure skaters wear one piece bodysuits in competition. However, the majority of children choose to dress their figure skaters in dresses and skirts.

4.4 Summary

Throughout the data collection process, key themes arose in the participant observation, interviews, and focus groups. Some of these themes include figure skating as visually very feminine, but on the other hand, hockey is primarily gendered through people’s
actions and language. The gendering of these sports is perceived not only by adults, but also definitely by the youth in these sports. In addition, the concept of competiveness and competition come up in several ways: for some as a motivator, whereas for others as a discouragement. Furthermore, hockey and figure skating frequently exist in contrast to one another. The opposition of these two sports parallels the gender polarization that exists in Western culture (Daniels 2009:29).
Chapter 5 Interpretation of the Data

The three methods used to gather a wealth of information and data can be interpreted in several ways. As shown in the previous chapter, the data from participant observation, interviews and focus groups works together to show how both figure skating and hockey are gendered in the arena. However, this gendering is both reproduced and resisted, and at times data from different methods or even from different individuals may not agree. It is often these moments that reveal the most information because it is this disagreement that illustrates the reproduction by some and the resistance by others. As there is no one truth that can be extracted from the culture of the arena, all data are approached with the idea that they can add layers and depth to the meanings of what is happening in the arena.

5.1 Hockey as Masculine (Mostly)

I made use of Messner’s (2009) concept that gender is constantly in a state of reproduction and resistance. Messner’s approach allows for an understanding of the social processes that gender hockey as masculine can be reached in the interviews and focus groups through their expressed actions and their opinions; those in the arena both reproduce and resist the gendering of hockey. Many times the reproduction and resistance of gendering hockey as masculine happened simultaneously.

One of the ways those in the arena reproduce hockey as masculine was observed during hockey times, when males are the majority on the ice, including players, coaches, and referees. In resistance to this is the female hockey league although it has male referees and mainly male coaches. In addition, some female youths are in minor hockey and there was one girl during school skating who chose to play hockey with a group of boys. Reproducing hockey as masculine is the all male Junior hockey team, which is the highest level of hockey played in the arena. Although no rules bar females from trying out or playing, none are found on the current team. There is no equivalent level of all female available; in fact, there is no all female competitive hockey available. The only female league is a recreational adult league. The lack of opportunity for female players, means serious players travel to other communities to pursue their hockey goals and people in the local arena do not see females playing hockey very often. This lack of seeing females in hockey is significant because one of the reasons identified by interviewees and members of the focus groups for taking up the sport they did, was seeing others do it, whether on television or in person.
Hockey is also established as masculine through the equipment worn by those on the ice. Although males and females wear the same gear and gender is frequently lost once players are on the ice, the colours are strong, similar to what would be found walking down the boy’s section of a toy store. There is some pink, a traditionally feminine colour, found on male players, but the most pink worn by a single player was a female in the adult female recreational league. Therberge (2000: 87-90) discusses how some female hockey players engage in the ‘feminine apologetic’ by countering the masculinity of their sport participation through emphasized femininity at other times. The wearing of pink on her helmet, stick, and skate laces by this female player may be her way to be both a hockey player, which is seen as masculine, but still claim her identity as feminine through her use of pink.

The types of skates worn during skating sessions other than hockey, contribute to gendering hockey as masculine. Participant observation during public skating, school skating, and Canskate showed males in hockey skates or hockey style recreational skates. Males are almost never in figure skates, unlike females on the same sessions who may be wearing any type of skate. Skate types for children are usually determined by their parent(s) who, to judge from those on the ice, believe that boys will go into hockey, whereas girls options are more flexible.

Similar to what Messner (2009) found, when examining the positions taken by parents in youth sports, the positions I observed that were taken on by parents and other volunteers are also gendered. Coaches are predominately male, and referees in my study were exclusively male. In other words, those on the ice, active, and in authority with hockey players are male. Those responsible for keeping the jerseys clean are known as “jersey moms,” by a child in one of the focus groups and those selling tickets during the Junior hockey game were female. These off-ice positions fit well within the traditional concept of females as helpers and homemakers. The executive for minor hockey had both male and female members. This can be read two ways because the executive is both in charge of running the organization, a traditionally masculine trait, as well as being the helpers, a traditionally feminine trait. Who is in each position is interesting, as the executive has males in the position of president, head coach, head referee, past president, and equipment manager. Females fill the positions of vice-president, treasurer, secretary, registrar, and risk (injury prevention) manager. Males have leadership positions, whereas females have the helping and
paperwork positions. This is just the executive from one year, which will change at their annual general meetings; however, it does illustrate some of the ways that individuals “free” choices are both “constrained and enabled” according to gender concepts (Messner 2009:47). Discussion of the positions of adults was not brought up during the interviews or focus groups, with the exception of the one youth who talked about the jersey moms.

One of the reasons given for the lack of females in hockey was the idea that females do not like the competitiveness, a conception that arose in interviews and focus groups. On the other hand, competitiveness is the reason one female hockey player gave for playing hockey with mostly boys. She wanted to be in a more competitive environment and told me that the all girls hockey did not become competitive until the Bantam level age, the age level above her. The fact that many people believe females do not like being competitive, particularly in physical ways, is a complex issue and effects girls outside of sports as well, since our society is frequently structured as a competition. Part of the stereotype of femininity is females work cooperatively, not competitively. This can push some girls away from the more competitive rep teams and into the recreational teams. Principally, in interviews, I found that females playing on mixed recreational teams seemed to be more accepted than females playing on mixed competitive teams. For example, the parent of a male hockey player who plays recreationally expressed no issues with females on the team; whereas, the parent of a female competitive hockey player talked about several issues that their daughter encountered from parents, coaches, and other players.

