Hockey in the Lower Mainland: An Ethnographic Examination of Passions for a Sport

by
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Abstract

In response to the widely publicized passions that Canadians have for the sport of hockey, this thesis examines passion for a sport from an ethnographic perspective. I observed daily practices and engagements with the sport throughout the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and suggest that hockey is important to individuals because of the relationships that hockey espouses. Through interviews, participant observation, and conversations, I was able to understand how discourses inform behaviours regarding hockey practices, and how hockey can be used discursively to encourage social relationships. These relationships encompass both real and imagined communities, with shared discourses as the indicators of belonging. Talking, playing, organizing, and watching hockey comprise four different, yet overlapping engagements that are revealed to have implications in the creation and maintenance of discursive communities. Passion is found to be a malleable, contextually contingent term that applies to a range of experiences, attitudes, and practices regarding hockey.

Keywords: Passion; Hockey; Discourse; Ethnography; Lower Mainland
For Don, Maureen, and Katie
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Hockey is an important aspect in shaping a Canadian identity, and as such, it occupies a significant place in the social lives of individuals living throughout the country. The sport is, for some, a constitutive part of socialization and self-identity. “Passion” is both implicitly and explicitly at the forefront of many observations about Canadians and hockey, and is used in a range of ways to describe and illustrate relationships with hockey. These discourses on hockey and passion, when coupled with ethnographic research concerning practices relating to hockey, reveal a complex and contextually contingent relationship between individuals and hockey in Canada. In this thesis, I use hockey as a subject in which passion can be analyzed ethnographically. I show that passion is culturally and contextually dependent upon an individual’s sets of experiences relating to the sport. By examining the discourses and practices of individuals in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, the complex, varied, and multifaceted nature of passion for a sport is revealed.

Growing up in Minnesota with friends and relatives who played, refereed, and watched hockey afforded me a cursory knowledge of the sport, but never an appreciation of the game. It was not until I moved away from Minnesota to Indianapolis, Indiana that I started to appreciate the game and its ties to my home state. By watching Wild games, Minnesota’s National Hockey League (NHL) team, I had a point of common interest for myself and my family, despite being geographically distant and in different stages of life. There was always something hockey-related to talk about: games, trades, locker room gossip, and methods of viewing the game. Engaging with hockey, for me, was a means of connecting to my family and home through shared interests and moralities. For example, wearing my newly-acquired Wild jersey around Indianapolis was a public display of my relationship to my team, and by extension, my family.
In Canada, hockey has similar implications for those who engage with the sport. Hockey represents something greater than itself, and by engaging with the sport, individuals show their appreciation for those things that the sport represents. For example, hockey is a constant source of representation of Canadian identity (Brunt 2011:114; Gruneau 1993:23-27). A Sportnet article from 2011 notes that

...in the never-ending quest to nail down a Canadian identity, hockey always comes to the fore. We embrace the game more passionately than anyone else...We’re different because when it comes to hockey, the cliché rings true: we have made it more than a game (Brunt 2011:114).

Additionally, broadcasts like the Canadian Broadcast Corporation’s (CBC) Hockey Night in Canada\(^1\) encourage the formation of relationships on both national and personal levels by broadcasting national games for the purpose of being watched in the intimacy and privacy of the family home. As suggested above, relationships with the sport are often described as passionate, and engagements become demonstrations of passion for both the game and the relationships that the game creates, maintains, and shapes. Thus, one aim of this thesis is to situate, describe, and elucidate the complexity of passion for a sport.

Another aim is to provide ethnographic material that contributes to an ever-growing literature on the anthropology of sport and more generally to qualitative-based analyses of society, practices, and people. While sport has been written about as a potential topic of interest to anthropology (Blanchard 1995; Moore 2004; Palmer 2002), sport can also be used as a site to glean social insights, trends, and complexities. My thesis examines daily life in the Lower Mainland and the ways that hockey fits into everyday social interactions. It takes into account the socio-economic status of participants, life histories, social networks, and demographic and economic trends of the Lower Mainland. The situations and contexts in which hockey arises in conversation allow for inquiry into who talks about hockey, when, and how. This reveals the ways in

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\(^1\) Hockey Night in Canada originated from the General Motors Hockey Broadcast, started in 1931 to broadcast Toronto Maple Leaf games over the radio on Saturday nights. In 1952, shortly after television was commissioned in Canada, the Canadian Broadcast Corporation aired games on Saturday nights between Canadian teams.
which hockey is used discursively to establish relationships by sharing moralities, practices, and knowledge.

I have also attempted to deconstruct the popular notions of what it means to be a “fan” of a sport, specifically a hockey fan. While the term is not outwardly derogatory or offensive, it often carries with it a burden of assumptions that reduce the individuals defined as fans to lowest-common-denominator people. Irrational behaviour, such as removing clothing in cold temperatures, wearing outlandish clothing, and spending excessive amounts of money on tickets for a single hockey game are a few examples. In Canada, this behaviour is often associated with professional hockey teams, implying that these fans are the primary generators of meaning when it comes to being passionate about a sport. As my research will illustrate, passion can take the most banal and calculated forms in addition to the anomalous and sensational. No less important than the forms that passion might take are the places in which these are performed. While common depictions of hockey fans rely almost exclusively on behaviour within and around NHL games, the passion that I came to notice in the course of my research was found in engagements with hockey at all levels of experience, administration, and interest.

1.1. The Fieldsite and Methods

The Lower Mainland is a region in British Columbia. It refers to the southwest corner of Canada, abutted by the United States to the south and the Strait of Georgia to the west. The mountains to the north and east cause wet, heavy clouds to congregate, and it is the source of persistent precipitation. The proximity of the Lower Mainland to the Pacific Ocean has been paramount to establishing the region as a dynamic centre of immigration and shipping. Vancouver, the major port city in the region, has an affluent downtown core which features high-end condos, vibrant neighbourhoods, posh shops, and businesses. In 2010, Vancouver was the host city of the Winter Olympics, an event which required the construction of more condos and facilities throughout the Lower Mainland ostensibly to accommodate the increase in population because of Olympic events. Many of these facilities were still being used at the time of my research for housing and events hosting. Despite the affluence that is displayed
through sleek downtown towers and the temporary stage provided by the Olympics, there are parts of the region that are better known for transience, crime, and drugs. Surrey, for example, has a reputation throughout the Lower Mainland of being a violent gangland, and the downtown eastside of Vancouver has been featured in documentaries about the poverty and drug use in Canada\(^2\).

Because of the relatively warm temperatures, there are very few opportunities to play outdoor pond or rink hockey. While not a detriment to playing hockey, the romanticized image of playing hockey on a frozen pond in spite of blistering conditions is not actualized. Instead, hockey games take on a variety of forms in streets and indoor rinks. On one of the few dry days the region is afforded, I would not be hard-pressed to find an assemblage of children playing against one another in neighbourhood pick-up games. Indoor hockey rinks are spread throughout the Lower Mainland as well and offer opportunities to do open-skates or organized games.

Participants who were invited to be a part of the research were informed that I would be examining “the nature and forms of the widely and frequently reported passions exhibited in Canada for the sport of hockey as it is played and watched at different levels of competition,” and that “this study [would] undertake an anthropological examination of the social and cultural dimensions of such forms of engagement with and passions for hockey within the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.\(^3\) To encourage participants to contact me, I sent emails out to various hockey leagues throughout the Lower Mainland explaining the project, and inviting people to contact me if they wanted to discuss their own engagements with hockey. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants, and verbal and/or written consent was obtained in situations that merited it. Because of the ethical code that I was adhering to, I was not soliciting people for formal interviews. Rather, potential participants were given my information and made the decision about whether to contact me or not. This created limitations, because only one

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\(^2\) Two documentaries of note are “Streets of Plenty,” which was made in 2010 and is available to view on YouTube, and “Through a Blue Lens,” which was made in 1999 by the National Film Board of Canada. The former follows a man who tries to live in the downtown eastside prior to the 2010 Olympics, while the latter examines interactions between drug users and cops.

\(^3\) These quotations were taken directly from the consent form given to participants.
woman contacted me for a formal interview. While I observed and spoke with numerous women throughout the course of my research, there is only one formal interview from which I draw data.

All of the formal interviews were conducted with racially white participants between the ages of 35-55. Because playing hockey and providing the opportunity for one’s children to play hockey is rather expensive, my guess is that the participants were middle-class to upper middle-class. All of the participants were Canadian citizens, although I did not ask about dual citizenship, immigration, or the ethnicity of spouses and partners. Most were born in other Canadian provinces than British Columbia, and only moved to the Lower Mainland as children because their parents relocated them or to pursue a career later in life. I do not consider the group of formal interviewees to be a sample demographic of the Lower Mainland. Rather, they were the ones who responded to an email requesting that individuals discuss their hockey engagements with me. For many of them, doing an interview and talking about hockey was a performance of their passion for the sport.

What is difficult to quantify are the observations I made and people I encountered in two years of living in the Lower Mainland. I had many casual conversations with individuals of all different ages, ethnicities, nationalities, and incomes. I saw and experienced much more than could ever be put into this thesis, and that is what makes ethnography such a useful method of inquiry. There are many people I saw, met with, and spoke to who would not come across as “conventional” consumers of hockey, yet they knew more about professional players and the game than I ever will. When it comes to people who engage with hockey, there is an immense amount of diversity, and that is something that a lot of writing about hockey either ignores or chooses to omit because of faith-based assumptions about who likes the sport. For example, Canucks flags would adorn apartment windows in the Downtown Eastside, and some people would be wearing hockey hats or shirts. While hockey is traditionally a game for rich people, a traditionally poor area will still bear the characteristics of a “hockey mad” city, perhaps as a means to claim commonality and community.
Qualitative methodologies were central to my inquiry because I was able to glean insights into the daily activities of participants while maintaining the holism that is characteristic of anthropology (Miller 2001:2). Long interviews, 1-2 hours in duration, were a primary source of information. I also spent time with participants as they prepared to go to their adult league games, went to games, or watched games on televisions at both homes and bars. Participant observation was a primary methodology in these situations, because I was able to ask questions that had seemingly obvious answers. Being from Minnesota also gave me an edge because many people were excited to talk about the differences in “hockey culture” between the United States and Canada. For this reason I also imagine the possibility that some people might have been “playing up” the degree to which they were passionate about hockey. Because hockey is, for some, constitutive of being Canadian, they were eager to explain to me and demonstrate the ways in which their passion for hockey was “crazier,” more real, and with greater intensity than the passion shown by those in the USA. I am not suggesting that these performances of passion were disingenuous; rather, I acknowledge that at times they were embellished, but they were embellished in order for the participant to make a point.

During the time of my research, the premier professional league of North America, the NHL, was involved in a labour dispute. The players were working towards a new Collective Bargaining Agreement, which led to the owners locking the players out of arenas. Because the owners and players could not come to terms, there were no NHL games for half of the season. While the regular season would normally start in early October, the 2012-2013 regular season lasted from 19 January 2013 to 28 April 2013. During a normal season, each team would play 82 games, but the shortened season meant that only 48 games were played. This was an initially worrisome situation for my research, but ultimately proved to be an enlightening exercise by virtue of prompting me to explore other leagues, forms, and engagements with hockey. Many of the participants were organizers of various youth leagues throughout the Lower Mainland, and had responded to an email that I had sent out asking for people to participate in an interview with me about passion for hockey. Other participants were acquired through mutual friends or acquaintances.
1.2. Contextualizing Discourse and Passion

Discourse analysis is an approach to understanding language, texts, pictures, and other forms of communication as socially constructed and meaningful. The methods of discourse analysis are necessarily malleable and applicable to a wide variety of situations and disciplines (Smith and Bell 2007:78). Because the core of this thesis seeks to present an ethnographic account of passions for a sport found in the various engagements individuals have with hockey, discourse is a common thread throughout because it ties together a variety of attitudes, behaviours, and experiences. The term discourse can imply a number of different approaches, assumptions, epistemologies, and outcomes, so a short overview will be provided here to establish a working concept of discourse to be used throughout this thesis. The purview of discourse analysis is language and communication "examined as evidence of phenomena beyond the individual person" (Taylor 2013:2- emphasis included in the original). This includes the analysis of how meaning is created, how ideas are communicated, what ideas are communicated, and how individuals learn and perceive of knowledge. It is a method that views language as a social act constrained, shaped, and informed by contexts and assumptions about social life and meaning (Taylor 2012).

