From Alpha Athlete to Regretful Spectator:

The Gendered and Heteronormative Story of My Sporting Experience

by

Keri Ann Freeman

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Much research has demonstrated the positive impact sport plays in individuals' lives; however, there are gendered rates of participation. In particular, adolescent girls participate in sport at a lower rate than their male peers. The withdrawal from sport for adolescent girls has been linked to gender and heteronormativity but the current literature does not adequately explain the attrition rate. Therefore, utilizing autoethnography, this research studied the gendered and heteronormative sporting context, specifically the recreational sport inside and outside the school, of adolescent girls. My own memories, sport memorabilia, conversations with my parents, and present-day experiences have informed the creation of my narrative. The findings from my autoethnography support the notion that gender intensifies during adolescence and presses femininity and heterosexuality onto adolescent girls. Coupled together, gender ideology and heteronormativity influence the negotiation of sport participation through peers and perceived peer appraisals, and lead to specific behaviour to demonstrate appropriate gender and sexual orientation. Heterosexual adolescent girls and athletes are not guarded against the lesbian label, a prevalent and powerful description of female athletes as a result of the femininity/athleticism conflict. Described in this research were my motivations to avoid the label, as well as, the ways in which I did so. Given that gender intensifies during adolescence, these negotiations are occurring when identity formation processes are taking place, which has implications for impending adulthood and sport participation. As such, the withdrawal of adolescent girls from sport has implications for Canadian sport and policy provisions to create a positive and gender inclusive space for adolescent girls.

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1.0 Introduction

Waiting on the centre line in the dissipating summer heat, I watch my teammates fight for possession of the soccer ball. The only movement I make is wiping the sweat from my brow and upper lip. Not wanting to be called "offside", I can't step over the line and onto our opponent's side of the field. But I can't join my teammates in their fight either. And so I wait and watch. Finally, one of our midfielders breaks through the mass of bodies and kicks the ball high in the air towards me. Still unable to move until the ball passes me, I wait, but eager to hit the ground running. The ball passes me and I begin my chase. Pounding down on the bright green grass, I run with the ball and dribble it toward to the net. Blood pumping in my ear, sweat rolling down into my eyes, I glance back and note with satisfaction that the other team has stopped chasing me. They can't catch me now! Alone, I draw closer to the net. *Don't screw this up, Keri.* Getting closer and closer, I notice the goalie hasn't moved out of the net to challenge me. *Bottom left corner, Keri, just tap it in.* Closing in on the net, my heart beats furiously and I kick the ball with the instep of my right foot into the back of the net. Goal!!!!!!!

I was ecstatic when I scored my first soccer goal. For years I had worked hard sharpening my athletic skills, which paid off the moment the ball glided smoothly into the bottom left corner. Although I considered myself an athlete regardless of my scoreless record, finally I joined the ranks of the superstars who knew how to put points up on the board. This was a significant accomplishment for me as I lived and breathed sports. In fact, I played roughly 4-8 sports a year, both inside and outside of school, which had earned me many accolades and awards. Needless to say, sport was a big part of my life and a key contributor to my sense of self, identity, and well-being.

Sport can be defined as "institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal or external rewards" (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p.3). Regardless of the rewards, sport holds different meanings for different people (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). More specifically, sport can mean "entertainment, a fantasy, a diversion from the realities of work, relationships

and survival" or can reflect a need to belong to something bigger than oneself (Eitzen, 2005, p.5). Furthermore, sport is used as a means to achieve higher health and wellness statuses (Waddington, 2000; Seippel, 2006), gain economic and global prestige on the world stage (Wilcox, Andrews, Pitter & Irwin, 2003), build communities (Dyreson, 2001), as personal expression (Sieppel, 2006), and facilitate charitable fundraisers and sports events (Jarvie, 2003), such as the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation's CIBC Run for the Cure (Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, 2013). In the 2005 Canadian Consensus, 7.3 million Canadians (aged 15 years and older) reported that they participated in some form of sport (StatsCan, 2005), which demonstrates it is an important and highly salient part of Canadian culture.

Sport is a political, economic and sociocultural system that reflects and reproduces the attitudes, beliefs, rituals, ideologies, and values of a society (Koivula, 2001; Jarvie, 2003; Eitzen, 2012; Reid, 2012). From a political perspective, sport incorporates issues of power and government involvement regarding policy formulation, distribution of resources for sport consumption and decisions regarding eligibility of participants, game rules and enforcement, and the organization of sporting events (Houlihan, 2008; Coakley, 1994). Individuals in society who possess subordinate or lower class statuses may use sport to exercise what power they have to "publicly demonstrate their worth" to achieve full, active citizenship (Reid, 2012, p. 168). Linked to the political nature of sport is economics. Sport represents approximately three per cent of the gross domestic product for developed countries, including Canada (Gratton & Henry, 2001). Sport is significant for local governments and cities because it can be a catalyst for the reimaging processes, as well as, profit generation through sporting events/facilities, which produces attractive infrastructure, promotes internal/external investment, and boosts the region's urban competition (Gratton & Henry, 2001). However, both the political and economic

underpinnings of sport are affected by cultural ideologies whereby the ideologies held by governmental officials could potentially influence policy creation or the distribution of sport-driven profits. The influence ideologies have on behaviours stems from their connection (Gerring, 1997). One ideology that is taken up in sport is gender.

As a prominent element of society, gender is a central component of everyone's life experience (Mandell, 2001; Fine, 2010). Unlike sex, which is grounded in biological, anatomical and physiological differences (West & Zimmerman, 1987), gender is a social construction that reflects "the traits and behaviours that are regarded by the culture as appropriate to women and men" (Brannon, 2011, p. 2). The inclusion of gender within sport creates a gendered experience with gendered beliefs regarding women's and men's roles, behaviours, and abilities, and conveys sport as more appropriate for men. Linked to gender is sexual orientation. As such, heterosexuality is also taken up in sport (Butler, 1990). As defined, heterosexuality is the "seemingly natural attraction between two types of bodies," specifically women and men (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 443). The assumed natural attraction between women and men is further emphasized in heteronormativity (Kitzinger, 2009). This means that individuals who do not identify as heterosexual are often subjected to heterosexism, which is defined as "the denial of rights and privileges to non-heterosexuals" (Simoni & Walters, 2001, p. 160-161). Research has demonstrated that sport contexts are often homophobic (Roper & Halloram, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham, 2008). More specifically, homophobia in sport is reflected in the differential treatment of lesbian and gay athletes. For example, lesbian and gay athletes often face daily discrimination and ostracism, lower levels of status and prestige, as well as, the threat of job loss, financial rewards or violence (Anderson, 2002; Herek, 2007; Symons, 2007). Homophobia in sport manifests, for example, in female athletes being labelled as lesbians; a term meant

pejoratively, which has been linked to deterring female participation in a wide range of sports (Shakib, 2003; Demers, 2006; Coakley, 2009).