Messner discusses how sports are seen as a way for girls to learn how to be competitive and aggressive, but that sports compliment boys ‘natural’ traits of competitiveness and aggression (2009:152-153). The problem with this view, as Messner touches on, is that it does not recognize the range of behaviours of both females and males. Both males and females can be competitive. However, Western society encourages girls to be less competitive, while boys are pushed from a young age to be competitive. This teaching is not usually conscious, but it is there. Martin (1998) conducted a study in preschool classrooms and found that teachers treat children differently, based on their gender. Messner, “came to see tensions and contradictions between the commitment to equal access to sports for all youth that most adults espouse, on the one hand, and the fact that many adults think about, talk about, and treat boys and girls in quite different ways, on the other hand”
He found those he interviewed frequently expressed the idea that boys and girls were born different. I also had one interview wherein the respondent discussed how boys ‘naturally’ outmuscle the girls, which is one of the reasons the interviewee choose to play all girls hockey. The hockey coach interviewed discussed how he would hope that coaches treat male and female players the same and how he tries to make sure he does. However, he contradicts himself as he tries to decide if other coaches treat female and male players the same. He stated that some coaches may have different expectations of male and female players, then changed his mind and said the coaches would have the same expectation, but that there might be issues in recreational hockey when coaches try to make their teams more competitive. In other interviews, I found that recreational hockey seemed to be more accepting of female players than the competitive rep teams. Furthermore, although people, including the coach, identified the competitiveness of hockey as one of the reasons girls do not participate or they drop out, boys drop out for this reason as well. The competitiveness of hockey is not necessarily a problem, but the fact that girls are often enculturated to be less competitive is something to be mindful of, as is the definite encouragement that boys receive to be competitive.

Related to the perceived lack of competitiveness by females is the finding that females on mixed teams frequently play defense. The female hockey player in the focus group is one example of this. When I asked her what position she plays and why, she told me she plays defense because she is not great at getting goals, but gets lots of assists. She told me if her coach asks her to play forward she will because her coach states she is a strong forward. However, she is not comfortable playing forward, stating defense is, “more my thing I do, I guess.” In contrast to this, all the male hockey players in their focus group, when asked their position and what position they would like to play, all played defense, although one plays leftwing sometimes, and all wanted to play forward, preferably centre forward. Although both positions are equally important, playing forward is seen as the more prestigious position, as forwards are the ones who usually score the goals. The prestige is similar to that of a football quarterback, or a basketball center. Defense is more of a ‘helping’ position as defense players keep the other team from scoring and pass the puck up to the forwards so that they can score. In other words, of the two positions, playing forward has traits associated with masculinity, whereas playing defense has traits associated with
femininity. Although in this instance the sample size is very small, I have coached minor soccer for several years at different age levels and notice that girls are more likely to volunteer to be defense.

In relation to this, Daniels (2009:16) notes:

that girls learn to consciously restrict the motion of their bodies and the space they take up in movement. It involves a considered thought process that limits anatomical movements and subsequently causes uncoordinated actions.

In other words, girls learn from a young age to limit the space they occupy physically, although I would argue that this is less conscious than Daniels suggests. On the basis of my research, I would argue that this limiting of physical movement extends to the positions during sports that females choose to play. The female hockey player discussed how she was uncomfortable as a forward; perhaps this is the result of an unconscious balancing between meeting her desire to play the masculine sport of hockey, but still meet some cultural standards of femininity. The male hockey players, by contrast, eagerly desired to play forward, which fits with Daniels’ description of how girls movements are the opposite of the, “‘I can’ intentions of boys’ movements (free flowing and expansive)” (2009:17). Physically and mentally, boys desire to play the position that is valued as more prestigious.

In addition to the competitiveness, one of hockey’s main ties to masculinity is through the physical nature of the sport. This physicality includes ‘hitting’ that becomes a part of hockey officially at the Peewee level, although the Atom players in the focus group had experienced hits as well. Hitting refers to the body checking that takes place during hockey games. Body checking is defined by Therberge (2000:166) as the, “intentional efforts to hit, or ‘take out’ an opposing player.” Body checking is tied to intimidation by both Therberge as well as Whitson and Gruneau (1992; 2006). Intentional body checking, or ‘hitting’ as it was referred to by those in the focus groups and some interviewees, is one method players use to intimidate their opponents. It is also what currently separates men’s and women’s hockey, as there is no body checking allowed in women’s hockey. Hitting was one of the ways that the youth in the focus groups gendered hockey as masculine.

Although hitting was one of the things a male youth hockey player mentioned first as something they did not like about hockey, throughout the session, hitting was mentioned several times as something that boys like to do and girls do not. From disliking hitting because it almost gave him a concussion, to talking about how one of the reasons more boys
play hockey than girls is because, “boys like to hit,” the male hockey players in the focus group used hitting during the session to mark hockey and themselves as masculine. They were not the only ones to use hitting as a way to describe why more boys than girls play hockey; the figure skating focus group also used hitting to explain why more boys were in hockey and more girls in figure skating. One female figure skater specifically discussed how the boys in her grade enjoy pushing and shoving, but she does not.

     All the male hockey players, when asked what sport they would like to play if they could play any other sport they wanted, all chose football. One of the reasons given for the choice was because of the tackling in football, which can be seen as another type of body checking or hitting. In addition, the male hockey players did not want to try ringette because it does not allow hitting, as well as the fact it forces more passing between players. This second part is especially worth noting because in multiple instances during the focus group, the hockey players complained about other players who are ‘puck hogs,’ that is, they rarely pass the puck to their teammates.

     Although youth in the focus groups used hitting and masculinity to reinforce the idea that hockey is masculine and for males, several times the group discussion resisted this idea. The female hockey player who was in a focus group, wished she was allowed to hit in her past season of hockey and has already begun practicing hitting with a friend so she will be ready for it next year. In addition, during the focus group with the male hockey players, after one said that girls do not like to get hit, another named a girl on his team who does like to get hit. However, the boy then told a story about how that player does not go with the puck, but passes it off right away and sometimes to the wrong person. It seemed the boy had to counter the fact that she likes to hit, an encouraged masculine skill, with another aspect of her playing that was weak.