One approach to discourse analysis involves a critical eye aimed at analyzing "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak 1995:204). Language, then, gives insight into "how discourse can be or become a justifiable object of analysis, crucial to an understanding of wider aspects of power relations" (Blommaert 2005:2). In critical discourse analysis, power and hegemony are the products of discourse that shape a social landscape of inequality. Discourses are largely seen as instruments that both produce and reproduce social dynamics of power, racism, and gender inequality (Blommaert 2005:25). It is largely a macro-examination of the historical and patterned ways that language is used to create inequalities. According to Jan Blommaert,

voice is the issue that defines linguistic inequality . . . in contemporary societies. An analysis of voice is an analysis of power effects- (not) being understood in terms of the set of sociocultural rules and norms specified-as well as of conditions for power- what it takes to make oneself understood (Blommaert 2005:5).
What this mode of analysis largely glosses over, however, is the idea of individual agency, and a major criticism is that it “takes a crude position on a variety of issues, recognizing, for example, only two parties in a relationship—the oppressors and the oppressed...” (Smith and Bell 2007:81).

Another approach to discourse analysis examines the social forms that language takes in order to understand how discourse establishes knowledge about the way a society is organized (Taylor 2012). Discourses are treated as things that establish normative sentiments and collective representations (Miller 2001:16). They are understood to be assumptions about society that serve as resources for interlocutors to draw from in order to communicate and interpret meanings (Taylor 2012). The emphasis is on language as socially constructed and informed, and attention is given to what and how something is said in varying contexts. Meaning is understood to be contextually and discursively contingent, as interlocutors depend upon a set of discourses that have a tendency to constrain what can be said (Taylor 2012). This can again undermine the agency of the individual, and downplay the capacity that individuals have to create discourses that suit their experiences. What this approach does allow for, however, is the acknowledgement that meanings can be established, changed, and understood in a variety of ways by a variety of individuals (Taylor 2012). It also allows for a wider range of actors and agencies than critical discourse analysis because the focus is less on a view of discourse as a hegemonic source of knowledge, and more on a view of discourse as a generator of knowledge that precedes and shapes social talk (Taylor 2012).

The importance of discourse to an analysis of a passion for hockey lies in the ways that individuals draw from larger social understandings about masculinity, nationality, class, and gender, and “play” or “create” texts of their own to fit their own circumstances and experiences. Both large and small texts are of importance to discourse analysis, the former focusing on the ways in which knowledge is created and shared on a macro-scale, and the latter on how individuals engage with and linguistically perform texts. My use of the term throughout requires that both larger discourses about hockey and individual practices are understood and analyzed. Therefore, my use of the term discourse derives from Daniel Miller’s use of it in The Dialectics of Shopping: “The
term ‘discourse’ is used here for the manner in which language and practice become routinized and externalized beyond the expressions of particular individuals and become, therefore, a common location for the standard generation of normative ideals and sentiments” (Miller 2001:15). I treat discourse not as something hegemonic that individuals upload, but rather something that people can draw from while establishing a text that is more aligned to their own experiences and circumstances. This conceptualization of discourse allows me to explore discursive practices which support collective representations, but also offers a point of departure which offers insight into individual practices, creativity, and the importance of discursive communities.

One discourse about the sport of hockey is that it is Canada’s game. This is in large part due to the sport being played in cold weather, signalling the symbolic dominance of nature, and that the best professional players in the world are Canadian. However, the Lower Mainland is not like the rest of Canada (and, I would argue, each province would likely have its own set of characteristics that make it unlike the idealized rest of Canada). Insofar as weather is concerned, the temperature is rarely below freezing, and certainly not cold enough to freeze over ponds for pond hockey. Dominance over nature is another aspect of hockey being a Canadian game, but the Lower Mainland, and Vancouver especially, are known for being very green. Many residents of this area take pride in working with nature and recycling, composting, and reducing their carbon footprints. What emerged was a more localized discourse about how street hockey instead of ice hockey was a formative part of growing up. Being outside and surrounded by the beautiful landscapes of British Columbia was the setting for stories about how various groups of kids “invented” their own versions of hockey that included modeling their play after professionals, using roller skates and roller blades, and going through a number of wooden hockey sticks that would become destroyed after being used on pavement.

Passion takes on many meanings and forms in both practice and theory, and despite the frequent use of the term throughout this thesis, I cannot offer a complete definition of the term. The generation of the importance of examining passion for a sport came from the frequent pairing of “passion” with various engagements with the sport of hockey. It is therefore necessary for the term to be left intentionally open and
ambiguous, with specific meanings emerging from the ethnographic examples provided. In some cases, participants described their passion as playing the game. Others described it as organizing and offering the opportunity to play to a broad community. What does emerge as a common thread is that passion is performative in nature. Victor Turner writes that “…*performance* does not necessarily have the structuralist implication of manifesting *form*, but rather the processual sense of ‘bringing to completion’ or ‘accomplishing.’ To *perform* is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act” (Turner 1979:82). Therefore, passion, in its myriad forms, is a statement of affinity for the communities, relationships, and representations that the sport of hockey is the site of.

### 1.3. Critical Views on Hockey

Hockey is a topic that has offered critical scholars a multitude of dimensions from which to examine social inequalities. Issues of gender, masculinity, class and nationality are treated in critical reviews of the sport. Gender and masculinity are identities that are tied up in hockey. Traditionally, hockey has been a male sport, and continues to provide a formula for masculinity that is followed today (Robidoux 2002). However, that formula is often aggressive and violent, two characteristics of the game that are exalted by public figures of hockey like Don Cherry, a noted Canadian Broadcasting Corporation hockey commentator. What is also at issue is the male-dominance of the sport. While there are leagues that offer the opportunity for women to play at elite levels, many leagues are set up as “alternatives” to men’s hockey, which lessens the impact and importance of women’s hockey (Theberge 1997). Hockey creates gendered differences because sport scholars view it as a social practice that creates and informs relationships between genders. Nancy Theberge argues that the decreased physicality in women’s sport, and hockey in particular, is a patriarchal control over women’s bodies that reaffirms the objectification and biases present in modern-day sport (Thebarge 2012).

Nationality is another topic that has received attention. Hockey is the official winter sport of Canada, but lacrosse is the official summer sport of Canada. Therefore, lacrosse was also, and to some extent still remains, a source of
representation of Canadian identity. The native game of lacrosse appealed to early male Canadian settlers because of the way in which it represented colonial life (Robidoux 2002). It was also a game that could be adapted and made into something that specifically represented Canada as an alternative to cricket, the sport of British imperialism (Robidoux 2002). As hockey became the more popular sport, leagues arose and professional players were developed. However, it was seen largely as a nation-building effort, because only certain types of people were allowed to play. By making amateur status a requirement in many leagues, people who had bet on the game or made money from it in any other way were excluded from the new nation-building (Robidoux 2002). Hockey as a characteristic of what is Canadian and who is Canadian is problematic on many levels because of its exclusionary tendencies based on race and class. Thus, to use hockey as a means to extol a united Canadian identity is, from this perspective, to overlook many inequalities that exist in the game and in an imagined Canadian community.

Because Canadian identity is so tied up in hockey, the NHL has become a platform upon which cultural and economic trends can be viewed. For example, in 1988, when Wayne Gretzky was traded from Edmonton to Los Angeles, it sparked a lot of protest from those who saw Gretzky as solely Canada’s. What the trade symbolized to critical scholars was a more fluid exchange of culture between Canada and America, while some even contended that the trade was an example of American cultural imperialism and dominance in Canada (Jackson 1994). What these three examples show is that hockey is mired in controversy. In many respects, discourses about the sport are positive and reverent, whereas the reality is that there are many ways that the sport of hockey has failed to live up to its reputation as a nation-uniting, inclusive demonstration of what is Canadian.

1.4. Outline of Chapters

The chapters are organized with reference to varying forms of engagement with the sport. Talking, playing, organizing, and watching are four engagements that
participants brought up in varying contexts and situations, and I argue that they are worth paying special attention to. This also allows for the contextual analysis of discourses and performances of passion as they relate to specific engagements. Individuals may, of course, have overlapping engagements with the sport: for instance, they may be talking about hockey as they also watch or play hockey. They may also be organizing hockey while watching and talking about hockey games. In order to organize the chapters, I have chosen specific ethnographic examples to demonstrate the specificity, yet commensurability of engagements with the sport. Each example illustrates how discourse concerning the same engagement is employed in differing and contextually dependent ways based on an individual’s sets of experiences. The examples also attempt to show the highly complex ways in which discourse and passion work both with and against each other to create the image of a person who is passionate about hockey.

Chapter 1 looks at how people talk about hockey, and the forms of speech they use to generate discourses about the sport. Because I have taken Miller’s approach to discourse as a personal expression and exploration of cultural themes, this chapter will also show how these discourses are reproduced, modified, and created. I first look at a very common type of social engagement in the Lower Mainland: small talk that is by preference centred upon hockey. This mode of talk can often include dialogues about hockey that are well-rehearsed and insipidly scripted. As many people note, “talking about hockey is like talking about the weather.” I also note that jerseys, hats, and other team paraphernalia are usually invitations to engage in discussion about hockey. Stories emerge as another form of talking about hockey, and often include events, places, and persons that extend beyond the Lower Mainland. For one participant, the telling of a story about a professional hockey player playing hockey on a frozen pond in Eastern Canada allowed me to elucidate themes of “organic” hockey, passion, and the participant’s use of discourses concerning hockey to convey his longing for home.

“Trash talk,” jokes, and heckling are three other modes of talking hockey that the chapter addresses. They illustrate the ways in which people “play” with discourses about hockey. It is important to note that discourse offers a constantly malleable way of conceptualizing a sport, rather than an ideological truism. Therefore, a
chapter on talking hockey would not be complete without examining the jokes that people make, especially in the face of an institution such as professional sport or Canadian hockey. These forms of talk are not necessarily directed at the institution itself, but rather serve to create a rapport with others within the hockey community. Pointing out the weaknesses of another team in a timely, creative or witty way is a valued asset. However, there are certain limitations to this. Those who engage in joking about hockey typically understand that there are implicit limitations about what can and cannot be said. These will be discussed further in chapter one.

Chapter two looks at the various ways that people explain or typify how they play hockey, specifically adult league and street hockey. I start out with an examination of street hockey, and the delicate balance that those who play it face in trying to be both competitive and inclusive. This aspect of my research was garnered almost entirely from interviews, and in many cases participants in their 50’s were reminiscing about the days before ice rinks became numerous and readily accessible within the Lower Mainland. Nonetheless, it is important to take into account the ways in which people feel hockey should be appropriately played. Following this, I examine three different adult leagues in the Lower Mainland. Each league differs with respect to the skill level, age, and sexual orientation that it appeals to. In many cases, the discourses surrounding adult league play are similar to those that are used to talk about street hockey. Some participants noted that they had a passion for playing hockey on the ice because of the unnatural speed at which the game is played. Others noted that they were passionate about being around their teammates.

Chapter three takes into account the ways in which youth hockey is organized, and the discourses that inform organizational decisions. It is slightly different from other chapters, because the ethnographic examples draw from more general discourses about the relationship of the organizer to the game, Canada, and childhood. Thus, “civic duty,” and “sport is good for kids” are central to ways that discourses about youth hockey are organized. More controversial, perhaps, is discourse surrounding how children ought to be parented in a sporting context. I again draw from ethnographic examples, from which arose the three aforementioned discourses. The first involves an organizer who spends substantial amounts of time on the rink and beyond, ensuring that
the members of his team avoid slipping into the notorious and alluring gang scene in the city. I also examine a game organized for 5-6 year-olds which ran contra to what some parents thought hockey should be. Finally, I look at the ways in which discourses about children's sport are created and maintained through interactions at hockey games. In many ways, this chapter highlights how organizers' accounts of their actions beyond the rink signify their passion for the sport.

The final chapter is shorter than the rest, but nonetheless necessary because of the unique conditions that pertained during the course of my research. The NHL's Canucks are a major subject of discourse concerning hockey in the Lower Mainland, at the very least because of incessant advertising and visibility throughout the region. As mentioned before, much "trash talk" is generated by individuals' relationships to NHL teams, and for many, myself included, NHL teams provide a link to home because of the popularity of games and teams throughout North America. Watching hockey was an activity that I partook of both alone and in groups. I watched games alone because of my subscription to the NHL's GameCenter⁴, and because I could not always find people who were willing to watch Minnesota Wild games when Canucks games were on. Other times, I was invited over to houses or out to restaurants to watch Canucks games. On those days that the Canucks and Wild played each other in Vancouver, I would make every effort to attend the game at Rogers Arena. However, the hockey lockout that lasted throughout the first half of the 2012-2013 season inspired interesting conversations about how participants went about their daily lives without the NHL. I examine three examples in which watching games, or not watching games, served to demonstrate the nature of friendship groups and a preferred relationship with the NHL.