An important manifestation of these gendered and heteronormative beliefs is revealed in gendered rates of sport participation (Trost, Owen, Bauman, Sallis & Brown, 2002). That is, more men participate in sports than women (Troiano, Berrigan, Dodd, Masse, Tilert & McDowell, 2008) in various ways. For example, men participate at greater rates (including leadership and administrative positions), occupy almost an exclusive space in some sports (such as boxing and football), and receive significantly more/better media coverage of their sport involvement (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006; Billings, Angelini & Holt Duke, 2007; Acosta & Carpenter, 2006). Despite this gender difference, women do participate in sport, particularly as children. Yet, research demonstrates that sport attrition rates are significantly higher for girls than boys. More specifically, girls who are active in sport withdraw almost six times more than boys and do so at a younger age (Slater & Tiggeman, 2010; Craig, Cameron, Russell, & Beaulieu, 2001; Garrett, 2004). This gender difference in attrition rates is most noticeable in adolescence; however, there has been inadequate research conducted to explore the attrition rates of adolescent girls. Therefore, the pattern of adolescent girls' withdrawal from sport needs further examination. For that reason, the purpose of this study was to explore the gendered and heteronormative sporting context, specifically recreational sport inside and outside of school, of adolescent girls. To accomplish this goal, I have written an autoethnography that critically examines my lived experience as an adolescent girl playing sport. Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology that examines a cultural context through a personal narrative (Schwandt, 2007), which has enabled me to share my experience as a real-life story.

2.0 Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature that is pertinent for contextualizing my study. I begin with an overview of the sport literature including its place in Canada and its federal policies. Next, I discuss gender ideologies prevalent in today's society and their linkages to adolescence within a sport context. Lastly, I review heterosexism and homophobia in sport before concluding with my purpose statement.

2.1. Sport in Canadian Society

Within Canadian society, sport is a social institution. Social institutions are most commonly referred to as explicit elements of society that are persistent and have endured the test of time (Martin, 2004). Since sport dates back to 4000 BC (Scambler, 2005), it can be concluded that sport, by this principle alone, has stood the test of time and thus, can be considered a social institution. There are other aspects of sport, however, that also demonstrate its status. For example, a key principle of social institutions is their interdependency (Martin, 2004). That is, sport is one of many institutions within Canada and relies on the others for its permanence. Other such institutions include the family, medicine/health, the economy, mass media, education, and science and technology (Delaney & Madigan, 2009; Martin, 2004; Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Sport's connection to other institutions is reflected in the academic programs that study sport, the numerous sports clubs around the world offering opportunities for individuals to participate, sport-themed movies, the world of professional sport and its media coverage (Woods, 2007; Delaney & Madigan, 2009; Freeman, 2012; Morrow & Wamsley, 2009; Coakley, 1994; Duncan, 2004). The connection to other institutions legitimizes sport; however, sport has its own "legitimizing ideology" that is used to validate its presence and importance in society (Martin,

2004). Legitimizing ideologies are those that express the ways in which an institution positively

contributes to society. In the case of sport, one of its legitimizing ideologies is that of benefits.

What makes this ideology powerful is the vast research that supports such claim. Research has

linked sport to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social domains of health and well-being.

Given that sport is generally physically active, it contributes to the physiological improvements

of the body, such as muscular and cardiovascular endurance, defense against bone deterioration,

and increased mobility, flexibility, reflexes, agility, and coordination (Hallal, Victora, Azevedo

& Wells, 2006; O'Dea, 2003). In addition to physiological improvements, sport has protective

benefits insofar as it decreases the risks of developing chronic diseases or ailments including

high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, heart disease, osteoporosis,   and even

obesity (Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006; O'Dea, 2003; Malina, Bouchard & Bar-Or, 2004;

Scambler, 2005; Gutin, Barbeau & Yin, 2004). Furthermore, research has demonstrated sport's

positive impact on emotional health through the reduction of stress, anxiety, and depressive

symptoms (Warburton, Nicol & Bredin, 2006; Bailey, 2006; Fox, 1999; Brake, 2010; Paluska &

Schwenk, 2000) thereby elevating moods and self-esteem (Kirkcaldy, Shephard & Siefen, 2002).

Moreover, a developed or increased sense of mastery, pride, and self-efficacy and coherence,

meaning that individuals feel they have a better ability to handle and negotiate the stresses of

daily life, is also linked with sport participation (Scambler, 2005; Mutrie, Biddle, Fox &

Boutcher, 2001; Kirkcaldy, Shephard & Siefen, 2002; Hallal, Victora, Azevedo & Wells, 2006;

O'Dea, 2003; Hassmén, Koivula & Uutela, 2000). In addition, sport has been linked to cognition,

although this relationship is somewhat complex (Tomporowski, 2003). Many researchers have

asserted that physically active sport increases blood flow, which enhances concentration and

other brain functions resulting in increased mental alertness, improved planning, and problem

solving (Bailey, 2006; O'Dea, 2003; Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003; Fox, 1999; Richman & Shaffer, 2000; Brake 2010). With regards to children, sport has been linked to intellectual development and academic achievement (Bailey, 2006; Brake, 2010). For example, students who participate in sport report higher grades and test scores than those who do not participate (Wilson, 2000). Lastly, sport has been connected to social and interpersonal realms. The social nature of sport allows for social interaction and connections to be made, as well as, a sharpening of teamwork and leadership skills or interpersonal communication between coach and athlete (Gratton & Henry, 2001; Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003; Brake, 2010; Richman & Shaffer, 2000; Eccles & Templeton, 2002). On a macro level, sport impacts communities and develops social capital as individuals work together for a common goal, while enhancing their collective identity and community cohesion (Collins & Kay, 2003). Indeed, the health benefits produced by research studies have enabled sport's legitimizing ideology to prevail and influence the behaviours of Canadians. For example, behaviours seen in sport can spill over into everyday life (i.e., staying active and talking the stairs rather than an elevator). That is, the benefits derived from sport can influence Canadians to become, or stay, active through sport participation. Therefore, the power of ideology surrounding sport as a social institution has demonstrated that it is an appropriate and acceptable means for achieving higher health statuses. And so, because sport can be used as a means for higher health statuses, it can be considered a "socially valuable enterprise" (Anderson, 2010, p. 1), and, thus, a social institution. Accordingly, there are many ways that sport reflects a social institution, which speaks to its importance within Canada and to Canadians.

Sport is also found in the Canadian school system and is often regarded as the most popular extra-curricular activity (Eide & Ronan, 2001). For students within the Toronto District

School Board (TDSB), sport's presence is paralleled. The 2006 TDSB Student Consensus reported that 73 per cent of grade 7-8 students participated in extra-curricular sport, in comparison to the 56 per cent of grades 9-12 students participating (Yan & O'Reilly, 2007). With high participation rates for students, there is evidence to support that sport, either varsity or intramurals are effective parts of the overall physical education program/curriculum (Martens, 1990). Whether students participate in a varsity or intramural context, the TDSB uses sport as a means to develop and maintain a healthy and active life (Toronto District School Board, n.d) through the acquisition of skills and knowledge gained through participation (Penney & Chandler, 2000). However, the objectives between varsity and intramural sports are different. Varsity sports are used as a means to develop higher levels of skill through a dynamic, competitive learning environment (including routinized practices and games), as well as, provide opportunities to reap rewards for participation while boosting school morale and feelings of belonging for athletes (Martens, 1990). On the hand, intramural sports aim to fulfill recreational needs for students (with minimal emphasis on competition and teaching/coaching) with a "no-cut" policy to ensure all those who want to participate can (Martens, 1990). Despite these differences, and arguably most important, sport within the school system is especially vital as many young people are only exposed to physical activity and sport through their participation in extra-curricular activities (Sallis et al, 1997). The minimal exposure for some students speaks to how important the school setting is for instilling sporting behaviour to achieve and maintain good health statuses and higher levels of satisfaction.