     Many miscellaneous incidents served to either reinforce or resist coding hockey as masculine. An example of this is the fact that those interviewed and in the focus groups referred to what are technically mixed teams as ‘boy’s hockey’ and all female teams as ‘girls hockey.’ This is one way hockey gets reinforced as masculine, since those teams should be referred to as mixed teams. Another example of the masculinization of hockey was the parent of a female hockey player who felt that their daughter had to work harder than the males on her team to earn the same respect. This sentiment was echoed in the interview with the adult
female hockey player who stated that females on mixed teams have to be strong players. In other words, to be a female hockey player on a mixed team, one has to be better than the average male on the team. In resistance to the idea that female players in general are weaker than male hockey players, the parent of a male hockey player told me how an all girls team from a neighbouring community played against their child’s mixed team and beat them soundly.

The parent of a female hockey player also told me of an incident wherein a hockey parent who had previously supported a girl in hockey told the parent that boys do not like girls who play hockey, they like girls who like to watch hockey. The parent asked if they meant ‘puck bunnies’ to which the parent replied “yes.” MacEwan (2003:1) describes puck bunnies as “females who chase hockey players” similar to music star ‘groupies.’ At the time of this incident, the girl was eleven years old and the parent who made these comments was reinforcing hockey as a masculine place where females are supposed to desire those participating as opposed to want to participate alongside them. This reinforces boys as active, a traditionally masculine trait and girls as passive, a traditionally feminine trait, and not active with the boys.

Furthermore, the comments assume heteronormativity, a common assumption, but one that can be problematic. These comments are also an issue because of the young age of the player. A related concept came up during a focus group when the female hockey player talked about how the boys on her team do not like having female players on the team with them who have crushes on them because they see it as a distraction. This girl showed them she is not one of those ‘weird’ girls and says that the other players on the team do not care that she is a girl. This is a similar age group to the incident between parents just discussed. This second example may be an instance of what Messner (2009) drawing on Thorne (1993) describes as when a girl is on a boys team, “the girl is a single ‘token,’ who instead of challenging assumptions of natural differences between the sexes becomes a kind of ‘honorary,’ or ‘fictive,’ boy” (Messner 2009:157). In other words, although she is a girl, she plays with the boys on their terms, thus she is one of them and different from the ‘weird’ kind of girl, the traditional feminine type, who likes to chase boys. A parent in a similar situation tries to make another parent force their child to conform to the traditional feminine type.
The focus groups images were a mixture of male, female, and gender neutral drawings of hockey players. It was interesting that during the figure skating focus group, one of the skaters drew her hockey player as female and stated, “That shows it does not matter what sex you are.” In the focus group with male hockey players, when one commented that his sister plays on his team, another player stated, “That would suck.” I do not know whether this was because the sister was female or because the player had to play with a sibling. As this and the previous discussion show, hockey is constantly having its gendering as masculine reproduced and resisted by those who use the arena.

5.2 Figure Skating as Feminine

Unlike hockey, wherein its gendering as masculine is constantly being contested, the gendering of figure skating as feminine is not often challenged. To begin, during participant observation, I noted those on the ice are almost always all females. There is only one male figure skater in the club, as well as an adult male figure skater who comes to give dance lessons. At the competition the club hosted, some male judges and officials were in attendance, but most were female. In addition, the club’s executive has one male member. Almost everyone else involved in the sport is female. The skaters themselves are female, the coaches are female, the majority of the judges are female and the bulk of the executive is female. In addition, the majority of youth drew their figure skater as a female, although in resistance to this, the male figure skater drew his figure skater as male.

Similar to hockey, the equipment worn by the participants is also gendered in an even more obvious way than hockey equipment. Female figure skaters wear dresses and skirts frequently, as well as tight fitting pants or shorts, with tee-shirts and form fitting jackets worn on the upper body. The colours of the skirts, dresses, tee-shirts, and gloves are any colour, but pastel tones, sparkles and bright colours are the most common. These colours are socially associated with femininity, as is an affinity for sparkles. Shorts, pants, and jackets are usually black. The two male figure skaters wear dark close fitting pants and dark jackets or sweaters. In addition, even the youngest skaters use makeup and sparkles in their hair for test days and competitions. In the Canskate program, some of the girls skate in figure skating dresses, even though they have not yet begun the actual figure skating program. In resistance to this, is the fact that some of the female children in Canskate do wear hockey skates, both types of recreational skates and figure skates. Furthermore, during public skating times there is a mix
of skate types seen on females, which demonstrates that although figure skating is seen as feminine, females do not feel that they need only skate in figure skates.

When asked why scarcely any boys figure skate, the figure skating focus group had several different ideas. One of the ideas was that boys believe they would have to wear “pretty” or “fancy” (effeminate) things. As the male figure skater stated, “Most boys like cool stuff instead of fancy.” In addition to this, the figure skaters discussed how boys their age do not even know much about figure skating and do not try to learn about it, but if they did they might like it. Another figure skater pointed out that it would be good for a guy to take up figure skating because then it would be one guy with many girls. “They never think of that kind of stuff” she stated.

When asked why he likes figure skating, the male figure skater told the group he likes the jumps and spins, which are the same reasons the female figure skaters gave for why they like figure skating. One skater talked about how she likes the feeling she gets when she is in the air during a jump. Other reasons the youth gave for why they like figure skating included performing, the exercise, falling, their coach, and being recognized for a job well done. Unlike hockey, wherein people believe the physicality of the sport is what drives away females, the females in figure skating embrace the physicality of figure skating. On the other hand, one of the reasons given for dropping out of figure skating was the competitions. It is possible to skate and not compete, which I have chosen, but from personal experience this is uncommon and seldom encouraged. Dropping out of figure skating due to the required competitiveness, is similar to the females in hockey who appear to drop out of hockey or move to recreational hockey for similar reasons. As stated earlier, this may be due to the wider culture that discourages females from being competitive, while actively encouraging males to be competitive.