What each chapter shows is that discursively, passion is a prominent feature in conceptualizing and realizing relationships that are based on hockey as a common denominator. Discourses normalize ideas about the community and the relationships

⁴ GameCenter is a service provided by the NHL that individuals pay a monthly fee for. It allows the subscriber to watch NHL games live that are out-of-market, past games they may have missed, and all playoff games. Games are streamed live on the internet, so watching on a computer or gaming console that is connected to the internet are two modes of viewing games.
that they explain and/or exemplify, yet there is room between discourse and practice for incongruencies. Hockey as a locus for ethnographic inquiry provides for the examination of ways that individuals create relationships to places, people, and events. For some, it is passion which sets a relationship with hockey apart from other relationships, because of what hockey represents to them, their past experiences with the sport, and what they hope to accomplish through a prolonged engagement with the sport.
Chapter 2. Talking Hockey

Making small talk can be one of the most challenging parts of sociality, as it is the first point of contact between strangers in forced or uncomfortable situations. Waiting rooms, busses, lines, and other similar situations often require some form of small talk in order to express a polite disposition, and hockey is a topic that can be readily discussed. I would argue that making small talk is one way in which discourses are externalized and exchanged, and become a location for the generation of normative ideas and sentiments (Miller 2000:15). It is because people do not put much thought into making small talk that these rehearsed discourses become tenable as larger discourses. For example, many people explained to me that “talking about hockey is like talking about the weather [in the Lower Mainland]”. This observation is itself a form of discourse that conveys the centrality of hockey to Canadian social relations, and perhaps makes them seem truer in practice.

For this reason, I would suspect that even those with a disdain for hockey, or who are indifferent about hockey, have at least a limited cursory knowledge just for those times of forced small talk. During my research, I found that the cold, wet weather caused people to shield themselves with umbrellas and raincoats, looking down to avoid getting their faces wet. It was a closed off body position, and I often felt that the denizens were unwilling to have conversations with strangers. When a situation that traditionally warranted small talk arose, a conversation about hockey more often than not occurred, (although it is entirely possible that I was more likely to elicit this type of conversation because my own interests pertain to hockey). Because of the high visibility of the NHL

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5 Small talk is a form of social interaction that most often occurs between individuals who are not overly-acquainted with each other. It is an exchange of niceties in situations that may otherwise be awkward if nothing is said. Topics of conversation are generally neutral, and conversations do not typically last for a very long time.
and the Canucks, it was easy to talk about the latest game, players, or playoff chances. It also helped that there were numerous advertisements, posters, and newspaper articles that saturated the cultural environment. Interestingly, one could almost predict what would be said. “The Canucks are bad this year,” “we need players who will score,” and “the Canucks need a goalie who can play under pressure” were common expressions that were not meant to lead to major arguments, but rather to foster a sense of commonality between strangers.

These benign and rather ritualistic interactions are discursive actions that contribute to hockey as a collective representation. Many aspects of the linguistic exchanges are so routinized that questions have expected answers, and the conversations serve a specific purpose. Arguably, the aforementioned sentiments expressed by fans to one another about the Canucks are what linguists would term “adjacency pairs.” Adjacency pairs are pairs of speech acts that involve a question and an answer, and the answer is something that the questioner anticipates (Finegan 2011:303). A fragment of small talk is exemplified by the following conversation, overheard between a barista and customer at a Tim Hortons:

Q: Did you see the game last night?
A: Yeah. It was awful.
Q: What did you think of those refs calling the icing against the Canucks when clearly the Hawks touched it last?
A: They’re so biased. Obviously the game was called in Chicago’s favour.

What this exchange reveals are shared sentiments, the first being that the game was terrible since the Canucks lost. The second is that the loss was not the fault of the Canucks. Most importantly, and why adjacency pairs are so important here, is that the conversation had the capacity to take either one minute or an hour. By asking standard questions, the field of topics can be either limited by expected responses, or broadened through unconventional answers. However, by rehearsing these arguments, individuals

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6 Tim Hortons is a popular Canadian coffee and donut shop that was founded in 1964 by hockey player Tim Horton and his business associate. It is considered by some a Canadian institution, and has aligned itself with both Canadian nationalism and hockey. Community initiatives such as the Timbits youth hockey program further promote this relationship.
within the discursive hockey community of the Lower Mainland are able to generate discourses that will support a conversation for a while based on shared ideas.

Sometimes, wearing hockey gear in public is an invitation to talk further about a specific team or topic pertaining to that team. Thus, conversations can be started easily enough based on what someone might be wearing. For example, I once saw a male at a café wearing a Quebec Nordiques hat. He was a 25 year-old student, and I thought it was interesting that he was wearing the hat of a team that went defunct in 1995, when he would have been about 7 years old. I decided to approach him in order to learn more about it. The conversation initially followed conventional small talk. “I like your hat,” I said. “Oh! Are you a Nordiques fan?” he asked. “Not exactly, I’m from Minnesota. I just love hockey though and am always interested when I see Nordiques, Whalers, or North Stars\(^7\) stuff.” It was an hour and a half later that we concluded our conversation which began with “talking hockey,” and ended with him telling me about his adventures in Europe. His hat suggested that he was part of a hockey community, yet its acquisition was individualized to his set of experience, because he had found it randomly while traveling through Europe. He expressed his need to get the hat because it was so strange to find the Nordiques hat in such a “non-hockey” village. To him, it was a way of maintaining a connection to the hockey community while abroad because he was unable to watch NHL games and chat with fellow Canadians.

These two examples of small talk reveal that giving an unconventional answer or asking a specific question are situations where passion is demonstrated through the explication of an individual’s personal experiences with the game. While adjacency pairs are helpful in understanding the routinized nature and manner in which discourses are developed, performances of passion emerge when standard discourses are understood vis-à-vis an individual’s experiences. For example, the mentioning of an arguably unfair icing call during small talk reveals hockey knowledge on the part of the asker, which perhaps was incongruent with what the answerer was expecting. Displaying hockey knowledge in this instance is a way of illustrating one’s capacity and

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\(^7\) These are three teams that have been relocated and renamed, but are still recalled in “hockey memory.” They are still recalled in conversation, and can promote both communities of memory (Carter 2008:5) and discursive communities.
inclination to show a passion for the sport by staying within the context of adjacency pairs (or discourse) while demonstrating a competency with respect to the game that is perhaps beyond what is expected. Similarly, the young man from the café was quick to demonstrate his knowledge of the Canucks, Nordiques, and the game of hockey during our conversation. While he engaged with me in conversation, he highlighted his passion by making me aware of his knowledge for the sport, despite having been for the past year in a study-abroad program in a “non-hockey” area of Europe.

2.1. Stories

Stories are important because they connect individuals to both real and imagined communities and pasts (Anderson 2006). Creativity is a central feature of these stories, since in many cases the truthfulness of the story is not what is important. Stuart McLean describes stories as being imbued with creativity, which he defines as “a relational process operating between bodies of different kinds (‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’) and blurring their contours” (McLean 2009:214). Stories fall under the category of discourse because of the ways in which they express sentiments that are externalized beyond individuals, becoming sites in which meaning is constructed. Stories, like small talk, are modes of communication that demonstrate a competency with hockey discourses, but they are used discursively to communicate with others about persons, places, and events that are of significance to the individual telling the story.

A 31 year-old male from Nova Scotia named “Pierre”\(^8\), who moved to Vancouver to pursue his career, often told stories about well-known hockey players from his small province. While he loved Vancouver, his pride for his home province was belied by his peculiar accent and bias towards players of the same geographic location. When asked about his passion for the sport of hockey, he replied with a story, which I paraphrase here:

\(^8\) This is a pseudonym. All names have been changed throughout this thesis in order to guarantee confidentiality.
Imagine a cold night in Rimouski. The air is crisp, and a lone person skates on the ice. You hear the scraping of the skates on the lake’s surface, the banging of the stick as he shoots and handles the puck. Perhaps you think that he is just trying to get some skating time in while no one else is there, perhaps he is embarrassed by his lack of skill. What you would never know from looking at him is that he just played a game. Probably all of his teammates are at the bar or partying or getting with girls, but not Sidney Crosby. Maybe he was upset that he hit the post during the game, so he’s taking the same shot over and over and over. He worked tirelessly to improve his game because he loves it so much, and he did it alone, of his own volition. That is passion for the sport.

Whether this story is true or not is beside the point. To Pierre, it is a powerful and useful example of passion. However, Pierre’s implicit performance of passion was in telling this story. He worked with predominant discourses in order to demonstrate that he understood enough about hockey to have a conversation in his new city of residence. He also told a story that was linked to the area he was originally from. By doing this, he was actively maintaining and creating a space within the imagined hockey community that accommodated some of his connections to hockey.

It is also important to unpack the ways in which Pierre’s story both spoke to and challenged popular discourses. The first involves the main character of the story, Sidney Crosby. As I will explain further below, he can be depicted as a polarizing figure, but is well known and respected in the hockey world nonetheless. By using Sidney Crosby as the primary character in the story, Pierre instantly demonstrates that he is familiar with professional hockey players and their pasts. Notably, “hockey stars continue to occupy a significant place in the popular imagination. For instance, in their different journeys to the big time Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux, it has been argued, have embodied and renewed deeply rooted themes in Canadian popular Culture about social and geographic mobility” (Gruneau 1993:131). Interestingly, he inserts a small line about how the rest of Crosby’s team was out chasing girls. This is a comment on masculinity, as it implies that

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9 Sidney Crosby is widely regarded to be the best hockey player in the world, and the quintessential “All-Canadian kid”. He was born in Nova Scotia, a province not typically known for producing professional hockey players, and has become “the face of the NHL” since he was drafted in 2005. He is also well-known for scoring the overtime game winning goal in the gold medal game of the 2010 Winter Olympics.
a true passion for the sport does not include aggressive sexuality, but rather a devotion to the game, which could indicate an inclination not to prioritize sexual pursuits, if not celibacy per se. Given Pierre’s geographic mobility and longing for home, it is not surprising that he would choose this specific figure to convey his intent.

Another incongruence that Pierre must rectify concerns the different climates that he has had to fit into his story. In Nova Scotia and Quebec, bodies of water freeze over. In the Lower Mainland, however, a more moderate climate limits the freezing-over of water. Thus, he must renegotiate what hockey means to him by telling his Rimouski story and ‘translating’ it for people who he perhaps feels cannot relate to such climatic differentials in the same way. Finally, he utilizes the symbol of the lonely skater to speak as much or more about himself than about Sidney Crosby. Being in a new city, he sees himself as working tirelessly to create a new life for himself. By using popular discourses about hockey, specifically the centrality of pond hockey, hard work, and independence, Pierre is able to construct a story that illustrates his understanding of hockey as a metaphor for his own struggles.

2.2. Trash Talk and Heckling

Trash talking and heckling are complex forms of communication, and are frequently employed within the community that talks hockey in the Lower Mainland and beyond. For a prospective speaker, rather more than a precursory knowledge of a team, a particular game, or a specific player is required for a venture in trash talking and heckling to have its intended effect. One must first understand that a joke or interactional approach is being made rather than a verbal assault, and a playful element must be maintained throughout these exchanges. Trash talk ranges from comments regarding the outcome of a game, the way a team played, or the athletic prowess (or lack thereof) of specific players. Heckling has many of the same qualities as trash talk, the difference being that heckling usually takes place when a sheet of plexiglass separates the heckler
from the intended target. Heckling also has more volatile intentions, despite being a playful form of communication\textsuperscript{10}.