2.1.1 Canadian Sport Participation Rates

Participation rates have decreased over the last two decades for Canadians. Most populations have recorded lower rates; however, the declines in sport for girls and women are

alarming. In 2005, 44 per cent of girls aged 5-14 years were active in sport and participated on average 2.7 times per week (StatsCan, 2008). Despite this considerable activity level, it is still lower than their male peers. This participation differential is echoed among adult women and men as well. That is, both girls and women participate at lower rates than do boys and men. Moreover, the initial participation rate of girls is drastically cut in half with only 21 per cent of adult women (15+ years) playing sport (StatsCan, 2005). Although this attrition rate reflects a 50 per cent withdrawal rate, some research has reported a 90 per cent withdrawal rate. For example, Troiano, Berrigan, Dodd, Masse, Tilert & McDowell (2008) have reported that only three per cent of adolescent girls (aged 12-15) participate compared to their younger cohort (aged 6-11) at 35 per cent.

High attrition rates are troublesome as they indicate a major gendered issue in sport. Given the benefits associated with sport, the need to address the gendered inequality of sport participation and attrition rates is imperative. Indeed, all Canadians, both women and men, deserve equal access to sport and the opportunities to reap the rewards of such participation. To take up the challenge of providing all Canadians with sporting opportunities, the Canadian government established the Department of Canadian Heritage and by extension Sport Canada to strengthen Canadian identity and heritage through sport. Sport Canada's mission is to "enhance opportunities for all Canadians to participate and excel in sport" (Government of Canada, 2010, para 5) and aims to do so through government partnerships, other sport organizations, and legislation/policies (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2012). With this in mind, Sport Canada develops multiple policies for sport in Canada.

2.2. Canadian Sport Policies

Canada created its first federal sport policy in 2002 with the most recent iteration released in 2012. Similar to its predecessor, the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy is a federal policy in which various government jurisdictions collaborated with the intent to create "a dynamic and innovative culture that promotes and celebrates participation and excellence in sport" (Sport Canada, 2012, p.5). The policy aims to enhance the health and well-being of Canadians and their communities through the promotion of seven core values: fun, safety, excellence, commitment, personal development, inclusion and accessibility, and respect, fair play and ethical behaviour (Sport Canada, 2012). In the 2012 policy, it includes an acknowledgement that there are under-represented and marginalized groups within sport. This acknowledgment is encouraging as it highlights a problematic aspect of sport; however, the under-represented and marginalized groups are not identified. To this end, the issue of gender inequality is not addressed. The lack of identification of girls and women as an under-represented and marginalized group has implications for the policy provisions and implementation. The ambiguous nature of the inequities in sport outlined in this policy can act as a detriment to its purpose if a reader of the policy is unfamiliar with the inequities within sport. Each under-represented and marginalized group has unique reasons for their absence in Canadian sport and, therefore, each group must be identified in order to overcome the barriers unique to their situation. Understanding such marginalization will enable policy makers to adequately write inclusive and effective policies, achieve all seven core values, and enable sport administrators and programmers to adequately provide and promote sporting opportunities for all Canadians. In addition to the ambiguous acknowledgment of under-represented and marginalized groups, policy implementations are discussed; however, there are no formal steps to guide provincial and municipal governments

and organizations in implementing this policy. Instead, this policy is labelled as a "roadmap" in which individual governments and organizations can choose which goals to further and the means for doing so (Sport Canada, 2012). The level of autonomy given to each government and organization in implementing this policy can result in a disjointed and fragmented effort to achieve equity in sport, and thus, social change. Furthermore, the choice of action given does not achieve a sense of urgency or commitment of achieving equity in Canadian sport. Rather, it affords some governments and organizations to affect change using the means of least resistance, meaning that some may choose to implement changes that require the least amount of effort, money or personnel. Therefore, in an effort to highlight the gender equity in sport and to specifically address it, a sport policy, *Actively Engaged: A Policy for Women and Girls* was released in 2009.

Actively Engaged was created in consultation with the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS), an organization supported by Sport Canada which advocates for the increased presence of girls and women in the Canadian sport system (Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity [CAAWS], n.d.). *Actively Engaged* replaces the 1986 *Sport Canada Policy on Women in Sport* and continues its emphasis on women as an under-represented group within sport. To this end, *Actively Engaged* attempts to improve the Canadian sport system by ensuring that girls and women become "full, active and valued participants and leaders, experiencing quality sport and equitable support" (Sport Canada, 2009, p. 1). Focusing on empowering girls and women to not only be participants or athletes, *Actively Engaged* also focuses on women having equal opportunity to become coaches, officials, and governance leaders in order to provide Canada with an ever-changing sport system (Sport Canada, 2009). To create a dynamic and progressive

sport system in Canada, *Actively Engaged* aims to improve sport programs in order to deliver

inclusive, innovative, and satisfying sport experience; establish and maintain strategic leadership

between national and international agencies, governments, and organizations to promote sport

for girls and women; and, create knowledge through research and development to bring about

awareness of meaningful sport participation for girls and women (Sport Canada, 2009). This

explicit focus on girls and women is much-needed; however, its status as a separate policy raises

concerns. Although *Actively Engaged* is supported by Sport Canada, it may not have the same

influence or power that the federal sport policies have. Rather, as a separate policy from a non-

government organization, it is possible that other sport organizations, clubs and associations do

not know this policy exists or feel compelled (morally or legally) to implement it. Instead this

policy is an additional resource that must be searched out and not everyone is looking for it. If

gender equity became a facet in the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy, or future iterations, greater

strides could be made for girls and women in sport. The current lack of gender inequity evident

in the 2012 sport policy perhaps warrants a more in-depth discussion about gender and sport.

Sport is a vast area of research in which scholars have been studying for decades.