Several times during Senior ice practice, the male high school hockey players from the next session stood watching the figure skaters, while talking among themselves. One particular time, several of the figure skaters commented that they do not like the players watching them and one skater refused to practice her axel, a jump she was still learning, at the end of rink. Another time, when most of the skaters were away at competition, only four figure skaters were on the ice, all high school age or older. The visiting Junior hockey team arrived earlier than usual and watched the figure skaters practice. Since they were early, I
went to move the skater’s belongings to a different dressing room and overheard one player say, “Look at the ass on that one” while laughing with friends. They said this before realizing I was next to them and they seemed slightly embarrassed but continued to joke amongst themselves. The skaters on the ice talked about the hockey players and they seemed annoyed, frustrated, and flattered at the comments and attention. For the rest of the session, the figure skaters distinctly ignored the hockey players, while at the same time were very aware of the boys’ presence. This response is similar to other times when I observed male hockey teams watching the figure skaters. Since there is glass between those on the ice and the hockey players, those on the ice do not normally hear what the hockey players are saying, so I cannot judge whether the comment I heard was typical or not.

This event can be read multiple ways. Curry (1991:128) in discussing his research in and about locker room culture states

Conversations that affirm a traditional masculine identity dominate, and these include talk about women as objects, homophobic talk, and talk that is very aggressive and hostile toward women – essentially talk that promotes rape culture.

He goes on to explain that two types of views of women are discussed in the locker room: women as people, such as girlfriends, are discussed quietly; and women as objects are discussed loudly as a performance of heterosexuality. In addition, Curry states, “The fact that women are viewed as objects is also evident in the tendency of men to dissect woman's bodies into parts, which are then discussed separately from the whole person” (1991:129).

The male hockey players comment, “Look at the ass on that one,” is an example of this. It was said loudly and for the group, although this took place just outside the dressing room. The bit of embarrassment some showed may have been because the female figure skaters that they were viewing as female objects was suddenly there as a female as a person and an older female. As Curry also notes, this is not to say that all the players on the team behave and see women as objects, but they are silent and do not challenge the dominant athletes who do talk like this.

Kestnbaum (2003:101) discusses how the specularity of figure skating places the skater in the feminine position of the “object of the gaze,” thus

The skater, while actively engaged in a display of athletic prowess, simultaneously occupies the structurally feminized looked-at position in relation to a structurally masculinized looker.
Unfortunately, Kestnbaum does not analyze figure skating from the position of who is looked-at, but instead focuses on the history of skating that made it a sport that emphasizes being looked-at. It seems interesting that researchers are willing to place figure skaters, especially female figure skaters, in the position of those being looked-at, but without analyzing what this means for the skater themselves. As a skater in this position and this situation (although comments are usually unheard, the general feeling remains), this has happened to me many times over the years I have skated. Personally, and from those I spoke with on the ice this time, the female figure skaters are uncomfortable with the situation. Their response and my own are interesting as they participate in sport that focuses on performance and here is an audience for them. However, this audience is unexpected and the skaters seem mentally unprepared to perform and be ‘gazed’ at.

The situation is not straightforward. As one of the younger skaters stated in the focus group, when boys are critical of her skating, she wants to just “show them all.” In other words, there is still a desire to perform and show their skills; however, on the other side is a desire not to embarrass themselves in front of them, as evidenced by the skater who refused to practice her axel (a jump she was just learning and not fully successful at yet) at the end of the arena where the male hockey players were. In addition, the other skaters on the ice are the same age as the male hockey players and it is flattering to have them looking. On the other hand, it feels wrong to have the male hockey players looking at one’s body and comments about the derriere were definitely derogatory. In addition, the discomfort of the female figure skaters about walking through the hockey players alone may show mistrust for how the teenage male hockey players might behave in that context.

This last situation is one example of how figure skating and hockey interact with each other. This is not the only time something like this has happened, and the following section discusses more interactions between the two groups.

5.3 Hockey vs. Figure Skating: A Moment of Gender Salience

Interactions between groups can be particularly useful because they highlight how each group views the other. In order to analyze one particular event, I use Messner’s (2000) method of analyzing a moment of “gender salience,” a three level analytical framework which includes interactionist, structural and cultural level approaches.
One interaction between hockey and figure skating occurred when some female hockey players prepared for their hockey practice in the dressing room normally used by figure skating coaches. Since the coaches’ room is the smallest dressing room besides the referee’s room, it has been given the status of girl’s dressing room by the hockey players, despite some tensions, since normally user groups do not share dressing rooms. On one particular day when the female hockey players began changing in the figure skating coaches dressing room, the figure skaters had off-ice training next. Several of the figure skaters came to the coaches room to find out if they were using the coaches dressing room for training, or if the rink attendants had unlocked the conference room for them to use. As we headed to the conference room, one of the figure skaters asked the coach, “Are the girl hockey players stinking it up in there?” to which the coach replied an affirmative. This statement stood out to me because a discussion of how the hockey players’ smell happened before, but it was about how the male hockey players smell, especially the Junior level players. Since this incident was so notable, I choose to analyze it using Messner’s three level analytical framework.

The first level of interpretation relies on the “interactionist theoretical frameworks” which are described by Messner (2002:23) as those that emphasize the ways that social agents ‘perform’ or ‘do’ gender are most useful in describing how groups of people actively create (or at times disrupt) the boundaries that delineate seemingly categorical differences between males and females.

How people act or perform their gender is a valuable way of seeing how people create or interrupt the gender order. In the event described above, the figure skaters perform their gender as feminine, as well as gender their sport as feminine through the act of grouping hockey players, both male and female as “smelly,” a designation which was applied to male hockey players in the past. In other words, the female hockey players, because they played a sport that is identified as masculine, are then given other characteristics that are tied to masculinity such as “smelliness.” Figure skaters, both male and female, also can smell, but their gear is more easily washed.
The next level of analysis is the “structural theoretical frameworks,” those that emphasize the ways that gender is built into institutions through hierarchical sexual divisions of labor are most useful in explaining under what conditions social agents mobilize variously to disrupt or affirm gender differences and inequalities. (Messner 2002:23)

Several structural conditions lead to this interaction occurring. For example, boys and girls in hockey are separated into different changing rooms so that boys and girls do not see each other in states of undress, although it can lead to isolation of the smaller group (usually girls) who miss out on the dressing room banter and socialization. This is particularly difficult if there is only one girl on the team, who may feel especially isolated, without any teammates to talk to while undergoing the somewhat lengthy dressing process that hockey requires. If the girls and boys changed together, then the female hockey players would not have used the figure skating coaches’ dressing room. However, since Western culture sees gender segregation as important, the girls and boys dress separately. In addition, interactions between figure skaters and hockey players are limited and not encouraged. The only time the two groups skate together is if people choose to attend public skating sessions, during which most skating is limited to skating in circles around the arena. Instead of indentifying the female hockey players as also female and welcome to share a room, either with the female coaches or even with the figure skaters, the hockey players and figure skaters are divided into two groups by a culture that separates these two sports despite their shared facilities.