Disputes between interlocutors declaring differing team affiliations are often assuaged by both trash talk and heckling, a practice that reflects the multitude of hockey communities that one may select from among to be identified with. For example, people who follow a particular NHL team may feel they belong to an NHL-specific sphere of interaction. Canadian Hockey League (CHL) supporters, in contrast, may follow the career of a player on the Vancouver Giants all the way to an NHL team, which potentially gives them footholds in many different NHL discursive communities. However, I would argue that the goal of heckling and trash-talking is to acknowledge boundaries within and between communities by using jokes to reference specific yet broadly understood information, while intimating or setting forth an ethos of a specific community. Communities are also not dependent upon the physical place in which one lives. “Matt”, for example, is a 21 year-old student and a Pittsburgh Penguins fan, despite never having been to the city of Pittsburgh or the state of Pennsylvania. “What really got me into hockey was Mario Lemieux, because when I was 6 I loved Super Mario\textsuperscript{11} and I heard there was another guy named Mario and I’m like, ok this is my favorite player now. And fortunately he was good because otherwise I’d like, be stuck with this third line goon\textsuperscript{12} or whatever as my favorite player.” Thus, his affection for the Penguins was not borne from an intense passion for hockey, but an interest in video games.

Matt also doesn’t attend hockey games when the Penguins are in Vancouver because ticket prices are too high for him to afford. However, he is able to connect to the Penguins community through wearing Penguins hats, jerseys, and shirts, and watching

\textsuperscript{10} Heckling is common at live games. I have observed attendees at both junior and professional level games attempt to throw players and referees off of their game by making loud comments directed at the on-ice participants.

\textsuperscript{11} Super Mario is a video game that was released for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985, and is socially significant because it is the highest-selling game created for gaming consoles. The protagonist of the series, Mario, is tasked with rescuing Princess Peach from Bowser’s Castle. Other iterations of the game have followed this formula, and some would credit the Super Mario series with popularizing NES and the prolific expansion of console games to other mediums such as film.

\textsuperscript{12} A “third line goon” is a player who is not regarded for their skill at hockey, but their ability to fight and propensity towards playing dirty. Goons are not typically well-respected.
games at his home through NHL GameCenter. He explains that it is people who support teams in the Eastern Conference or the Detroit Red Wings (who the Penguins defeated in 2009 to win the Stanley Cup), who have heckled him the most. When I asked him what it was like being a Penguins fan in “Canucks territory,” he told me about some of his interactions.

There’s only this one guy who really got in my face and that was actually last year. And he was like wearing Capitals stuff and like, he really got in my face on the bus...it wasn’t even a Capitals Pens game, it was just on the bus. It was like at the start of the playoffs. Oh, I remember after the Penguins lost to Detroit, anyone who’s had Detroit stuff has always got in my face. That was kinda ugly for a bit. I think because the Penguins aren’t rivals [of the Canucks] or anything, people don’t care that much.

He even offered a reason as to why people in Vancouver don’t bother him as much about the Penguins anymore

The big turning point for feelings about the Penguins was the Olympics, like when Crosby won the game, or scored the winning goal, that is. It used to be like, oh Crosby’s a diver, Crosby can’t play, he’s just, like, a primadonna. But now everybody’s like, Crosby! What a stand-up guy!

Trash talking is another means of setting boundaries and creating affiliations with the various communities to which individual fans belong. Because of my affiliation with and affinity for the Minnesota Wild, I was often engaging in trash talk with my Canucks friends. “Catherine,” a 30 year-old woman who became a close friend, would constantly greet me with, “Hey Tess, how are the Minnesota Mild doing?” “Better than the Can’t-nucks,” I would often reply. In doing this, we were exhibiting “insider knowledge,” performing our friendship while maintaining our allegiances to our favourite teams and thereby, to the NHL discursive hockey community as a whole. But, in tenser situations, trash talk can escalate. During games, trash-talk offers an appropriate context for joking while trying to “save face” when one’s team is losing. For example, during one game that Catherine and I watched together, the Canucks were playing very well against the Wild, which wasn’t what I wanted. Catherine’s favourite player, Kevin Bieksa, appeared to have taken a dive in order to draw a penalty for the Canucks. I quipped, “Jesus may
walk on water, but Kevin Bieksa can dive on ice!" "At least we're winning," she replied. A grudging silence followed as we watched the resulting power play.

Talking about the Canucks brings out more localized discourses about hockey. It is acceptable to be self-deprecating about affiliating with the team, especially when the team is performing poorly. The team is also made up of an international roster of talent, so being critical of the team is not, by extension, being critical of the Canadian system of hockey. Therefore, jokes, trash talk, and heckling will not get someone into a lot of trouble with Canucks fans. Talking about Team Canada, however, takes on a more solemn tone because it is an entirely Canadian roster, and represents the extent to which Canada can claim to be the best at hockey in the world. Many people showed me tattoos representing the gold medals won by Canada’s men’s and women’s teams at the 2010 Winter Olympics, yet I did not see any Canucks tattoos. Inscribing something permanently on one’s body is another way that discourses are created and played with, and for those individuals, hockey is forever a symbol of their identity as Canadians.

2.3. Conclusion

Various forms of talking connect individuals to discursive communities, both real and imagined. More specifically, by using rehearsed modes of speech and scripted dialogues, individuals are able to demonstrate their affinity for being a part of this community. Places, events, and people form the basis of discourses about hockey, and these discourses can be used in a multitude of creative ways. By talking hockey, passion emerges as a salient discursive device which can be used to describe, situate, and explain relationships with the sport of hockey.

Some of the primary discourses that influence hockey talk are the idea of hockey as a common language throughout Canada. Specifically, the NHL has the capacity to represent an imagined community, as evidenced by the man who felt connected to his Canadian home by buying an NHL hat in Europe. It both reaffirmed his relationship to the game and served as a means for him to talk about his passion for the sport. The Canucks game provided a basis for conversation in line at Tim Horton’s, and romantic conceptualizations of hockey, dedication, and passion were woven through Pierre’s story.
of passion. What each of these demonstrates, however, is that hockey discourses provide knowledge, or normalizations that allow interlocutors the ability to find common ground. From there, conversation will flow depending on the audience and level of familiarity with larger and smaller hockey texts. There are no standard ways to talk about hockey, despite there being standards for talking about hockey. What each example in this chapter has shown is that individuals have the capacity to draw from hockey discourses, but must tailor them to suit their own needs.
Chapter 3. Playing Hockey

3.1. Street Hockey

Many of the people whom I interviewed had shared the experience of playing street hockey as kids. In the Lower Mainland, because outdoor rinks were not available, even when the temperatures were below freezing, friends would call each other up to meet and play, or neighbourhood kids would play on their streets. The experience and memories of playing street hockey are important for some adults because of the model it provides for creating and maintaining friendships, community, and friendly competition. It also provides a perspective from which to reflect upon current practices for the organization of children’s hockey and adult playing. Finally, based upon my interview findings, playing comprises an ongoing engagement with the sport of hockey. Accordingly, “playing,” in its many forms, constitutes a passion that is situated between neighbourly and community discourses, on the one hand, and personal achievement, on the other.

Community discourses about play arise from the context in which games are played. For example, “Brian”, a 53 year-old male who was born and raised in British Columbia, mentioned that he would in his childhood form a team of seven players from his street. Then, they would play teams from other streets in a series of mini-tournaments to determine which street was the “best.” Because of this, he reasoned, there was no need for him to play in organized sports to the extent that kids do today. However, very specific forms of “community” are established through street hockey. None of the men I interviewed brought up the inclusion of women, but a 46 year-old woman named “Lindsay”, similarly born and raised in the Lower Mainland, lamented that she never had the opportunity to play street hockey because the boys wouldn’t let her. However, watching her brothers, who were “allowed” to play street hockey, provided the link that made her feel included in a hockey community.
Arguably, street hockey is important because of the blending of fun and competition that kids experiment with while playing. While the implications of belonging to a community, team, or neighbourhood are important, playing well at an individual level is also important. Scoring more goals than the other team will ultimately lead to a win, which affirms to the winning team that they are capable of reaching goals together. “Craig”, a 50 year-old male who moved to the Lower Mainland at age 4 recalled his excitement at receiving a hockey stick for Christmas.

I got my first hockey stick for Christmas, and of course it was a wood hockey stick and didn’t last long on the road at all. You’d wear it down pretty quick and I was quite distraught when it got broken, but had to get another one. I just kept getting supplied with cheap hockey sticks... it’s every kid’s dream!

Craig’s personal victory of getting a hockey stick meant that he would have the necessary equipment to play with his friends, which was an important prerequisite to fostering a sense of friendship.

Craig is able to combine communally-sensitive discourses about playing within a neighbourhood context while bringing forward his own personal achievements within hockey. He says of his days playing street hockey,

....we, I could say were were kinda the inventors of roller hockey [laughs]...Because at the time there was no inline skates. I think they were just coming out at the time. I remember the commercials for them, and so yeah we would have the old, you know the old 10 dollar steel wheel skates on, and stuff, strap on to a pair of shoes... we turned it into our own game...

Creating a style of play to which only some were privy suggests a form of proprietary experience and knowledge that reaffirms a group. Craig’s claim to have “invented,” or pioneered, roller hockey speaks to a personal achievement that satisfies both the communal and personal tensions that arise within discourses about playing hockey.

Furthermore, Craig went on to suggest that his first memory of playing hockey was shaped by and shared with the group of friends he was playing with.
My first memory of hockey was a bit disastrous...I got stuck in goal- I might have volunteered to play goal- and really never had the experience of having pucks shot at me...we were having a fun game, but I got scored on a lot and I didn’t like that anymore. So, I never went back to goaltending.

As will be discussed in the next section about adult league hockey, Craig’s early experiences of playing street hockey, coupled with his prolonged engagement with playing the sport on ice, suggests that for him, passion is best described as a continuing effort to play, rather than a single act. It embodies a process whereby each game he plays is another performance of passion deeply situated within his own sets of experiences with the sport and its community.

3.2. Adult League Ice Hockey

If engaging with the sport of hockey by playing the game is a form of passion, then each game provides the setting for demonstrating an individual’s competency in playing at the appropriate level of competition while maintaining the “social club” aspect of adult league hockey. Here, fun must be tempered with aggressive and competitive play in order to maintain social relationships with teammates, members of other teams in the league, and friends. It is also important to bear in mind that hockey is, for some, a component part of performing masculinity. In what follows, I examine the ways in which participants create a form of hockey that suits them, not unlike the malleable styles of play that emerge with street hockey. These forms of hockey are often further articulated within commonly recited discourses, such as “we’re a drinking team with a hockey problem” and “I just enjoy playing with the guys.” These discourses, when looked at in relation to the seriousness with which the participants understand their involvement with the sport allows for the explication of their demonstrations of passion through playing.

Throughout the Lower Mainland, there are ample opportunities to join leagues. Seven ice hockey leagues in the region cater to adults with different skill sets, abilities, and transportation opportunities. Other types of leagues, such as the Vancouver Ball Hockey League, serve those who forgo ice and skates for a hardwood floor and athletic shoes. The chance to play in a league is not free, and each team in the league must
come up with the $1000-plus fee that goes towards reserving ice time and hiring referees. To ease the financial burden of playing, some teams, such as the Cutting Edges\(^{13}\), provide some financial help to their participants by holding fundraisers to earn money to put towards league fees. Other times, old equipment is donated from one teammate to another\(^{14}\). However, there are no free ice hockey leagues in the Lower Mainland, so if an individual cannot afford to enter into a league, it is most likely that they cannot play ice hockey.

The often highly competitive, time-consuming, and organized hockey played in youth leagues is immensely different from that featured in adult hockey leagues. Adult hockey is less about developing skill and more about taking one or two hours out of a few days of the week in order to get together with friends and “blow off steam.” The games usually take place later at night, after the evening’s youth games have finished. This often leaves the adult players with terrible ice conditions, little sleep due to late nights, and tired referees. For many, it is these things that are characteristic of the adult hockey experience, and most see it as a rite of involvement rather than something to complain about. Any complaining happens during another rite of involvement which further separates adult and youth ice hockey leagues- the after-game beer\(^{15}\). “Cal”, a 51 year-old male who moved to the Lower Mainland when he was 6, explained his experience with adult hockey by saying that “it’s really about drinking the beer after the game and getting together with the guys.”\(^{16}\) All participants made statements similar to this, although it is important to note that not all who play in adult leagues actually imbibe on a regular basis. Rather, it is a piece of discourse that is used to emphasize the social nature of adult leagues and downplay the amount of skill present in any given team.

\(^{13}\) This team will be discussed in a later section.

\(^{14}\) Helmets, according to some of the participants, are not shared because safety standards cannot be met with some older helmets.

\(^{15}\) Those interviewed made it seem like a rite of involvement, although there are exceptions, and arguably drinking beer is as much of a metaphorical or discursive claim as it is an actual practice.