However, there are three areas of sport that need further examination. First, an exploration of the

gendered nature of sport from the perspective of adolescent girls is needed as the attrition rate for

this demographic is troublesome. Nevertheless, the research conducted on adolescent girls'

experience in sport does not adequately explain such attrition rates (Davison, Schmalz & Downs,

2010). Second, heterosexism and homophobia in sport is tremendous on those who participate

and can, specifically, have an impact on adolescent girls' attrition rates. An exploration of the

interplay between gender and heterosexism as it relates to adolescent girls can uncover and

deepen the understanding of their sport experiences and attrition rates. Lastly, the research on

sport has taken many methodological approaches; however, autoethnographies are "largely absent" from the sport literature (McCarville, 2007, p. 159). The inclusion of personal experiences of adolescent girls will add a new layer and depth to the sport literature and offer new methodological ways of researching sport. Furthermore, the addition of voices can ignite social change/justice through simple acts of sharing and talking about important issues (Wheatley, 2002). To this end, one voice can spark conversations and reach larger groups of people where they have the ability to empower individuals and groups (Plummer, 2002). Now, we turn to the gendered nature of sport participation

2.3 Gendered Nature of Sport Participation

2.3.1 Gender

Sex and gender are two terms that are sometimes used interchangeably, but represent different, although similar, ideas. Sex refers to anatomical differences (Unger, 1979). This biological classification is made based on the differences seen in the body, but specifically in the chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and reproductive organs (Rider, 2005; Lorber & Moore, 2007; Matlin, 2008; Rosenblum & Travis, 2003; Helgeson, 2005; Etaugh & Bridges, 2010). In contrast, gender contests that the differences between women and men are purely biological (Denmark, Rabinowitz & Sechzer, 2005) and refers to the social and cultural constructions associated with being female or male (Etaugh and Bridges, 2010). Socially constructed from the time biological sex is identified, gender includes social, psychological, and behavioural characteristics (Denmark, Rabinowitz & Sechzer, 2005; Rider, 2005). Such sociocultural characteristics produce the "differences between being feminine and being masculine" (Holmes, 2007, p.2) and provide the basis for gender ideology.

Gender ideology is "a web of ideas and beliefs about masculinity, femininity, and male-female relationships… in order to define what it means to be a man or a woman" (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 17). Traditional gender ideologies reflect women (and womanhood) as submissive responders who are physically and emotionally weak, dependent, frail, and passive (Kelley, 2001; Koivula, 1999; Messner, 1988; Mangan, 2005) and express characteristics of nurturance, warmth, and compassion (Galambos, Almeida & Petersen, 1990; Parry, 2007). Such expressive characteristics are often associated with roles of mother, girlfriend, and wife, which women are expected to fulfill (Parry, 2007; Roster, 2007; Koivula, 1999). Gender ideology is frequently encountered within everyday life through multiple sources (i.e., interpersonal interaction and media) that seek to continually construct and reinforce conformity to the ideology of womanhood, and thus, femininity (Kay, 2000).

Consequently, gender ideology is inextricably linked to the manifestation and expression of gender. To publicly express one's gender identity is to "do gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, it is important to note that doing gender does not necessarily mean conforming to traditional notions of femininity and masculinity based on one's sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Instead, gender is performative (Butler, 1990) and consists of "any activity that can be assessed as to its womanly or manly nature" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 136). The ways girls and women perform gender is ascribed by the ideology of womanhood. This means that in order to successfully accomplish womanhood, certain performances need to be achieved. For example, some of the performative ways in which some women express femininity is through suppressing physical hunger to achieve the idealized thin body (Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael, 2006) and not engaging in weight lifting programs since "too much muscle" is undesirable for women (George, 2005, p. 317); avoiding masculine-typed movements (i.e., sitting with legs together

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rather than apart); and, dressing themselves in feminine colours and fabrics (i.e., pink, lace, sequins) (Tolman, Impett, Tracy & Michael, 2006; Koller, 2008). The ideology of womanhood and its expression in everyday life has implications for women's leisure. For instance, aspects of sport such as physicality, aggression, and competition are inconsistent with performing femininity, which means women might shy away from sport participation. The shying away from sport has been documented to begin during adolescence as young girls are transitioning to young women.

2.3.2. Gender and Adolescence

Gender is a life-long performance; however, adolescence is a time when girls and boys become more sensitive to gender and what it means for them, their identity, and behaviour (Lobel, Nov-Krispin, Schiller &Feldman, 2004). More specifically, adolescence is a time when individuals are transitioning from childhood to adulthood, characterized by dramatic changes in an individual's biological, cognitive, psychological, and social characteristics (Lerner, Boyd & Du, 2010; Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006). One particular marker of adolescence is identity formation. It is this process of self-discovery that makes adolescents become cognizant of societal norms and peer dynamics (Horn, 2005). Such awareness can lead to a sense of vulnerability when discovering their identity and behaviours (Horn, 2005). One major element of identity is gender. In adolescence, gender becomes quite salient and intensifies with age. Gender intensification occurs when the "behavioral, attitudinal, and psychological differences between adolescent boys and girls" become much more pronounced and result from "increased socialization pressures to conform to traditional masculine and feminine sex roles" (Galambos, Almeida & Petersen, 1990, p.1905). With specific reference to adolescent girls, this means that they face particularly greater intensity and pressure to conform to the dominant discourse of

womanhood (Kindlon, 2006; Driscoll, 2002). In response to the pressure to conform to femininity, adolescent girls self-monitor to gauge where they stand in relation to their peers and cultural expectations (Driscoll, 2002). Relating to others regarding gender identity acts like a feedback system which appraises her efforts and either reaffirms or rejects her gender performance (Horn, 2005). An example of a feedback system is her peer groups. Peer groups in adolescence are major agents of socialization and contribute to self-monitoring behaviour (Durham, 1999; Brown, Frankel & Fennell, 1989). Learning about gender through and within a peer group is especially evident when an individual interacts and spends time with same-sex peers (McHale, Kim, Dotterer, Crouter & Booth, 2009). The more time an adolescent girl spends with her same-sex peers, which is popular among adolescent girls, the more gender-typed her behaviour becomes (McHale, Kim, Dotterer, Crouter & Booth, 2009). In this way, adolescent girls are learning how to conform to feminine ideals and are, thus, policed and influenced by the members of the group (Siegler, Deloache & Eisenberg, 2006). With the increase of cultural expectations during adolescence, failure to conform to the group can result in ridicule and shunning by the group members (Siegler, Deloache & Eisenberg, 2006; Muuss, 1996; Smetana, Campione-Barr & Metzger, 2006). Given that aspects of sport (aggression, physical combat, assertiveness) have been found to be inconsistent with femininity, (Hall, 2002; Goldberg & Chandler, 1991), adolescent girls may choose not to participate in sport. However, if her peer group does participate in sport, she may feel pressured to play sport despite her desire not to (Weiss & Weiss, 2004). The social pressure to play sport can result in less enjoyment, higher levels of anxiety and burnout if she is trying to keep up with her friends (Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008). Furthermore, forced sport participation can lead to higher levels of dropout, and a decreased likelihood of sport

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participation as an adult (Taylor et al, 1999), which could have negative health outcomes resulting in a sedentary lifestyle. On the other hand, adolescent girls who want to participate in sport may choose not to in order to avoid criticism and disapproval from her peer group (James, 2000, 2001). The ideological pressures of performing femininity can thus result in less physically active lifestyles, eating disorders, or submissive and self-sacrificing roles for girls (Carr, 1998; Paechter, 2007). Therefore, it is perhaps these expectations, along with the notion that sport is unfeminine and detracts from the achievement of femininity that underscore girls' withdrawal from sport. Moreover, it could be these expectations that begin the withdrawal process and initiate the devastating statistics. The connection between gender performativity and attrition rates of adolescent girls highlights an important gap in the literature that this research seeks to fill. Moreover, the notion that sport is inconsistent with femininity can be seen in the way sport is organized with a particular emphasis on men and masculinity.