The third level of analysis is the, “cultural theoretical perspectives” which are those that examine how popular symbols that are injected into circulation by the culture industry and are variously taken up by differently situated people are most useful in analyzing how the meanings of cultural symbols, in a given institutional context, might trigger or be taken up by social agents and used as resources to reproduce, disrupt or contest binary conceptions of sex difference and gendered relations of power. (Messner 2002:24)

Some of the cultural symbols found in the arena at all times, but also part of the event discussed above, include the use of clothing and colour to mark figure skating as feminine and hockey as masculine. The imagery used in the arena also draws on popular symbols. There is a mural on one wall within the arena that features a hockey player, a figure skater, and a lacrosse player. The colours used match the organizations colours, with the hockey
player in purple, the figure skater in red, and the lacrosse player in green. However, thanks to the equipment hockey players and lacrosse players wear, those images are gender neutral. The pose of the hockey player is as a goalie ready to block a puck and the lacrosse player has its arm and stick raised in triumph. In contrast, the figure skater is wearing a skirt and holding a graceful, upright position, an image of figure skating used popularly and one of grace as opposed to strength or athleticism. Other materials found in the arena, such as brochures for hockey camps and a hockey magazine, feature male players and male coaches.

These levels of analysis are best used, as Messner (2002:24) discusses, in an interrelated fashion, as each influences the others and a single analysis on one level may lead to a distorted understanding. In addition, I found that the figure skating versus hockey concept came up several times, not only just this particular moment. As one figure skater stated, the boys in her grade think that figure skating is “stupid” and “Oh like, all the boys in my class they’ll…be rude to me and they’ll be like ta-da! I’m better than you. I’ll be like really? Then I’ll show them all.” Another example of the boys’ dismissal of figure skating came up during the focus group with the male hockey players, wherein one stated that, “I am drawing a retarded figure skater.” In the same focus group one of the male hockey players stated:

If you have a coach that just lets you figure skate around when you’re trying to play hockey you are not going to improve in life. If you have a hard coach like ours, he’s going to make you skate, then you are going to get better.

In figure skating, the saying, “If figure skating was easy, they would’ve called it hockey” is very common. In addition, comments about each sport’s equipment being “better” or more “real” as opposed to the equipment of the other sport continue to place figure skating and hockey in opposition to each other.

The positioning of these two sports as opposites mirrors the common position of male and female as polar opposites. According to Daniels (2009:29)

\textit{Gender polarization} can be defined as the organizing principle upon which many cultures and their social institutions have been created and function relative to the natural, seemingly natural, or assigned roles of females and males.

Female and male are seen as polar opposites, as are figure skating and hockey. However, as several authors discuss (Daniels 2009; Dowling 1999; Messner 2000, 2002, 2009) males and
females have more in common than they have differences. The same can be said for figure skating and hockey; the two sports have many shared characteristics and trying to place one as “better” or more “real” than the other causes more harm than good, as does trying to situate male or female as “better” or more “real” than the other.

The gender polarization of hockey and figure skating acts in similar ways to how it affects the workforce. Daniels (2009:32) discusses how females in traditionally male occupations frequently face a “glass ceiling” that keeps them from moving to full leadership positions, even within female dominated arenas, whereas males in traditionally female dominated occupations frequently have a “glass elevator” that promotes them more quickly and easily than females in the same occupation. In the case of hockey and figure skating, this means that females in hockey have to struggle and work harder to reach the same competitive levels as males and, as noted earlier, female hockey players are unable to advance to the upper reaches of their sport, which is professional, paid hockey such as the NHL. In addition, female hockey teams are frequently coached by males, not females, another glass ceiling. Males in figure skating ride the glass elevator and are embraced and promoted. At a recent figure skating competition I attended, one competition category had one male with several females; the male skater won. The comments after the event, from skaters, coaches, and one of the judges (who did not judge that particular event, but watched it), all stated that he won because he was male and that he was not actually the top skater in that event. The comments from the female figure skaters particularly seemed to reinforce that this was a common occurrence at figure skating competitions. At the upper levels of figure skating administration, such as Skate Canada and the International Skating Union, males frequently hold top leadership positions, even though figure skating membership is mainly female.

The placing of figure skating and hockey in opposition frequently also serves to reinforce their gendering. Similar to how masculine and feminine are placed in opposition to each other, so are figure skating and hockey. Gendering figure skating as feminine is rarely actively contested, whereas gendering hockey as masculine is frequently contested in the local arena.
Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Overview

Figure skating and hockey are two sports practiced in my local community arena. Similar to the findings of others (Adams 2007, 2010; Allain 2008; Avery and Stevens 1997; Feder 1995; Gee 2009; Gilenstram and Henriksson-Larsen 2008; Grahn 2002; Gruneau and Whitson 1993; Kestnbaum 2003; McGarry 2004; Therberge 2000), the two sports, figure skating and hockey, are gendered as feminine and masculine, respectively. Interestingly, gendering hockey as masculine is much more contested than gendering figure skating as feminine. This seems to parallel society’s more willing acceptance of females in masculine positions than males in feminine positions. In other words females are moving into what are traditionally seen as masculine occupations; however, males have limited movement into feminine occupations. In addition, figure skating is more visually feminine than hockey is visually masculine. Figure skater’s choice of clothing is very feminine, with a rainbow of colours on skirts, dresses, and shirts, every item usually form fitting. In contrast, the equipment worn by hockey players usually obscures gender until helmets are removed. The daily interactions among people in the arena further gender these sports as feminine and masculine through policing gender boundaries by both youth and adults. As these gender boundaries are policed, they are also contested.