\(^{16}\) Further attention will be given to masculinity as a theme and matter of ethnographic inquiry later in this thesis.
3.3. The Cutting Edges

The Cutting Edges is an all-male hockey club in Vancouver. In a very explicit sense, the members and organizers of this club have fashioned a style of hockey that is unequivocally their own. Popular discourses are, as is usual, used to validate their form of engagement with the sport. For example, members of this team variously say: “I love the game,” “I like spending time with friends,” and “[ice hockey] is a great way to meet people”. These are discourses that I will go into further below, but it is important to note that the Cutting Edges is the first gay hockey team in the Lower Mainland. Since 1998, the Cutting Edges, both as a hockey team and organization, have striven to create an inclusive hockey experience for those who have been outcast by the notably heteronormative and homophobic world of men’s sport. In doing this, the members of the Cutting Edges have had to bring attention to the offensive language and derogatory terms used in a cavalier fashion by other players on the ice. In doing so, the club has brought attention to changing masculinities - respect has replaced offensive language as a characteristic of masculinity in hockey. The life history of one member of the club sheds light on how a more inclusive atmosphere in hockey was a personal matter for him, and why he felt compelled to create a safe space for others.

“Brendan” is a 35 year-old male who was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta. His love of hockey was fostered through watching Hockey Night in Canada with his dad. Wayne Gretzky’s career with the Edmonton Oilers was also a formative, yet coincidental aspect of of his affection for the team. Overall, he says,

I had a group of friends...none of us played organized hockey which maybe gave us more time to play street hockey and play shinny...trading hockey cards as a kid, we used to do that a lot, watch games all the time, go to games when it was a little more affordable. I had a group of friends that we played street hockey [with] pretty much every day after school, and then the hockey cards, and I think collecting hockey cards led to knowing players’ numbers and names and all those things that teenagers spend their time with, or at least did then.

This emphasizes that hockey connected kids throughout his neighbourhood, especially those who played street hockey together.
Brendan describes street hockey as constitutive of his friendships as a youth and adult. For him, street hockey was an important way of making friends and creating a community, and this inspired him to seek out a hockey community in Vancouver when he moved to that city for work.

[The] friends I associated with played hockey. I remember my best friend who I had from grade 6 or 7, he was a big New Jersey Devils fan so it was just a common interest that we had and it probably just grew as I had people to hang out with that like the same stuff. I think [street hockey] connected a lot of kids together in my neighbourhood. Sometimes playing street hockey there would be 4 guys on each team, and sometimes there would be 20 guys...It was a good way to meet people then, and then it certainly was when I moved [to Vancouver].

His involvement with the Cutting Edges was not limited to his just his love of playing hockey and desire to meet new people. His experiences as a gay man in Edmonton, and feeling the need to keep his sexual orientation a secret, led him to become more involved with the Cutting Edges because of the group’s openly-gay stance from the outset of its creation. He appreciated the positive strides that the group was taking towards the acceptance of homosexuality on and off of the ice.

Prior to joining the Cutting Edges, Brendan admits that he did have to think carefully about what he was saying in the locker room.

Once everybody got into university it just got a bit more difficult. The locker room environment, but as I was coming out, there were less and less places where I was in the closet, and it was like having that one remaining place to be in the closet was playing hockey. Because before I came out to Vancouver, for maybe 2 years I played hockey with some of my high school friends, so they knew that I was gay, but the guys on the team didn’t. And sometimes stupid things are said in the locker room and I don’t think people realize what they’re saying sometimes. There are some things said in a hockey environment, or that used to be, calling guys ‘faggots’ on the ice. In our league now guys don’t say that stuff.

Thus, the form of hockey that Brendan is actively creating for his teammates and himself defies many of the hyper-masculine mores of aggression, as he and his organization challenge the typical derogatory insults and misguided assumptions that gay men are not athletic.
However, being gay is not the sole reason for the existence of the club. Brendan says, “Here, nobody really talk[s] about [being gay]. It’s not like, ‘let’s talk about being gay for 5 minutes before we go play hockey,’ but it’s just nice to be in a dressing room or locker room where we don’t have to worry about being outed.” I asked him what the importance of playing hockey was, and he responded,

...just really socially. I almost like driving to the game and talking with the guys more than playing the game...my core friends are my hockey friends. I mean, it’s a great game to play, it’s a lot of fun, but to me it’s just hanging out with the guys first and foremost.

However, when I asked him if he would say he was passionate about the sport, he responded that hockey was one of his strongest interests, and that when “things get shitty at work or home it’s nice to be on the ice for an hour and a half and not think about anything. So it can be very therapeutic.”

Since hockey has been such a central part of his life, Brendan’s passion for the sport pertains to activities both on the ice and beyond. He discursively suggests that his engagements with the sport are like anyone else’s by saying that it is “fun to play,” and that he enjoys “spending time with the guys.” However, his personal circumstances and desire to “do a lot of fundraising and try to do what we can to make hockey a bit more accessible to those who haven’t been able to play” displays an ongoing engagement with the sport that sets his set of experiences apart from those of many other players. What this requires of Brendan is not merely his skills as a hockey player, but also a social acumen that will allow him to enact change and make an impact in the sport he loves.

3.4. The “Old-Timers” League

The physical toll of the sport on hockey players, especially those at the professional level, can be painfully apparent. Missing teeth or scarred faces might signal the fact that the individual has spent a significant amount of time on ice skates, and has perhaps been in a fight or taken a puck to the face. In recreational hockey, bodily signifiers may not always be as apparent, but the connection between the body and
playing is linguistically apparent. Discourses concerning the agency of passion vis-à-vis the helplessness of the body with regards to playing are common ways of describing what it is like to play. For example, Cal, who was introduced above, told me how he “got the bug” after attending his first Canucks game. Thus, Cal’s assertion that he “got the [hockey] bug” is a bodily signifier, suggesting that his love of the game is something over which he had no control. Significantly, Cal also talks about his age and preexisting health issues, giving meaning to his current ability to play the sport of hockey. In what follows, I will examine Cal’s engagement with playing hockey in relation to his bodily imagery.

As people age, their bodies don’t do the things they once did. Hockey, being a physical sport, can make the body’s limitations painfully apparent. The cultural imperative to never quit, and the connection of passion to playing inspires many people to push their bodies to limits that might be unsafe. However, this is not due to pure ignorance of the body’s limits. As I have suggested, adult league hockey is a social affair, and the people with whom I spoke did not see another suitable outlet for their physical and social needs. A beer league team for older players in the Lower Mainland is colloquially referred to as being “duffers” or being part of the “old-timers league.” The style of play in such leagues discourages hard checking and overly-competitive play. Cal discussed how there is a zero-tolerance policy for violence in his league:

> It’s really stupid. We’re all grown men here, it’s just a game, and if you can’t control your emotions on the ice then we don’t want you in the league. If you haven’t matured by the age of 30 to get over that aggression in the game and you think some guy took out your feet when [he] was actually playing the puck and you’re gunna get into it, this league’s not for you. You either learn to chill or you’re gone.

He reiterates the age and maturity required to play in the league, and it is perhaps his discursive insistence that “it’s really about drinking beer after the game and getting together with the guys” that persuades him to think this way about aggression. However, the bodily implications of playing too hard or too aggressively are very real, and it is

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17 “Having the bug” is a colloquial expression in which (in North America) people describe becoming sick. It can also be used in a metaphorical sense to describe an overwhelming and sudden affinity for something.
important to set limits by establishing a style of play that is age-appropriate and physically-appropriate.

Heart attacks, strokes, and seizures are more common among the older age-sets, and Cal recalled an incident where someone had a “jammer” on the ice.

We had a guy not last year, the year before on my team [who] had a jammer on the ice. That’s the term guys use in the dressing room. ‘You gotta lose 25 pounds or you’re gunna have a jammer. I’m not doing CPR on you if jam up on the ice.’ So Johnny, just old school guy, probably close to 70, and he had the big barreled chest, and you just kinda figured, one day he’s just not gunna show up. Well, he had a jammer on the ice...the goalie was a fireman, we had a guy in the other rink who was reffing was a fireman, and a guy that was a doctor playing on the other rink...and that’s why they say the best place to have a jammer is right at the rink because they have these defibrillators.

When I asked him what this meant to him, and whether or not it made him confront his own physical limitations, he responded, “You know when it’s your passion, you can always kind of see an end, you know there’s going to be a day when you can’t play the game anymore and it’d be like, maybe that would be a good time to check out, cause, you know, there’s no meaning in life anymore if you can’t play hockey.”

His response was surprising, but in many ways understandable. He argued that not just hockey, but playing hockey was “part of your culture, part of your life, part of who you are.” Thus, there is a very strong connection for Cal to the game of hockey that is both personal and social. He explained that he had been born with a hole in his heart, and hockey was a great sport because “you get off when you’re tired...you’re not pushing yourself beyond what you can do.” This provides him with a sense of agency because he is able to maintain and control his physical exertion despite a medical diagnosis that is beyond his control. While his involvement with playing hockey stems in part from desire for a physical and athletic outlet, there are also social factors which contribute to his love of hockey. He talks about his son “catching the bug” and becoming enamoured with hockey, and watching hockey on the television with his

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18 The term “jammer” refers to a heart attack. Everything in the heart “jams up.”
family. There is a distinct familial quality about hockey, and playing ensures that he has an ongoing bond with the game above and beyond a visual familiarity.

3.5. Conclusion

Hockey is an important part of adult sociality for some in the Lower Mainland. As I have shown, street hockey is one of the first forms that the sport takes for younger, urban and suburban kids. When the ideal of “Canadian pond hockey” cannot be met, street hockey is an appropriate alternative to the storied “rite of passage” (Gruneau 1993; McKinley 2000). For Craig, Cal, and Brendan, street hockey was the basis for a lifelong engagement with the sport of hockey. It was joining emergent communities that were both real and imagined that helped to foster their affinity for the sport, and encouraged them to pursue playing throughout their adult life. Street hockey also allowed for experimentation with various forms of play. Craig learned the values of teamwork when he played goalie for the first time, although he also encountered the physical and emotional pain of defeat. Brendan was able to become part of a community that he knew he would find commonalities with when moving to a bigger city. Thus, playing street hockey, whether in the Lower Mainland or elsewhere, served as a starting point for the formation of a community and the ongoing performance of passion for the sport through playing.

Adult leagues are similarly sources of social events, where much of the “fun” of street hockey is realized. According to participants, both street hockey and adult hockey encourage the creation of teams that are intentionally kept relatively “even” in terms of skill and experience. For Brendan and the Cutting Edges, philanthropy is balanced with a desire to play the game and “hang out with the guys.” This allows Brendan to pursue his passion for hockey in a milieu of giving and tolerant awareness, permitting him to find his own close circle of friends. Cal, given his bodily limitations, plays an appropriate form of hockey for his body. His passion is kept alive by continuing to play hockey despite his knowledge of the hole in his heart and the possibility of others (albeit 30 years older) around him having strokes and heart attacks on the ice. He reconciles this with the knowledge that there are medical personnel and equipment present at the rink that might not be available if he were to have an incident at home. He also comforts himself with
the discursive claim that he simply could not live without hockey, and if he could not play, it would be a fine time to pass away.

Throughout this chapter, themes of masculinity emerged. Playing hockey aggressively to the point of sustaining serious injury, or intending to injure another player was not viewed as an “adult” masculinity. There are rarely fights in adult league hockey, and some leagues bar physical contact. This is a direct contradiction to the type of masculinity that is advocated by hockey “purists” like Don Cherry and other media commentators. Hockey fights are also glorified by the Canucks organization and the NHL, but there are different standards for play, and different discourses which inform masculinities at the professional level of play. Professional hockey players also have immediate access to the best doctors, which ensures that any injuries sustained are quickly addressed. What emerged in my research was that it was seen as childish to not know the appropriate manner in which to play hockey. This is a manner of playing hockey and conceptualizing of masculinity that defies the common conception that hockey is an aggressive, violent sport. What emerges is a middle-class male masculinity that is more focused on bodily restraint and healthy competition rather than the violent, emotional play that is popularized in the NHL.
Chapter 4.  Organizing Hockey

4.1. Organizing Hockey as a “Civic Duty”

Hockey is important to the identity of Canada as a nation and on an international level. Multiple gold medals from both the men’s and women’s teams in the Winter Olympics throughout the years, and success of the national junior teams in international competitions is often interpreted as irrefutable evidence of the superior system of hockey development in Canada. Hockey is imbued with a significance that merits mention because of the ways in which it is marshaled for purposes that go beyond training bodies or teaching a sport. The mission statement of Hockey Canada, the governing body of hockey throughout the nation is, “Lead, develop, and promote positive hockey experiences.” Furthermore, there is a list of things in which Hockey Canada believes.  