2.4. Sport as Male Privilege

Sport is organized and implemented along gender lines (Knoppers & Elling, 2001) which are used to "manufacture and reinforce beliefs" about gender dichotomy (Davis, 1997, p. 56) and further promote the polarization of girls and boys, and women and men (Pronger, 2000). The gender divide in sport is particularly taken up in the gender classification of individual sports. Sports are categorized and assessed as masculine, feminine, or neutral by the physicality needed to perform, as well as, bodily contact and aesthetics (Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). Football, boxing, and hockey, for example, are considered to be masculine sports because they involve physical contact, aggression, and are not aesthetically focused (Koivula, 2001; Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). In contrast, sports such as gymnastics, dance, figure skating, and other non-contact sports are stereotyped as feminine because they are focused on grace, non-aggression,

and beauty (Koivula, 2001; Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). The aesthetics of feminine-typed sports, such as dance or figure skating, have made some perceive women's sports as art, rather than sport, whereby the skill needed to perform has been ignored (Adams, 2011). Women's athletic skills are somewhat ignored because sport has a masculine focus (Brandth & Kvande, 1998) but also as a means to feminize female athletes in masculine-typed sport (Billings, Angelini & Holt Duke, 2010). Sport, as an individual pursuit, but also as an institution, teaches boys how to be men (see Theberge, 1993; Knoppers & Elling, 2001). Growing out of fear that young boys would become effeminate from spending time with their mothers and older sisters (Kidd, 1999), boys were encouraged to play sport because it was considered an antidote for and prevention of feminization and homosexuality (Kidd, 1999; Knoppers & Elling, 2001), as well as, a means to foster masculinity, maleness, and heterosexuality (Malcolm, 2012; Anderson, 2009). Therefore young boys are socialized into sport whereby it becomes a scripted and natural path (Ross & Shinew, 2008; Richman & Staffer, 2000). In this way, sport is seen as a primary masculine-validating experience (Sparks & Smith, 2002), which has significant implications for the way sports are organized and implemented. As a result, sport is considered a highly gendered social institution that enables and produces hegemonic masculinity (Scraton & Flintoff, 2001; Messner, 1992).

There are many masculinities that can be performed by men; however, hegemonic masculinity is seen as the ideal form of masculinity: white, middle-upper class, educated, and heterosexual (Messner, 1997). As a social, cultural, and relational practice, rather than a self-reproducing system, hegemonic masculinity regulates and polices the gendered patterns of men (Connell, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity rests on the binary of biological sex and enables the "collective dominance over women" (Connell &

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Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 840). The two sex system (female versus male) maintained in hegemonic masculinity is also institutionalized and normalized in sport (Travers, 2008) such that ideological differences are emphasized in order to celebrate male advantage (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Hall, 2002; Theberge, 2000; Burstyn, 1999). Undeniably, as an institution that teaches boys how to be men, sport promotes athletic principles that are consistent with masculine ideologies such as physical strength and power, competence, self-confidence, assertiveness, competition, stamina, and aggression (Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000; Harry, 1995; Hall, 1988; Cooky, 2009; Pronger, 1990; Kidd, 1999; Sabo & Messner, 1993; Ross & Shinew, 2008; Richman & Shaffer, 2000; Connell, 1987; Messner, 1992). Therefore, sport is a vehicle for reinforcing gender ideology through participation, with a particular focus on masculinity. Such a focus on boys, men, and masculinity has proven to have serious implications for female sport participation.

2.4.1. Sport and the Marginalization of Female Participation

The implications of sport as a male privilege are that women are marginalized and often excluded, and devalued. The ideological beliefs about appropriate sporting behaviour have devalued female sport participation and conceived the notion that girls and women are trespassing when entering into sport, specifically masculine-typed ones (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Girls and women are seen as trespassers because it is believed that sport participation is not only inappropriate (Mennesson, 2000), but off limits for girls and women (Whisenant, Pedersen & Obenour, 2002). This context has caused the marginalization of girls and women in sport, particularly in the media and resource allocation (Theberge, 2002). Both of which are explored next, beginning with media portrayals of female athletes.

One particular way girls and women are marginalized in sport is through media representations. Female athletes receive less air time and attention; however, when they are covered, their femininity, sexuality, and life outside of sport (i.e., motherhood and children) are emphasized rather than their athletic and sporting accomplishments (Billings, Angelini & Holt Duke, 2007; Cunningham, Sagas, Sartore, Amsden & Schellhase, 2004; Adams & Tuggle, 2004; Messner, Duncan & Jensen, 1993). Specifically, women's physical appearance and feminine gender roles outside of sport become the focus and are far more valued than a woman's athletic competencies and achievements (Bremner, 2002; Knoppers & Elling, 2001; Schell, 1999). Such media portrayals suggests that women are not taken seriously within sport as they are discredited and denied the chance to show power and athletic ability in sport (Kane & Parks, 1992; Kane, 1996). The avoidance of women's athletic abilities reinforces the notion that sport is a male pursuit and men are the "real" and natural athletes (Hargreaves, 1994; Ross & Shinew, 2008). The ways in which the media depicts female athletes, perhaps, is a means to minimize the threat of female athletes entering and taking up space in sport that is reserved and meant for men (Duncan, 2006; Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Another way girls and women are marginalized in sport is through opportunities and resource allocation. It has been well-documented that girls' and women's opportunities and resources are unequal when compared to their male peers (Kelley, 2012; Hall, 2006; Hovden & Pfister, 2006; Warde, 2006; Hoeber, 2008). Sport opportunities have historically been truncated by the historical blatant demand for the exclusion of women, both in the Olympics and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (Hartmann-Tews & Pfister, 2003; Elling & Knoppers, 2005). For example, until 1970, FIFA had openly banned women from playing soccer within their organization (Elling & Knoppers, 2005).

Although this overt discrimination is less visible today, adolescent girls still encounter fewer sport teams and programs than boys (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Furthermore, adolescent girls have to fight to participate on boys' teams whether or not a girls' team is offered (see Casselman v. Ontario Soccer Association). Fighting for opportunities to play sport is evidence of the manner in which gendered ideologies influence sport participation and opportunities for girls as reflected in unequal resource distribution in Canada (Hall, 2002). There are three main categories of resource distribution within sports: human, financial/funding, and facility. Human resource refers to the individuals involved in the delivery of sport services and programs, such as coaches, volunteers, and board/executive members. A particular problem with human resources among organizations is the lack of qualified staff in organizing and implementing quality programming (Negley, Bell & Cederquist, 2005). The lack of qualified staff can result in the unintentional creation of barriers, policies, procedures, and practices that could make the sporting environment "welcomingly or exclusionary" for some individuals or groups (Negley, Bell & Cederquist, 2005, p. 15). Women have identified some barriers to sport (i.e., lack of discretionary time and money, as well as, safety concerns [Winter, 2007]) in which programming staff need to be cognizant of and address. Not addressing or programming with sport participants' needs in mind can negatively affect one's experience but also the relationship between the organization and its users (Misener & Doherty, 2009). This means that women may avoid specific organizations or programs because their needs are not being met, which further leads to their decreased participation rates. Furthermore, without clear knowledge and know-how of providing satisfactory experiences for all participants, financial/funding and facility resources cannot be unevenly distributed.