6.2 Research Findings

Four main questions guided my research. The first was how do the day-to-day interactions in the arena gender figure skating and hockey? I found that they do gender figure skating as feminine and hockey as masculine and this is accomplished in several ways. Visually, both those on the ice as well as materials in the arena, promote the gendering of figure skating and hockey. For hockey, gendering is expressed by those on the ice: male coaches, male referees, and mostly male players; as well as materials off the ice, such as brochures for hockey camps generally featuring male players and male coaches. In the case of figure skating, clothing emphasizes the femininity of those on the ice, who are almost all female, including both the skaters themselves as well as their coaches. In addition, the mural in the arena shows a traditionally feminized image of a figure skater.

The gendering of hockey and figure skating is also found in the interactions among arena users. Those in the stands during figure skating are almost all female, whereas hockey
usually has a mix of males and females in the audience. The executives for figure skating are almost all female, whereas hockey has a mix of female and male members. The positions of the members in hockey mirror stereotypical positions of female and males, with males in active, leadership positions and females in passive, supporting ones. Interview and focus group participants provided further evidence supporting gendering and contestation of gendering in the arena.

The second question explored how gender boundaries are enforced. Among youth and among adults, the gender boundaries of figure skating and hockey are enforced through the day-to-day interactions in the arena. Hockey’s masculine gender is enforced through frequently emphasizing traditional masculine traits such as strength, competitiveness and aggression. This was particularly evident in the focus groups conducted with youth. In addition, female players frequently have to work harder to achieve the same standing as their male counterparts. Because of this, female players are often pushed towards recreational as opposed to competitive hockey. Furthermore, parents work to police the boundary through their negative treatment of female competitive players. However, parents of recreational hockey players seemed less concerned with policing gender boundaries.

The gendering of figure skating as feminine, unlike hockey, is not generally enforced by those within the sport. By contrast, it is those outside of figure skating, such as the male hockey players in the focus group, who mark figure skating as feminine. Those within the sport do perpetuate figure skating as feminine; however, similar to Daniels’ (2009:32) glass ceiling versus glass elevator discussion, figure skating does tend to encourage male participation.

The third research question concerned how children recognize the gendering of these sports and whether this affects their decision as to which sport to participate in. The focus groups definitely showed that children are aware of the gendering of figure skating and hockey. However, it seemed to depend on the individual youth whether they allowed that to influence their choice of sport. One female hockey player in a focus group chose to play hockey over ringette, with ringette being another feminized ice arena sport. The male figure skater chose figure skating while acknowledging that few boys figure skate. Some of the female figure skaters would consider trying hockey, whereas none of the male hockey players would consider trying figure skating. This shows that hockey is currently seen as
more open to both males and females; however, once within the sport, there is pressure for females to only participate recreationally, not competitively. In contrast, the feminization of figure skating prevents youth from even trying the sport, although once they are in, males are encouraged to stay in the sport.

What sports youth choose to participate in depends on many factors, not only the gendering of the sport. Both hockey and figure skating are seen as expensive and when talking with adults, cost came up as the primary reason discouraging youth participation in sports. In addition, parental support is important. The parents interviewed stated they would do their best to support their children’s sport choices, and generally this seems to be the case for other parents as well.

This leads to the final question, whether parents who perceive the gendering of figure skating and hockey choose to place their child in the “gender appropriate” sport. Although parents state they would do their best to support their child’s sport choice, and I believe most of them truly mean that, unconscious parental decisions place females in figure skating and boys and hockey. When looking at the skates during Canskate or public skating, boys are placed in hockey skates or recreational skates with hockey style blades. Female children on the other hand are placed in all types of skates, although the majority of females tend to be in figure skates. Some skate choices may be due to what is available to the parent, such as hand-me-downs. However, skate choice at the youngest levels is made by the parent. Coaches of Canskate even admit they sometimes assume males will go into hockey and females into figure skating and they emphasize different skills when teaching boys or girls. In addition, the coaches tend to base their assumption on the skates the child is wearing, as when the one male figure skater was in Canskate in figure skates, figure skating skills were emphasized with him. Since the gendering of these sports is not frequently discussed, parents make these decisions usually unconsciously.

The gendering of sport, as mentioned by authors in the literature review, acts as a microcosm of how gender is reproduced and resisted in our culture at large. Hockey continues to represent a specific form of white, working class masculinity, although this is heavily contested by females. This contestation is seen in the rest of society as women take on occupations and activities that were previously seen as for men only. On the other hand, figure skating’s white, upper class femininity is not heavily contested and males in the sport
face criticism similar to that of men who choose to pursue occupations and activities previously seen as for females only.

While conducting this research, I had to evaluate my position within the arena constantly. I wanted to ensure that I was not missing information, especially in figure skating because I did not want to see it and be critical of a sport that is part of my own identity. My position as a figure skater in a club I grew up skating with was both an advantage and a disadvantage. It gave me insider knowledge and access that I did not have with hockey, but this also made it more difficult to establish a distance and see what was happening in the sport. I realized that I contribute to the feminization of figure skating as I embrace the feminine colours and clothing. I also heavily promote the athleticism that the sport requires, which is considered a more masculine trait. I also reflected on whether I chose figure skating as a child over other sports, such as hockey, because it supported my presentation to the world as female. Although that may have occurred, I believe a larger reason I enjoyed figure skating and pursued it was because it required independent practice and I was unsuccessful in team sports as a youth. In addition, my choice to research in my own community meant that I came with knowledge of many of the people and the history, which is another example of both an advantage and disadvantage. I know the history of the arena, but this meant I had to separate what I saw as currently happening in the arena as opposed to what had happened in the past. My reflexivity during my research helped me gain the distance necessary to understand how figure skating and hockey are gendered as well as how it is resisted and reproduced within individuals, such as myself.

6.3 Recommendations

One of the main goals of the research was not only to learn if the gendering of sport impacts youth involvement in figure skating and hockey, but also to provide possible solutions if gendering is the case. In addition, several issues came up that are not directly related to the gendering of these sports, but do negatively impact youth participation. It is my hope that completing this study will raise awareness of how hockey and figure skating are in fact gendered in the community arena and that this knowledge will be the first step to creating change.