Most are concerned with good sportsmanship, the well-being of players, and social inclusivity. It is important to note that Hockey Canada believes “in the country of Canada, its tradition in the game of hockey, and the proud and successful representation of this tradition around the world” (Hockey Canada 2013). Not everyone will compete in an international ice hockey competition, but some organizers, like Brian, understand hockey as being central to creating and demonstrating a Canadian identity. Therefore, his interest in organizing youth hockey is largely based upon his assertion that it is his civic duty. Brian, at the time of our interview, was the managing director for Pee Wee hockey in a league that serves a northeastern municipality. Prior to this role, he had been a team manager, league president, vice president, and coach. His journey from “the only parent who raised their hand when the team needed a volunteer” to becoming the managing director for a league his children no longer played in demonstrates his

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19 For a full list of the beliefs that Hockey Canada espouses, see appendix 1

20 Pee Wee hockey players must be 12 years of age or under during the regular playing season. For a full list of age divisions according to BChockey, see appendix 2.
commitment to being involved with the organization of youth hockey. He recalls that his passion arose in the early 1990’s, while watching the team manager at the time doing a lot of work. Brian offered to “help out some, and then more and more.” His willingness to help was situated within his experiences of playing street hockey (see chapter 2), and his assertion that “minor hockey is about developing citizens, not NHLers.”

The municipality that Brian serves is home to a diverse population, and as a whole has a poor reputation. Gang violence, murders, and drugs dominate discourses about the municipality. It is perhaps due to the large population of immigrants and violent reputation of the denizens of Surrey that suggest to Brian that he needs to focus on hockey as a conduit to Canadian citizenship. He rationalizes his engagement with this specific league, and validates his statement by explaining that “hockey gives kids an outlet,” “hockey helps the reputation of [the municipality],” and “hockey develops life skills.” Brian is not alone in his utilization of sport to reach children. Sport, according to other ethnographic accounts, is a salient feature in transmitting both spoken and unspoken moralities of society (Anderson 2003; Brownell 1995; Dyck 2000). For example, Sally Anderson examines the cultural work of children’s badminton in Copenhagen, and argues that “children’s recreational sport has become a moral domain of universal ideology and inclusive sociality in Denmark” (Anderson 2003:24). Similarly, Brian would argue that the inclusion of practices into youth hockey schedules is necessary because it is through the practice of hockey that kids stay off of the street, learn systems of play as well as appropriate ways to release emotions, and gain self-esteem. He mentioned team practices as being more important than games because there are more practices than games, and spending time with one’s team is constitutive of the benefits that youth hockey has to impart. Like the children in Copenhagen, who learn specific sets of Danish moralities, Brian understands playing hockey as an exercise in teaching and learning Canadian moralities.

Brian describes his passion for the sport of hockey as his prolonged engagement with the organization of youth hockey, and his willingness to connect with the kids on his team off of the ice. He recalls a “high risk” youth who joined his team when he was a coach. Brian spent a lot of time to make sure that this youth attended practices and stayed out of trouble. He proudly told me during our interview that the youth was doing
just fine now and was not involved in drugs or gangs. This is further validation of his
tactic of using hockey as a means to develop Canadian citizens. When I asked him why
organizing youth hockey was so important to him, he replied that ultimately, “you feel like
you owe the game.” Because he conceptualizes most of the game as happening off the
ice (behind the bench, beyond the rink, and in meetings), and finds the most satisfaction
in seeing kids’ faces when they do something successfully, Brian’s passion for the sport
is doing anything to ‘give back to’ the game and community that has been so constitutive
of his own self.

4.2. Sport is Good for Kids

Brian’s engagement with hockey is largely based on an understanding that “sport
is good for kids” because it teaches them about being a Canadian citizen, commitment,
and teamwork. He also argues that it gives them hope. Craig sees kids reaping similar
benefits from playing hockey. He first became interested in becoming more involved with
the administrative side after coaching. He says that while spending time behind the
bench, he could see more than just hockey skills.

We jokingly say on the bench, because I’m a coach as well…with some
players they won’t make a pass or they’re very selfish with the puck,
or stuff like this, and we jokingly say maybe they should be doing an
individual sport like swimming…maybe track and field, maybe more
individual-type sports. Uhm, not hockey, because hockey is 5 players
on the ice and a goalie and you’re all working toward the same ends.
So it’s a teamwork experience which is great because you can’t, it’s
hard to instill that in some kids. Not without actually having them have
that experience going on, and a lot of them don’t get that until they’re
13-14 year olds, that it is a team thing.

Thus, the experience of being a coach and seeing first-hand the learning process
inspired Craig to become more involved with creating hockey experiences and
developing programs that would instill the lessons that hockey has to offer.

Craig, who, at the time of our interview, was the Vice President of a league
serving another municipality in the Lower Mainland, develops hockey programs that are
both physically and mentally beneficial to kids. He describes his daily routine:
...I deal with emails in the morning, generally, complaints, stuff from the night before, stuff I’ve got to get done on a timely basis, I have reports to write, and I have to communicate [with the governing bodies of hockey]...and then I just deal with the stuff going on. I have a board of 13...14? Members. And I’m getting questions and issues from them regularly. This morning I had to suspend 2 players, uhm, for misdeeds during their last game. So now we’re gunna start an investigation...and then I went from there to a meeting with our jersey supplier and we’re looking at developing international jerseys for going to tournaments in the States...

Craig’s involvement with the league is justified for him by reciting the ways in which hockey is beneficial to kids: exercise, camaraderie, team spirit, and friendship. Most importantly, however, is his capacity to develop hockey programs that reiterate these ideas in a fun and appropriate way.

Many things that hockey is meant to teach are not effectively communicated through language. One strategy for teaching teamwork and inclusion comes in the form of putting teams together. Craig states that his association tries to mix up the teams every year, while still taking account of various skill levels. “With hockey, it’s everyone’s thrown into the mix every year, and, hence, you get thrown into a different team every year depending on how you try out or where you’re gunna play. And so what you end up doing is you end up meeting a lot more kids and a lot more people.” He likes this method of assigning teams because it creates more of an overarching hockey community, and it teaches kids who don’t know each other to learn to play together. It also creates a broader community amongst parents, which can be extremely helpful because oftentimes, when a family is struggling to find the money to pay for new equipment, a family within their network will help them out and give them old gear. Thus, not only is this style of team formation organizing bodies for the purpose of playing games, but also creating a social environment in which community and friendship formations are encouraged.

One way Craig tried to introduce the benefits of the game was by organizing a “Jamboree.” A Jamboree is for young children who are just learning to play hockey, and he described the participants to me like this:
...Imagine what we’ve got it we’ve got kids 3 feet, 3 ½ feet tall. OK? And they’re young, they don’t have super skills, but they’ve got the drive, they just want to play hockey. They watch it on TV and they, they really aspire to be really good hockey players...

At this skill level, despite the intensity with which they aspire to be really great players, Craig argues that hockey should be about fun “in capital letters.” He described the Jamboree he organized as:

...A 4-on-4 or a 3-on-3 tournament and basically it was a flow game, so what we did is we set it up there’s no score, there’s no offsides, there’s no icing. And basically all you had was the drop of the puck at the beginning of the period and then it’s run time, and then there’s a buzzer every 1 minute and it just goes back and forth and back and forth and that’s the game, and it is a lotta fun...

The intent of the game was to provide both an athletic challenge and a fun atmosphere in the context of learning to play hockey. Craig felt this was an appropriate format for a game because it encompassed the “spirit of the game [which] is competition,” but also a fun outlet for the kids who want to play hockey during a break in the season.

Not all parents were amused or appreciative of the jamboree format of the game. Some spoke to Craig and voiced their concerns that the game was not competitive enough, and that their child gained nothing from a “non-competitive” event. The Jamboree served to highlight the competing discourses about what hockey is and how sport is good for kids. While some argued that the jamboree was not “real hockey,” others felt that it was appropriate for the age and skill-level of the participants. Craig lamented:

we gotta let them be kids...and the negative side is once people get into hockey and they start to see some possibilities it becomes ‘the sky is the limit.’ They seem to forget that we’re actually raising children, not hockey players.

The organization of the Jamboree exemplifies Craig’s passion for the sport. He expressed to me that “the spirit of the game is competition” and then described the Jamboree mentioned here. In this case, his performance of passion is situated between
honouring what he perceives as the spirit of the game and what he perceives as the social benefits, or “beyond the rink” benefits of playing hockey.

### 4.3. “Respect Our Game”

“They needed someone to do it, and I was the only one who raised my hand” is the most common response I received when I asked participants how they became involved with organizing youth hockey. Despite initial reluctance, an appreciation was developed for the particular assignment that the parent volunteered for. One of the common themes that arose throughout interviews and participant observation was the behaviour of parents at their child’s hockey games. As Craig says, “99.99% of the time, parents are fine. The other .01% are just the ones that get attention.” While some, like Cal, enjoy the challenge, it can be difficult for the community of parents when the .01% set the tone for how hockey parents are viewed as a whole. The presence of parents at games is important, however, because “parents enable their children to participate in organized sport to the manner in which this sphere has been incorporated…within the child-rearing strategies of many Canadian families” (Dyck 2003:58). Thus, many parents take their child’s involvement in youth hockey very seriously.

The events that occur on the ice can have off-ice ramifications, and provide opportunities for parents to articulate a lesson. For example, Cal recounts a lesson he learned from a friend’s dad following a game.

One of the particular things I remember about that particular game after the handshake brawl was my buddy’s dad just reamed us out for 45 minutes from the drive to West Vancouver to Port Moody. The whole way, just about how immature, stupid, uncool, not tough, you know. ‘You guys think you’re so tough, you’re not tough.’ For 45 minutes.

Here, Cal demonstrates how he learned that brawling was unacceptable behaviour in the context of a hockey game because a concerned and angry parent chose the confined and silent space of a car to “ream him out.” At the other end of the spectrum, however, Cal describes parents as instilling in him a passion for the sport.
Not just my parents, but other kid’s parents, like all your buddies you go to school with, all their parents are making positive comments after the game… I thought, oh yeah, if I work hard they’ll praise me.

Parents can also have a negative impact on their children’s play, however. Lindsay, whose daughter plays hockey, was describing the father of a goalie on her daughter’s team. She said that this father was always standing directly behind his daughter’s net screaming through the glass. She lamented the fact that the goalie was probably very skilled, but was unable to perform under her father’s gaze and pressure. Lindsay described this parent’s behaviour as “passion gone wrong,” and expressed horror that a parent could treat their child that way. She assured me that some of the parents took the father aside and asked that he calm down, because he was creating an uncomfortable environment for everyone. There are, therefore, many different ways that parents can influence and create the atmosphere of the game. With this knowledge, organizers are cognizant of the need to watch the behaviours of spectators.

Just after our interview ended, Craig handed me a blue spiral-bound rulebook for his league and a bright yellow card with bold blue print on it. It said, “Respect our Game.” He proudly stated that he came up with the card himself. Based upon his experiences with playing, coaching, and organizing, it is apparent that he is trying to introduce and enforce a code of conduct at games while also creating an environment that both reflects and creates and the ideals of a positive hockey experience. He said that he gives this card to parents, players, officials, spectators, volunteers, and anyone else at the arena if they are acting out of line. Other parents are given the cards to give to present to each other if the need arises. In this way, the spectating becomes a self-regulated and communally enforced event. He told me that “just the other day I gave it to a parent” who was getting a bit too animated over a call that the ref had made. Craig said that the card was respectful, because it did not encourage or necessitate a public shaming of a parent, but it could be discreetly handed to someone with a contrite, “hey, I think you’re getting a bit too fired up.”