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Financially, girls' and women's sport programs receive smaller budgets. For example, female athletes receive fewer scholarships and associated monies (Sander, 2008; Costa, 2003; Kelley, 2012). This inequity is justified by a focus on revenue. Decision makers believe that girls' and women's sport programs do not produce enough revenue to justify additional resources (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Therefore, beliefs about female sport participation and lack of revenue production places girls' and women's sports programs in danger of receiving less money, but also budget cuts if cutbacks need to be made (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009).

From a facility standpoint, access to and quality of facility amenities disadvantage adolescent girls and women (Hoeber, 2008). The unavailability of female-only space, such as change rooms, is a source of inequality (Vertinsky, 2001) and has resulted in public bathrooms being used as change rooms, specifically for hockey (CAAWS, 2012). Being forced to change in the bathroom when playing on a co-gendered team, for example, forfeits the opportunities to build team cohesion and hold meetings (CAAWS, 2012). Apart from change rooms, playing surface is also a source of inequity. Wiley, Shaw and Havitz (2000) assert that the lower levels of participation for girls and women, in hockey specifically, could result from the "limited availability" of the ice rink (p. 29). Pertaining specifically to women, additional sources of inequality include lack of quality or affordable childcare, affordable fees, and scheduling of facilities, games, and tournaments that are compatible with professional and familial responsibilities (Currie, 2004; Samdahl, Hutchison, & Jacobson, 1999). Such examples of inequality are underscored by gender and further serve to maintain their low participation rate and marginalization in sport. As such, women's participation rates are lower than adolescent girls' rates because they experience more barriers/constraints due to their different life stage. Whether or not the unequal distribution of resources and sport opportunities are intentional, they

underscore the ways in which girls and women are not afforded the same or equitable opportunities as their male counterparts, and therefore, such unequal resource allocation is a perpetual way of asserting and maintaining male dominance and superiority in sport (Duncan & Messner, 1998). The hierarchy of men maintained in sport is consistent with the production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. As emphasized in hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality is stated as the ideal sexual identity and, therefore, embodying a sexual identity that is inconsistent has serious implications for sport participation.

2.5. Heterosexism and Homophobia in Sport

Despite the significant social change the gay rights movement has made in Canada, heterosexism and homophobia abound (McCormack, 2012). Heterosexism rests on the beliefs that heterosexuality "is the only normal and acceptable sexual orientation" (Griffin & Harro, 1997, p 146). To this end, sexualities that do not conform to that standard are seen as deviant and immoral (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009). Heterosexuality is deeply engrained in western society (Applebaum, 2003) and serves to marginalize and oppress those who do not identify with a heterosexual orientation (Applebaum, 2003). The consequences of such non-conformity can result in differential treatment by society, also known as homophobia. Homophobia is the "prejudice, discrimination, harassment or acts of violence against sexual minorities" including lesbians and gay men (Sears, 1997, p. 16). Homophobia manifests through harassment, such as negative attention, comments or slurs, as well as, the use of negative stereotypes, social exclusion, and discrimination in sport participation and team selection (Roper & Halloram, 2007). Research has documented the heterosexist and homophobic climate of sport, which is often manifested in the beliefs about female athletes. For example, a Penn State University basketball coach in the 1990s publicly declared that she did not and would not "recruit or allow

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lesbians to play on her team" (Woods, 2007, p.22). Such overt displays of discrimination impact female athletes, most specifically those who persevere and play sport.

Examples of the ways female athletes are impacted by potential discrimination lies in the way they "perform femininity" in their clothing, use of make-up, and hairstyles on and off the court. For example, many female athletes will decorate their uniform through the use of bejeweled necklines, hair ribbons or bows, matching finger nail colours/designs, as well as, wearing make-up, and ensuring that axillary, pubic, and body hair is removed (Hargreaves, 1994; Wughalter, 1978; Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; McDonald, 2008). Outside the sporting arena, some female athletes will perform their femininity by wearing jewelry (i.e., wedding bands and necklaces), feminine apparel (i.e., dresses, skirts, high heels), and styling their hair in a flowing manner. Many female athletes are seen out in heterosexual dominated spaces such as bars or quick to discuss their plans to marry and/or have children during media interviews (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Anderson, 2010). Some female athletes will also work as a model off the court, which enables women to perform "heterosexy femininity" (Dworkin & Messer, 2002) to appeal to men's (sexual) interest and be seen as a heterosexual woman. Heterosexy femininity depreciates female athletes' achievements and reduces them to sexual objects (Muller, 2007). In short, female athletes have many mechanisms through which they demonstrate their heterosexuality to avoid being labelled a lesbian (Krane, 2001). Research in this area has labelled women's behaviour in this regard as "emphasized femininity", which describes women's "compliance" with their subordination to men and "oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987, p. 183). Emphasized femininity is thought to further marginalize women within a patriarchal context and reproduce gendered ideologies. Clearly, homophobia along with the fear of being labelled a

lesbian "serves as a vehicle for social control by making conformity to traditional sex roles desirable… and restricts acceptable behaviour and sporting prowess and reinforces traditional, historical images of female frailty" (Clarke, 1998, p.150). Therefore, the power and stigma of the lesbian label is used to threaten and intimidate females and to create a climate of vulnerability as their sexual identity is called into question (Clarke, 1998, p. 150). To this end, females who are aware of the stigma and link between female athleticism and lesbianism may feel pressured to steer clear from masculine sports or not participate in sport at all (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006; Clarke, 1998). The experiences of both lesbian and heterosexual athletes in relation to sexual identity are somewhat absent from the literature; however, newer methodologies emerging in sport research can address this gap.

2.6. Sport Research and Autoethnography

The epistemologies and methodologies utilized in sport research have varied throughout the years. Historically, research on sport (within the physical education domain) has adopted quantitative methods whereby sport participation rates and trends are measured through surveys or other empirical measurements (Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006). Additionally, sport management research began with a positivist epistemology (Edwards & Skinner, 2009) that relied on quantitative measurements with controlled data collection, a deliberate and considerable distance between the researcher and subject along, and strict statistical analysis (Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). However, both quantitative and positivist methods have failed to provide explanation beyond the descriptive level (Jones, 1997). Pertaining to sport, this means that these two methods are unable to uncover why and how individuals adopt, maintain and cease their sport participation (Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006). With a need for deeper understanding of sport experience, which will inform management practice, policies and

procedures, and thus, the organization and implementation of sport, a shift in the research

processes has commenced with qualitative and post-positivist research gaining momentum.