As part of this, I would recommend to both the local figure skating club and minor hockey organization, that their registration packages include in the code of ethics that youth
and parents have to sign a section that discusses how discrimination based on gender will not be tolerated. It will then be up to each executive committee to handle any issues that arise during the season when a youth or parent breaks that code of ethics. In addition, I would like to see coaches of the teen and young adult hockey teams discuss with their members that comments that degrade women, such as the one I overheard, are not acceptable.

Participation in sport for youth, particularly females, seems to drop in the preteen and teen years. I would recommend several things to help counter this trend. Youth tend to drop out is because they lack friends in the sport they currently play. A potential means to counter this may be for organizations to coordinate group events outside of the sport, in order to increase group cohesion and create opportunities for friendships to begin within the sport. Another reason for drop-out at this age, appears to be due to the increased competitiveness that begins in this age group. Several methods to address this are available. One is to create opportunities for youth to continue participation in less competitive ways, such as those who play recreational hockey or those who pursue the test stream as opposed to competitions in figure skating. As part of this, the culture of their group needs to accept this as a valid form of participation, since competitions and competitiveness are highly valued in figure skating and hockey. In addition, further discussions with individuals as to why they do not like the competitiveness or competitions may yield specific solutions for each youth. One of the figure skaters in the focus group talked about how she did not like the constant focus on being ready for the next competition and would like to have more fun on the ice. I would recommend the coaches remember that these youth are in fact youth and that incorporating games to keep their sport fun may be a way to keep them in the sport. After all, coaches usually know of several games that also work on skills at the same time, so I would suggest incorporating these regularly.

Another recommendation as a result of this research would be for either the youth organizations themselves, or for the arena management to bring in speakers who are athletes in order to provide encouragement and role models for the youth in sports. Several members of the focus groups and interviews discussed how seeing someone perform is part of the reason they chose that sport. Perhaps that same idea could be used to keep youth in sports. In particular, the local figure skating group could find ways to capitalize on the success of the Canadian men in figure skating, such as Patrick Chan, in order to encourage more males to
try figure skating. The local minor hockey organization could use the success of the national women’s team at the Olympics to drive up their female participation. Having someone from that team come to the arena, or speak at the schools may encourage more youth to try the sport or continue to play.

I would also propose that the local arena management find ways to increase awareness of the sports and other youth programs available in the community. Events that allow local groups to demonstrate or just provide information about their sport would benefit the arena by attracting more users. Ideas for this could include a free public skate with demonstrations by local arena groups, or a community event that brings together all the youth organizations in the community so others in the community can learn what is available. In addition, events that bring the various user groups of the arena together hopefully will create better relations in the groups as they recognize that all arena sports share a love of the glide.

Among the adults with whom I spoke, one of the main barriers to participation is the cost of participating in figure skating and hockey. Potential ideas to make these sports more accessible may be for the organizations to hold fundraisers specifically to fund scholarships for athletes based on financial need. The arena management could also search for funding for those with low incomes, since there is funding available, and make it easier for those in the community to take advantage of that funding. Skate and equipment swaps, potentially held at the arena, in addition to those held by the groups already, may encourage those not already in the sport to give it a try.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

I chose to limit the study to my local community arena. Different arenas could potentially yield different results depending on the community where it is located. Larger cities tend to have more male figure skaters than smaller communities and, in those arenas, the gendering of figure skating may be more contested than it is in the local arena. In addition, hockey may be less contested because higher numbers of female hockey players (as well as more male hockey players) are found in larger cities, which leads to more programs being offered. Furthermore, as this was an exploratory study, only a small number of interviews and focus groups were conducted. Future studies should conduct more interviews and focus groups in order to gain a more nuanced and thorough understanding of how figure skating and hockey are gendered.
During participant observation, I was unable to access areas of the arena that may have provided further insight into the gendering of figure skating and hockey. One example would be that because I was a figure skater, I had access to the dressing rooms when occupied by figure skaters. However, I did not have similar access to male or female hockey players’ dressing rooms.

6.5 Avenues for Further Research

In the future, I would recommend similar studies should be conducted in more arenas in order to learn more about how these two sports are gendered in different communities and the consequences of gendering for youth participation. This study cannot be generalized to other arenas; however, studies in multiple arenas may demonstrate commonalities among arenas, which the major organizing bodies of these sports, Hockey Canada and Skate Canada may find useful in addressing barriers that exist, gendered or otherwise, in order to attract more youth to their sports.

In addition, future studies could be completed in the same arena in order to learn what may have changed, as well as engaging in a more in depth study. One way a more in depth study could be performed would be to observe in the arena for a whole season, or multiple seasons. Future research could include a researcher with more background in hockey as this would potentially allow them access to what happens behind the scenes in hockey, such as in the dressing rooms.

Further avenues for research would also include ringette as part of the study. I did not choose to include ringette because until fairly recently the rules of ringette barred males from participation, unlike hockey and figure skating that have had male and female participation from the early beginnings of their sport. In the next couple years, it would be worth including ringette to see how ringette is gendered now that the rules have changed.

The research focused on how the gendering of figure skating and hockey impacts youth involvement in these sports from a concern that the gendering of these sports was potentially keeping some youth out. Future studies should consider other factors, such as the high cost, that also keep youth out of sports such as figure skating and hockey.

How figure skating and hockey are gendered in the community arena is complex, with traditional gendering of these sports being frequently enforced as well as contested. Further research should focus on conducting more in-depth studies, both locally and
nationally in order to further understand how gender, as well as other factors, can keep youth out of certain sports.
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Appendices

Appendix A  Focus Group Pictures

The following are scans of the pictures that the children drew during the focus groups. Each picture was originally drawn on a blank 8.5” X 11” piece of paper.

These were drawn by a female hockey player.
These were drawn by a former female figure skater.

These were drawn by a male hockey player.
These were drawn by a male hockey player.
These were drawn by a male figure skater.

These were drawn by a female figure skater.
These were drawn by a female figure skater.
These were drawn by a female figure skater.
Appendix B  Recommendations

B.1  Recommendations for the Local Figure Skating Club

Dear (Local Figure Skating Club),

As you are aware, I have been conducting research in the arena and as a result of my research, I would like to submit the following list of recommendations to your organization.