The card is significant for many reasons, the first of which is that it introduces a discourse on how to behave properly at a youth hockey game. By “respecting our game,” a feeling of inclusivity is created. One would expect those on the ice to engage in
good sportsmanship, and the same is expected of those off of the ice. It also forces the recipient to think about their behaviour as being potentially disrespectful to the game of hockey itself. As illustrated at the beginning of the chapter, some conceptualize hockey as a part of their civic duty, so to disrespect the game is to disrespect Canada. Finally, on the back side of the card, the basic tenets of the league’s standards of behaviour are explicitly laid out: “Please ensure your actions and behaviours reflect the principles of RESPECT, INTEGRITY and FAIRNESS to those who participate in Community Hockey” (emphasis theirs). Throughout engagements with hockey, the importance of maintaining community has been at the forefront, and it is significant that the card would draw upon popular signifiers of the hockey community.

Craig created this card, and it is another performance of his passion for the sport. While creating new forms of play is one dimension of his passion for hockey, creating new ways to enjoy and watch the game is another. In designing this card, Craig used discourses about the hockey community - for example that it is based on mutual respect, integrity, and fairness - in an attempt to moderate the behaviours of parents who were acting “out of line.” He also expressed his individuality by acting on something that was incongruent with his own vision of how hockey should be watched and enjoyed. Therefore, he was able to work both with some and against other popular discourses to assert his own take on watching hockey, and by extension, parenting.

4.4. Conclusion

A theme of “giving back” runs throughout this chapter, which has implications of both masculinity and nationalism. Charity, the means to help, and occupying the role of the “provider” are characteristics of masculinity, and organizing youth hockey draws upon these. “Giving back” also has implications of nationality, because some participants felt that they wanted to give something back to the game that had such a profound impact on their own development. In this sense, there is a militaristic, dutiful masculinity that aligns itself with nationalism. It is again the purview of a middle-class or upper middle-class sensibility, since the idea of charity is dependent upon the donor having the means to give.
Discourses influence organizational decisions in children’s sport, and performances of passion are ongoing acts which stem from a culmination of experiences, discourses, and beliefs. Brian’s performance of passion was based on an understanding of hockey as a central feature of raising Canadian citizens, and he took the time to ensure that his “high-risk” youth didn’t gravitate towards the allure of gang life and drugs. Cal’s involvement in hockey demonstrates that passion can take many different forms, even when it is performed by the same person. The Jamboree illustrated his desire both to inspire competition and yet keep things fun, especially since the athletic contest was for 5-6 year-olds. His creation of a card for distribution to anyone watching the game who began to demonstrate behaviour that was incongruent with what was expected is another way in which his passion for hockey was acted upon. Again, he tries to honour the spirit of competition while keeping the environment fun and comfortable. The card reminds and requests people to stop and respect the game, bringing to mind the desired characteristics of a hockey community.
Chapter 5. Watching Hockey

5.1. Televised Games

The NHL has not received much attention thus far, but it is worthwhile to examine the ways in which the Canucks and other professional teams were brought up in interviews, conversations, and through visual stimuli. Watching hockey is for some constitutive of being part of an NHL community. It can be an explicit endorsement of the commercialized claim that “We are all Canucks\(^{21}\),” implying that an assumption that people in the Lower Mainland, and more specifically in Vancouver, are Canucks fans. In Minnesota, we are always reminded that “Passion, Loyalty, Integrity, Teamwork: It’s in Our Blood.” This suggests that there is a metaphorically kinship-like bond between Wild fans and that our virtues come from within. Watching a hockey game can be an analytical exercise in understanding more about how people in a certain area are asked to and may come to conceptualize of themselves, and how the discourses of their connectivity are introduced, reinforced, and challenged.

In all formal interviews, and in a number of other conversations, watching Hockey Night in Canada with family was a widely cited factor in generating an interest and passion for hockey. The NHL through its television coverage connects an imagined community across the nation which gives further credence to the idea that hockey is specifically Canadian. This is not to imply that every Canadian cares about hockey or the NHL, but rather an observation about how and why some and probably many people watch and care about the NHL. For example, Cal explains that behaviours concerning hockey derive from watching the NHL. “I think it comes from the top down. The NHL is a game that everyone watches on TV, and it’s a business.” When he says that everyone

\(^{21}\) “We are all Canucks” and “Heart of a Canuck” marks are considered proprietary materials owned by Canucks Sports Entertainment and/or the NHL, although they are not trademarked.
watches the NHL, he is alluding to an imagined community of hockey fans. While not everyone watches the NHL, Cal, and others, may be inclined to argue that only “real” Canadians watch the game on TV. In doing this, they can create boundaries by defining themselves based on what they are doing distinguished from what others are not.

During my research, there was an NHL lockout which resulted in an abbreviated season. While initially a frustrating development, this allowed for a certain amount of introspection on the behalf of participants about the place of the NHL in their overall relationship with hockey. Matt, for example, was brutally frank in a somewhat ironic manner about the lockout, because many of his friendships were based on watching NHL games. He explains,

One thing I really noticed though, this lockout totally killed my relationship with my friends somehow. We still see each other, but we used to see each other maybe 2-3 times a week for games. But now that there’s no games it’s kind of hard to get everyone together I guess.

Watching games was an excuse for his friends to get together multiple times in the week, and to him, it is an important part of his sociality. However, he is also cynical about his own love of hockey. “I’m well aware that it’s ridiculous that my happiness is predicated upon how a bunch of millionaires pass around a piece of rubber on ice.” His statements suggest that for him, watching hockey is more about the social aspect and having a reason to meet with friends rather than simply watching the game.

Brandon also gave a lot of thought to his passion for his favourite team, the Edmonton Oilers:

When the strike was on we were all a little angry at the players and owners, but it’s nice to have it back. I pretended that I was going to turn my back [on the NHL] and not pay attention. I lasted through day 2 of training camp [held when the season finally commenced].

22 The abbreviated season is expanded upon in the introduction. My research lasted for the entirety of the 2012-2013 regular season, ending in April.
Like Matt, Brendan admits that his interest in the Oilers is “pathetic now,” but this is partially due to the lackluster performance of the team prior to and during the time of my research. However, his affinity for the Oilers comes from a longing for home, and impacts his schedule in a significant way.

Edmonton is still home, so I think that’s one thing that makes [it a soft spot]. The Oilers are the first team that I love, and the second team is way far down...I'll listen to interviews, watch clips of goals, in the playoffs I'll probably try to catch a game every night, depending on how nice it is, but certainly if the Oilers...in some ways I've been happy that the Oilers haven’t been in the playoffs because when they are, and they were, there goes my spring, and I hated that. But at the same time I loved it too, so I guess it depends on how successful they are...I won’t work my day around a Canucks game, but I will try to massage my day around watching the Oilers on TV.

Brendan’s devotion to the Oilers is another way that his passion for hockey is realized as he actively works to watch games on the TV. By moving his day around and staying inside on spring days, he is using passion to ameliorate the tensions between various communities that he has footholds in, and the knowledge that he should be taking advantage of nice days instead of being inside. Watching hockey for Brendan is part of a larger understanding of who he is as a resident of Vancouver, a native of Edmonton, and a hockey fan.

The lockout also caused confusion on the part of another participant, Sandra. We would regularly meet up at a restaurant and watch hockey. After the lockout was over, and the Canucks were playing their first game of the abbreviated season, Sandra and her husband met up with me. Sandra was adamant- she was not going to watch any games. Sandra’s husband and I disagreed and watched the game while eating pizza and chatting. Our excitement at a goal prompted Sandra to look at the TV screen. “It’s OK to just watch the replay,” she reasoned. By the second period, she was animatedly watching the game, criticizing bad plays and admiring the good ones. “I guess I can’t live without hockey,” she said at the end of the game. “But I’m not going to watch the next one!” She did watch the next one, and I imagine that it was her friendship group that made it difficult to not watch hockey. While one declaration of passion involves watching hockey, another entails not watching hockey as a matter of principle. She had felt so hurt and betrayed by the lockout, that not watching was a way for her to
indicate the extent to which she was affected by the lockout. Essentially, by pointedly not watching, she communicated to us that she was more affected and angry than those of us that did watch. And by giving up her boycott of the resumed season in less than one 20-minute period of the next televised game, she indicated the reality of her passion by succumbing to its irresistible power.

5.2. Live Games

Watching live hockey games can be equally interesting, as the spectacle and ritual of the game displays traditions which unite a specific set of people. For example, after the loss to the Boston Bruins in game 6 of the Stanley Cup finals during the 2010-2011 season, a riot broke out in Downtown Vancouver. It damaged both the city's shops and reputation, so the 2011-2012 season was heralded as the "rebuilding year." Reminders of the misconduct were erected outside of the arena. Wood that was used to board up broken shop windows now carried messages of hope written by and for Canucks fans. People who had skipped work and school to help with the clean-up efforts were celebrated before the game started. These people were the volunteers and heroes who helped to rebuild the city, the same people who, according to the Canucks organization, would be responsible for helping to rebuild the Canucks' successes and playoff hopes. This acknowledgement of volunteerism suggested that one was always associated with the team through their deeds, because it proved they had "the heart of a Canuck." Many participants did not regularly attend live professional hockey games. However, many were able to tell me about times they attended live games. It seemed that these experiences had an impact of fostering a relationship with the game. Brendan, who was keen to talk about his experiences with the Oilers, came to tears when

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23 Notably, the cost of admission to a game is not cheap. Therefore, this "specific set of people" refers to those who can afford a ticket to the Canucks, Vancouver Giants, or Abbotsford Heat games. Canucks tickets for the 2013-2014 season averaged $90, and Heat tickets for the 2012-2013 season were $15 and up.

24 Using bodily imagery here also implies a biological connection to others, perhaps similar to kinship.
describing an overtime goal that sent the team to the Stanley Cup finals. He describes his affinity as being generated from attending live games.

[The season] I remember the most I was probably 15, 1990, followed that one pretty closely. I had season tickets when I was in Edmonton, but sort of the players I guess stand out. That drew me into the team....but there are certain players, you know, that are probably your favourite players and I was lucky to have [Wayne] Gretzky and [Mark] Messier, and why wouldn’t you like them if you were watching them play? In ’90, when they won, there were more obscure players like Peter Klima. You probably don’t remember him, Bill Ranford...I don’t know what it is that made them heroes, but Oilers became my heroes and that’s why I followed them as much as I did.

Brendan sees his involvement with this aspect of hockey as witnessing an important part of history. For him, each game that he attended during the Stanley Cup winning season was an important source of pride and excitement for the city that he lived in. He says, “maybe there’s a connection in terms of the excitement, stress, and anxiety. A bond develops. You care about [the team] as a family member.”

Others go to games for the ambiance and not to watch the team itself. Matt admits that he doesn’t care about the Abbotsford Heat, yet he went to a game “for the worst reason- because it was $2 beer and $1 hotdog night.” However, the nature of a hockey game and the physicality of the athletes can leave an impression on some. Cal talks about why he loves the game of hockey so much, and how he first “caught the bug.”

There’s no other game where there’s an unnatural speed other than motor sports, which is, I guess in the terms of unnatural that’s not even human. But it’s a human-driven unnatural speed because humans don’t generally glide on ice and be able to build up to that level of speed...My first Canuck game was Vancouver versus Salt Lake City. It would have been the American League, or they were like a minor league team, and I think they’d even borrowed [Phil] Esposito. I kinda got the bug, you know all these crazy fans, the place was full. I think it was a playoff game, February, so, it was a big deal...

Between the speed and physicality of the game, and the amount of frenzy that he experienced attending his first live game, Cal developed an appreciation for watching the
sport. However, he is cognizant of the fact that the NHL is a business, and he is critical of the refereeing.

Cal too is a referee, and he often fears that live games are subject to manipulation “from the top down,” by “manufacturing consent” (Herman and Chomsky 2002). He used an example to make his point:

I think the reffing is such that the word is you gotta try to keep the games close, help out these struggling franchises like the Phoenix Coyotes or Atlanta Thrashers, I mean, even the game last night, Colorado. You know, we’re up 3-1 and they call that cheesy penalty - it was the lamest interference call. I look at it and I got, whatever, of course they’re going to call that, I mean, the Canucks are up by 2 goals, there are 2 minutes left, you’re here to entertain the fans! And if you give the home team the power play in a struggling...Colorado’s pretty healthy...but they’re having a bad year and they’re down in the standings. If you’re a ref, you don’t want to finish the game and say, ‘hey, how come the Canucks didn’t get any penalties in the 3rd and won by 2 goals?’ If you can’t keep the game entertaining as an official, you won’t be officiating...

For him, this is an important distinction to make, because he needs to make a distinction between his own playing of hockey and managing of a youth league, and the explicitly business-oriented operating of the NHL.