Qualitative research allows the contextual, social, and cultural elements of human life,

and thus sport experience, to emerge and become an integral part of the analysis and discussion

(Allender, Cowburn & Foster, 2006). Such integration of these elements provides opportunities

to gain in-depth insight into the experiences and meanings of individual's sport participation

(Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). Furthermore, interpretative research has made its entrance

into sport studies because it better aligns with the human and sport experience than positivism

(Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). The human and sport experience is subjective; it does not

follow a set pattern of behaviours or series of variables and is not free of opinions or emotions

(Silk, Andrews & Mason, 2005). Therefore, interpretative research allows for a greater

understanding of the human experience since cognition, emotion, and the co-creation of

knowledge by the researcher and subject are valued and utilized within the research process

(Jones, 1997). A substantial example of interpretative research, and perhaps a post-modern

approach, is the recent inclusion of self-narratives within sport (Denzin, 1997; Denzin &

Lincoln, 2000).

Autoethnographies can be a useful methodology that illustrates important aspects of

human life and relations (Chang, 2008). Despite a few strong autoethnographies (see McCarville,

2007; Popovic, 2012), they have been largely absent from the sport literature. Autoethnographies

are a means of exploring societal forces that shape our behaviours which dictate how we

experience the social world (Fleming & Fullagar, 2007). In this sense, autoethnographies grant

us the opportunity to critically examine our sporting involvement and practices (Fleming &

Fullagar, 2007). Examining our own sporting experience can allow the researcher to reveal any

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pain or burdens in order to make sense of what she has or is experiencing (hooks, 1994). The

inclusion of personal narratives not only uncovers phenomena that is otherwise kept secret, but

allows for both the researcher and readers to better attest to a phenomena and transform their

lives through critically examining their own lives and asking questions (Adams & Ellis, 2012).

Bringing to light issues that are otherwise shadowed and unexamined, as seen in

autoethnography, mirrors the need to research adolescent girls' sport experience and attrition

rates. Therefore, this research aims to, not only delve into the experiences of adolescent girls and

their attrition rates, but to add to the emergence of new methodologies that mimic the messiness

of human life and relations.

2.7. Summary of Literature Review

Sport is a popular element in society, especially among Canadians. However, sport

participation is gendered, which is particularly evident amongst adolescent girls who face

ideological and interpersonal pressures regarding sport participation. Indeed, sport offers many

benefits to its participants; however, the marginalization reported by females illustrates sport's

production and reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. As a result, females have to negotiate

their sport participation which has implications for the ways they perform femininity and adhere

to heteronormativity.

Taken together the literature review reveals three main research gaps with respect to

sport, gender, and heteronormativity, particularly in regard to adolescent girls. First, the attrition

rate for adolescent girls regarding sport participation is a troublesome trend; however, the

gendered nature of these rates has not been adequately explained. Previous research has

documented the difference in sport participation between adolescent girls and boys, but

discussions surrounding why this gender gap exists remain muted. The proposed research seeks to examine the unique factors that contribute to attrition rates amongst adolescent girls.

Second, the research on the lesbian stigma in sport has primarily focused on lesbians and the discrimination and prejudice they have encountered in sport (Sartore & Cunningham, 2008). However, the stigma extends beyond lesbian athletes. Therefore, this study has delved into the experiences of heterosexual athletes including how they negotiate the lesbian stigma.

Third, the voices of girls and women participating in sport have been somewhat heard and discussed (see James, 2000; Slater & Tiggeman, 2010); however, the sporting experiences of girls and women who have withdrawn from sport have been neglected. Research with those who have withdrawn can offer unique perspectives into constraints and solutions with respect to sport participation (Hovden & Pfister, 2006). One way to include the voices of those who have withdrawn is through autoethnography. Autoethnography enables the researcher to highlight an important unseen and under-researched area of sport research as the withdrawal of girls and women can speak to the nature of sport and the influences at play within it. Uncovering the influence at play will help to determine what actions need to be carried out in order to overcome constraints and improve the experiences for girls and women resulting in lower attrition rates.

I have highlighted some important gaps in the literature and in the understanding of adolescent girls' sport experiences. However, to adequately explore these under-researched areas, I have written an account of my sporting experience through autoethnography. By using my own voice, a woman who withdrew from sport, I have provided an authentic narrative highlighting my own attrition rate.

2.8. Purpose Statement

Keeping these three gaps in the literature in mind, the goal of the proposed study was to explore the gendered and heteronormative sporting context, specifically recreational sport inside and outside of school, of adolescent girls. To achieve this purpose, I have used autoethnography to capture my own lived sport experience.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Feminism

This research study has been guided by a feminist perspective. Feminism is a response to the ways women have been neglected, excluded, and devalued in society (Lugones & Spelman, 2000). Feminism is both a personal and political movement that embodies "equity, empowerment, and social change for women and men" (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996). Although feminism advocates gender equality for both women and men, feminism actively repositions women from the margins and into the centre (Henderson, Shaw, Freysinger & Bialeschki, 2013). Recognizing that women live in the margins creates the basis for feminism and the understanding that they hold subordinate statuses in society as a result of patriarchy – the societal domination and privilege of men over women (Scranton & Flintoff, 2001; Schippers, 2007). Therefore, feminism aims to rescind patriarchy and the oppression of women through means of empowering women to positively change their lives (hooks, 2000) and legitimize "women's ways of being" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240). Challenging mainstream thinking and patriarchal ways of living (Beasley, 1999), feminism aims to identify, criticize, and remove the forces and practices that have constrained women (MacKinnon, 1987) in order for women to have the same "social, economic, and political rights and opportunities equal to those possessed by men" (Lewin, 1983, p. 17). The advocacy for equity and empowerment of women will bring about social change and create a "society where women can live a full, self-determined life" (MacNamara, 1982, p. 6).

3.1.1 Feminist Theory

There are a variety of feminist theories (i.e., liberal, radical, Marxist) that put forth various responses to the androcentric nature of society and marginalization and exclusion of women. For the purpose of this study, I have utilized an overarching feminist theory. Feminist theory asserts that an understanding of gender and gender relations is necessary for understanding the social world (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009), and that social experience is highly gendered (Snyder, 1995). Feminist theory recognizes the conditions that shape women's everyday lives and a cultural understanding of what it means to be a woman (Jackson & Jones, 1998). The understandings of what it is like to be a woman better highlights and explains the disparate experiences between women and men (Snyder, 1995). However, feminist theory does not only seek to explain the experiences of women, but to understand the meanings of women's experiences (Lugones & Spelman, 2000). To really appreciate the experiences and meanings of those experiences, women's voices must be heard. The giving of women's voices breaks free from one aspect of oppression, which is fundamental to feminism and feminist theory (Lugones & Spelman, 2000). Moreover, the sharing of their experiences allows for personal accounts to be blended with research and data to craft new practices of understanding and eliminating female oppression (Bunch, 2000). The combination of theory and embodied experience is integral for feminist theory because you cannot separate one from the other (Harrison & Fahy, 2005); instead, each informs the other. Furthermore, feminist theory helps inform feminist research.