1. Figure skating is gendered as feminine in the arena and hockey is gendered as masculine. This is important for your organization to know because this gendering prevents youth from participating in your sport. However, this gendering is being contested regularly in hockey, but is not often contested in figure skating. This has several implications. This means that females are fighting to participate in hockey, but it does require a fight sometimes. On the other hand, males are not even fighting for the opportunity to figure skate.

2. In order to create a better environment for all youth in your programs, I would suggest that the code of ethics that athletes and their parents sign at the beginning of the season include a statement that discusses that discrimination based on gender is not acceptable within the organization.

3. Several different people I spoke with discussed how seeing others participate in sport is what encouraged them to take up the sport they did. Your organization could capitalize on this by bringing athletes from your sport to speak in the community and/or demonstrate their skills. For example, having a male figure skater speak and perform may encourage more male youth to try figure skating.

4. I have several recommendations in order for your organization to retain the athletes you already have. One concept that came up in my research is that some youth leave because of the competitiveness. Your organization should continue to provide opportunities for youth to continue to participate in a recreational way, such as pursuing the test stream. In addition, especially among the middle school age group, the youth would like to have the opportunity to not always be focused on the next competition, but to have opportunities to play games and have fun as well. Furthermore, organizing activities outside of sport may increase cohesion among the group which encourages youth to continue to participate.
5. Cost came up frequently as a barrier to participation among those I spoke with. I would recommend that your organization fundraise specifically to create a sport scholarship program to help lower income families the chance to participate.

6. One parent mentioned that they are concerned when more skaters are on the ice than usual during buy-ons before competitions and suggested that the group rent more ice in the time leading up to competitions.

7. Finally, I would recommend that figure skating and hockey begin to communicate and perhaps hold joint events with other arena users. Doing so would hopefully create an arena environment that is friendlier between the groups.

My full thesis will be made available once the university has published it. It includes the data as well as explains in further detail the reasoning behind my recommendations. You are also more than willing to ask me questions and I can be reached at crysta.westoby@hotmail.com

Sincerely,

Crysta Westoby, B.A.
B.2 Recommendations for the Local Hockey Association

Dear (Local Minor Hockey Association),

As you are aware, I have been conducting research in the arena and as a result of my research, I would like to submit the following list of recommendations to your organization.

1. Hockey is gendered as masculine in the arena and figure skating is gendered as feminine. This is important for your organization to know because this gendering prevents youth from participating in your sport. However, this gendering is being contested regularly in hockey, but is not often contested in figure skating. This has several implications. This means that females are fighting to participate in hockey, but it does require a fight sometimes. On the other hand, males are not even fighting for the opportunity to figure skate.

2. In order to create a better environment for all youth in your programs, I would suggest that the code of ethics that athletes and their parents sign at the beginning of the season include a statement that discusses that discrimination based on gender is not acceptable within the organization.

3. Several different people I spoke with discussed how seeing others participate in sport is what encouraged them to take up the sport they did. Your organization could capitalize on this by bringing athletes from your sport to speak in the community and/or demonstrate their skills. For example, having a female hockey player speak and do a demonstration may encourage more female youth to try hockey.

4. I have several recommendations in order for your organization to retain the athletes you already have. One concept that came up in my research is that some youth leave because of the competitiveness. Your organization should continue to provide opportunities for youth to continue to participate in a recreational way, such as your house league. In addition, especially among the middle school age group, the youth would like to have the opportunity to not always be focused on the next competition, but to have opportunities to play games and have fun as well. Furthermore, organizing activities outside of sport may increase cohesion among the group which encourages youth to continue to participate.
5. Cost came up frequently as a barrier to participation among those I spoke with. I would recommend that your organization fundraise specifically to create a sport scholarship program to help lower income families the chance to participate.

6. I would also recommend, although the specific incident this is in response to was with a visiting hockey team, that coaches discuss with their players appropriate behaviour in the dressing room and outside of it, with particular reference to how females are discussed among teenage male hockey teams.

7. Finally, I would recommend that hockey and figure skating begin to communicate and perhaps hold joint events with other arena users. Doing so would hopefully create an arena environment that is friendlier between the groups.

My full thesis will be made available once the university has published it. It includes the data as well as explains in further detail the reasoning behind my recommendations. You are also more than willing to ask me questions and I can be reached at crysta.westoby@hotmail.com

Sincerely,

Crysta Westoby, B.A.
B.3  Recommendations for the Local Parks and Recreation Commission and Manager

Dear (Local Arena Management),

As you are aware, I have been conducting research in the arena and as a result of my research, I would like to submit the following list of recommendations to your organization.

1. Figure skating is gendered as feminine in the arena, and hockey is gendered as masculine. This is important for your organization to know because this gendering prevents youth from participating in sports in the arena. However, this gendering is being contested regularly in hockey, but is not often contested in figure skating. This has several implications. This means that females are fighting to participate in hockey, but it does require a fight sometimes. On the other hand, males are not even fighting for the opportunity to figure skate.

2. Several different people I spoke with discussed how seeing others participate in sport is what encouraged them to take up the sport they did. You could help the local organizations bring in athletes to speak in the community and/or demonstrate their skills. For example, having a male figure skater may encourage more male youth to try figure skating and a female hockey player would hopefully encourage more females to try hockey.

3. Cost came up frequently as a barrier to participation among those I spoke with. I would recommend that you research government and business funding for low income families to participate in sports.

4. Finally, I would recommend that you assist figure skating and hockey to communicate and perhaps hold joint events with other arena users. Doing so would hopefully create an arena environment that is friendlier between the groups.

5. I would also encourage management to find more ways to promote the groups that make use of their facilities in the community. Some ideas include free advertising in the recreation program guide, or a free public skate with the tables for the organizations to promote themselves.
My full thesis will be made available once the university has published it. It includes the data as well as explains in further detail the reasoning behind my recommendations. You are also more than willing to ask me questions and I can be reached at crysta.westoby@hotmail.com

Sincerely,

Crysta Westoby, B.A.