5.3. Conclusion

Overall, watching hockey can comprise an important personal and social action. Televised games give people the opportunity to come together and reaffirm friendship groups through time spent together. Watching games can also connect individuals to their distant hometowns or regions despite having moved to a place where their ‘home’ team isn’t popular. Seeing the game and having a knowledge of another team is an additional way in which “inside information” is generated and displayed, so that socializing with people with interests based on hockey knowledge becomes a more intimate ritual. Finally, watching or not watching hockey can be a signifier of the level and type of emotion that an off-ice decision has caused.
Live games are also important, because they allow individuals to connect themselves to a team in a more intimate way. As Cal illustrated, live games provide him with the means to compare and contrast discourses about how to conceptualize of his own engagement and purpose when managing his league. He makes it clear that when he referees, there is no "manufactured consent," and that he doesn't feel he needs to make the game entertaining. Brendan's story emphasized the ways in which live hockey games can influence the degree to which a team is revered. Unlike Cal, he doesn't suggest that there is anything disingenuous about Oilers hockey, but rather draws attention to the hero-status of players on the team.
Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1. What is passion for a sport?

Participants had a wide range of responses when it came to describing their own passion for the sport of hockey. Matt, for example, used a framework of suffering to define “passion” for himself:

[Passion] is a strong word, right? Because as a fan, like, well, I guess I do suffer sometimes. Because like, you’re so emotionally invested in these things and like when, the games don’t go your way or your team loses big-time, it makes you made. It’s just something to like, care about, but passion is probably too strong a word for it...Politics, there is actually some suffering that can happen for it. I’m doing work, I’m putting in effort into something as opposed to spending money and getting drunk. It’s a different kind of emotional work.

Matt indicates through this statement that passion is something that one is emotionally invested in, and that they suffer for. However, his engagements with the sport, such as writing articles for Penguins’ fan sites and using games as a platform for socializing, would suggest that he puts a considerable amount of work into hockey. However, his ambivalence towards the term “passion” as being descriptive of his own engagement with the sport suggests that at the time, he was perhaps uncertain of his attachment to the sport, especially since the NHL lockout “killed” many of his friendships.

Other participants knew without a doubt that they were passionate about hockey. Cal describes one dimension of his passion for hockey as playing the game. He describes playing as:

...A level of anticipation when you know you’re gunna get out there and get skates on. It’s all positive feeling, just the anticipation. You know you’re gunna have a good time. Even if you have a crummy outing you make a few giveaways it’s still fun to get out there and skate, move around, good exercise. I know I’ll sleep good that night... You know
when it’s your passion, you can always kind of see an end, you know there’s going to be a day when you can’t play the game anymore and it’d be like, maybe that would be a good time to check out, cause, you know, there’s no meaning in life anymore if you can’t play hockey.

Cal’s answer makes sense within the context of his own experiences of hockey. The sport connects him to his family and friends, and to be unable to play would suggest to him that his chances of socializing are over. Since hockey is also one of the few sports he feels he can play in order to stay healthy, he also conceptualizes the sport as a central part of his physical and mental health.

Craig incorporated discourses of passion into his administrative work and league organizing.

Passion-wise...it’s like I have no problems getting up day after day and doing this...If I didn’t have a passion for the game, cause that’s all part of the game, you know, with all the administrative stuff, then I wouldn’t do it.

Craig demonstrates that passion for him fuels his ongoing relationship with the game, whether it is playing, talking, or answering emails.

All three examples here attempt to answer the question, “What is passion for a sport?” Participants variously described suffering, anticipation, and doing banal tasks, among other things, as indicators of their passion for hockey. Therefore, passion for a sport cannot be a singular act or emotion that is constant and universal among individuals who engage with the sport of hockey. However, the term “passion” can readily be used discursively to define and identify with a group of people. “Passion” must be understood as “passions,” a necessarily contextual, varied, and overlapping explanation of how and why individuals engage with the sport of hockey and derive meanings from it. Understanding passions for hockey reveals one aspect of the incredible complexity of social interactions and impacts of the sport in the lives of individuals.
6.2. Summary and Further Inquiries

The first aim of this thesis has been to “situate, describe, and elucidate the complexity of passion for a sport.” In order to show this, I have attempted to present a myriad of engagements with the sport of hockey, and show how these engagements are performances of passion for the sport. Passion emerges throughout these examples of particular sets of experiences, as well as individuals’ understanding and referencing of pre-existing discourses that call for acting towards the sport of hockey in certain familiar ways. While I contend that the meaning and modes of passion are emergent and contextually contingent, conceptualizing it as an ongoing processual performance which is deeply intertwined with individuals’ lives leads to another aim of this thesis.

The study of sport from an anthropological perspective allows for another angle from which to glean insights into the lives and frameworks that people live with. For participants in this study, hockey was an important part of their lives that took up a significant amount of time and money. For example, playing in leagues, organizing games, and attending to their own children’s games are just a fraction of the activities that participants engaged in. Economically, hockey is not an inexpensive sport. According to a Globe and Mail article from 2011, the average family that has a child playing hockey in Canada spends $1,500 on hockey-related costs every year (Brady 2011). Moreover, the Vancouver Canucks are valued at $700 million, with each individual ticket buyer contributing $38 on average in revenue to the team (Forbes 2013).

The third aim was to deconstruct popular notions about what it means to be a “fan” of hockey. I have often felt that the term and its accompanying set of assumptions were flippant dismissals of the complex ways in which passion for a sport is realized and experienced. Throughout this thesis, I have used the term “fan” when participants designated themselves as such, but I have also tried to provide context for this term through life-histories and examples that real people offered me. While it can be easy to write-off sports and sports fans, or reduce them to lowest common-denominator figures, a wonderfully complex and interesting feature of North American society gets dismissed in doing so. In reality, “we are not all Canucks,” and not all Canadians care about
hockey. However, by applying both an interpretive and analytical lens to situations, conversations, and interviews, I hope that I have been able to convey some sense of human substance to the idea of a “hockey fan.” Sport is a socially, politically, and economically significant pastime that offers many avenues for ethnographic inquiry, and hopefully this thesis has both contributed to and opened up ideas for new areas of research.

Discourses, as locations of shared knowledge, carry with them a burden of assumptions about how things should be. Discourses surrounding hockey suggest that it is a hetero-normative endeavor, with high-profile cases of NHL players like using derogatory and homophobic words. There is also the tradition of the “Kiss Cam” at games, which always features heterosexual couples, and occasionally two male members of the opposing team in order to generate a laugh. However, what my research has shown is that there are forms of hockey and engagements that challenge this discourse and the concept of hockey as a hetero-normative endeavor. Clubs like the Cutting Edges work to challenge this particular discourse by discouraging the use of homophobic language and making the locker room a safe space. In this sense, passion for the sport of hockey is exemplified by cultivating an inclusive community through challenging discourses that would exclude or turn people away from the sport.

The benefits of ethnography can also be its limitations. As I mentioned in the introduction, there are many things that I saw and experienced that could not possibly fit into this thesis, but still have relevance and are impactful in the analysis. Everything pertaining to hockey that I saw, heard, or read over the course of two years comprises small pieces of a larger picture that I have attempted to present in a systematic and concise way. Carrying out a discourse analysis on passions for the sport of hockey allowed for the examination of a variety of texts and situations that involved engagements with hockey on both macro and micro scales. What is of importance to note is that the larger and popular discourses about hockey do not adequately provide material for individuals to communicate and make sense of their experiences pertaining to hockey. Therefore, individuals create, play with, and develop their own discourses about hockey that suit their specific sets of experiences and discursive communities.
What using ethnography allowed me to do was examine a multitude of communities and engagements, especially with people who might be outside of the conventional notion of someone who is interested in hockey. For example, I spent a rather significant amount of time with people who seek autographs from professional hockey players. They were a group of people--males and females--who would wait outside of Rogers Arena or the Pacific Coliseum in order to get autographs from players as they were walking in and out. In some instances, they would wait outside of hotels and restaurants. Some individuals sold the autographs, but others described to me the thousands of cards and glossy photos that they had obtained throughout the years that were stored in a storage unit. This was an engagement that I was not expecting to come across, yet it emerged through participant observation at hockey conventions, signings, and games.

The autograph seekers formed a discursive community that was held together by stories. During the long periods of waiting, they would tell each other stories about their best autographs or their most daring attempts at autographs. Chasing cars, finding hotels, and looking up flights were some of the tools they used to figure out when a particular team would be arriving, and where the best place to find them would be. They also shared moralities through stories, showing dismay for those who sold autographs, or for those who shoved items into cars for people to sign. They seemed to have a very specific set of assumptions about how to respectfully approach a player for an autograph, and a disdain for those who made the community look bad. I think particular attention could be paid to the ways in which individual identities are tied into issues of class, race, and gender when it comes to acquiring autographs. Professional hockey players earn a lot of money, and I believe that the autograph seekers felt a certain thrill when they were able to get a millionaire to sign something for them. I would like to investigate further the discourses that legitimate the activity, because there are many who might consider it to be an inappropriate and invasive engagement with hockey.

Passion gone wrong is another concept that emerged from my research, and warrants further analysis. In this regard, it can be viewed as an emotion or a discursive device. Based on what my research has shown, not having control of one’s emotions is childish and alienating, so an eye towards passion as emotion might be well-suited to
this endeavor. What kinds of emotions are associated with the “wrong” kind of passion? Alternatively, there are discourses that would suggest the emotions that one is supposed to feel, and I would imagine that emotion and discourse are not mutually exclusive. Discursively, understanding “passion gone wrong” has implications on masculinity, nationalism, race, class and gender. Who’s “voice” is being heard and what are the contexts in which passion for hockey goes wrong? How “wrong” can passion get? Because the Lower Mainland is a multi-national region, there are people who could use hockey as a means to be included in a Canadian identity, and I would be interested to learn more about how they develop an idea of what passion for hockey is, and how others perceive of it.

Hockey has proven to be a site of myriad intersecting discourses, engagements, communities, and passions. It is a socially, politically, and economically significant institution, but it is also significant to the generation of personal sensibilities of self, identity, and community. By examining both the larger discourses about hockey and the ways people play with and create new ones, a more complete analysis of passions for the sport has emerged. It has been shown to be dependent upon sets of experiences, and is part of a larger process of creating and defining communities. What has been presented in this thesis is a very small selection from a very specific period of time, but nonetheless speaks to a broader pattern for examining passions for hockey in Canada. The sport is an undeniably important piece of the social fabric of Canada, and explaining passions by way of humanizing engagements with the sport is a means of shedding light on the complexities and nuances of passions for hockey.
References


Appendix A.

Hockey Canada Mandate and Mission

Hockey Canada’s Mission Statement

- "Lead, Develop, and Promote Positive Hockey Experiences."
- **Hockey Canada believes...**
  - In a positive hockey experience for all participants, in a safe, sportsmanlike environment.
  - In the development of life skills which will benefit participants throughout their lives.
  - In the values of fair play and sportsmanship, including the development of respect for all people by all participants.
  - In hockey opportunities for all people regardless of age, gender, colour, race, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status and in both official languages.
  - In the importance for participants to develop dignity and self-esteem.
  - To instill the values of honesty and integrity in participants at all times.
  - In the promotion of teamwork, and the belief that what groups and society can achieve as a whole is greater than that which can be achieved by individuals.
  - In the country of Canada, its tradition in the game of hockey, and the proud and successful representation of this tradition around the world.
  - In the value of hard work, determination, the pursuit of excellence and success in all activities.
  - In the benefits of personal and physical well-being.
Appendix B

BC Hockey Age Eligibility

BC Hockey governs competition in amateur hockey in various divisions, including:

DIVISIONS AGE ELIGIBILITY

a) Senior Male and Female Open to players of any age.

b) Junior Male and Female:
   i) Junior Male Open to players twenty (20) years of age and younger in the current playing season.
   ii) Junior Female Open to players twenty-one (21) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

c) Juvenile Male and Female Open to players twenty (20) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

d) Midget Male and Female Open to players seventeen (17) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

e) Bantam Male and Female Open to players fourteen (14) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

f) Pee Wee Male and Female Open to players twelve (12) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

g) Atom Male and Female Open to players ten (10) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

h) Novice Male and Female Open to players eight (8) years of age and younger in the current playing season.

i) Pre-Novice Male and Female Open to players six (6) years of age and younger in the current playing season.
The player's age is determined for the current playing season by the player's age at December 31 of the current season.