3.1.2 Feminist Research

Trussell (2009) states that individual experiences are situated within broader societal contexts. In order to understand our individual experiences, an examination of the broader context in which we live is essential in deriving meaning (Henderson, Shaw, Freysinger &

Bialeschki, 2013). The placement of women at the centre and the telling of our experiences will highlight issues of power and authority which align with feminist theory (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Individual experiences are subjective and such examinations of them challenge positivism and its ideals of objectivity and a universal truth. This push against dominant, hegemonic "circles of knowledge" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 21) acknowledges and celebrates that there are different ways of knowing. Indeed, there are women's ways of knowing (Hall, 1996) and it is only appropriate for women to speak of their own experiences to acquire true accounts of reality (Lugones & Spelman, 2000). Therefore, feminist research values women in knowledge building through the telling of their own experiences. In my research, the "Other" has been represented and the illusion of absolute (masculine) truth has been contested (de Beauvoir, 1972). Finally, the use of emotion in feminist research is an important element in knowledge building (Jaggar, 1997). In fact, Hesse-Biber (2007) argues that the presence of emotion in phenomena underscores the reasons and need for exploration of those phenomena. Therefore, women's experiences and emotions should be explored in order to understand the social world and its structures and practices. The valued examination of women's subjective perspectives, feelings, and lived experiences are taken up in autoethnography.

3.2 Autoethnography

A feminist framework lends itself to the use of autoethnography. Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology that "refers to a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic (looking outward at a world beyond one's own) and autobiographical (gazing inward for a story of one's self) intentions" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16). The writing of one's story places the self within a social and cultural context (Holt, 2003), while producing and advancing knowledge and sociological understanding of the social world (Ellis, 2004; Wall, 2008). The

personal nature of this methodology positions the author as both the researcher and research participant (Merton, 1988). The unique positioning of the researcher allows her to be a part of the context and phenomenon, rather than trying to incorporate herself into the research setting (Duncan, 2004). Autoethnography is an especially important way that researchers can diffuse 'Othering,' which occurs when there a clear separation between the researcher and the research participant (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Not only can autoethnography eliminate Othering, but it can also highlight the voice and experience of those who have been largely invisible in the literature (Russel, 1998; Duncan, 2004). The inclusion of the Other in research allows for their otherwise silenced stories to be told, as well as, brings an element of emotion into the research (Sparkes, 1997; Diversi & Moreira, 2009).

Emotions are the essence and soul of autoethnographies (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Lincoln, 1997). Careful consideration and "attention to physical feelings, thoughts and emotions" (Muncey, 2005, p. 70) during the studied phenomenon is important for creating a captivating narrative that illustrates the personal and emotional experiences of the researcher (Anderson, 2006). The inclusion of emotion in the text makes autoethnography a "felt-text" whereby the reader enters into the story becoming co-participants in its meaning and emotion, and thinking critically about the story and the human experience (Ellis, 1999; Richardson, 1994; Spry, 2001). To this end, the use of emotion can awaken the reader to see a different perspective, as well as, understand their potential involvement in the process that keeps the Other invisible (Sparkes, 1997). Lastly, from a narrative aspect, emotionality in the stories aid in reliving the experiences and stories told (Ellis, 1999).

The goal of autoethnography is not only to portray one's experience and bring a private world to light, but to critically analyze and extract meaning from it (Jones, 2010; Ellis &

Bochner, 2006). Moreover, an autoethnography usually targets an important turning point in one's life, which leads to a different course in her life path (Bochner & Ellis, 1992). What makes this turning point significant is the impact the individual still experiences "long after a crucial incident is supposedly finished" (Bochner, 1984, p. 595). In telling her story, the researcher reveals a private, unseen world by revealing "what has been kept hidden" and "speaking of what has been silenced" (Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26). Although an autoethnographic text is written in first person, the data and stories told are not just limited to the researcher. Instead, they can come from other actors in the story, as well as, reflective writing, interviewing, and the gathering of documents and artifacts (Duncan, 2004; Stanley, 1993; Mayan, 2001; Morse & Richards, 2002; Muncey, 2005).

3.2.1 Autoethnographic Methods

As a reflexive writing practice (Fleming & Fullagar, 2007), autoethnography can be written using various methods. The writing process can consist of linear or non-linear story writing, fictional stories, poems, personal essays, photographic essays, and authorial narrations (Richardson, 1998; Bruce, 2000; Sparkes, 1997; Ellis, 2004). The style of writing chosen by the writer is used to represent fragments of time of her lived experience (Axelson, 2009; Carless, 2012). It is important to note that the use of fictional stories is not meant to fill space within the narrative; instead, autoethnographies can be used to convey the meanings of the experience rather than providing an "accurate" account (Ellis, 2004).

An autoethnographic text is actively created through many forms of data collection (Ellis, 2004), but its primary method is memory work (Chang, 2008). Memory work is vital because the texts created cannot be separated from the memories that mould them (Coffey, 1999). Furthermore, memory work is often tied to emotion (Duquin, 2000). Given the centrality of

emotion in autoethnography, memory work is not just a method of retelling the story. Instead, it is used to elicit emotions and feelings that make the story or event meaningful (Duquin, 2000). The attention given to emotions during memory work allows the writer to attend to and chronicle physiological responses, personal thoughts, and feelings like doubt, fear, joy, and pain (Jones, 2010).

Attending to one's emotions during the creative process is also seen in introspection. Introspection is a conscious awareness of oneself in that she is actively thinking about her own thoughts and feelings (Ellis, 1991). Emotions and feelings can also be triggered by artifacts associated with the story. For example, these artifacts can be (field) notes, participant observation, photographs, newspapers and publications, and personal memorabilia (Jones, 2010; Ellis, 2004; Holbrook, 2005; Muncey, 2005; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). These tangible sources of data offer hard evidence to support memory work and introspection (Duncan, 2004; Holbrook, 2005). Furthermore, they can fill in the gaps and enhance understanding of self and context lived (Chang, 2008). To assist in filling other gaps and provide greater detail and meaning to the story, the voice of others and their memories are also used for data collection (Duncan, 2004). Given that autoethnography connects to the social and cultural world (Holt, 2003) and an individual's life experience does not occur within a social vacuum, the stories, memories, and voices of others become important to the creation of the text (Duncan, 2004). Lastly, data also needs to come from the researcher's present (Chang, 2008). The present-day data comes from an equally important method of self-observation (Ellis, 1991) in which the researcher's experiences are captured "at the time of research" (Chang, 2008, p. 89). Capturing present-day lived experience is especially important if part of the autoethnography is placed within the present.

3.3 My Writing Process

      I began my autoethnography with the writing of a chronology of events. The creation of

the chronology serves as a foundation for the creation of my autoethnography and includes

everything that I can remember from my sporting experience. Spanning 23.5 years, it describes

my sporting experience both inside and outside of school. More specifically, it highlights my

triumphs, defeats, insecurities, emotions, conversations, games, and inner thoughts using a linear

organization to illustrate its evolution, specifically its progression and regression (Chang, 2008).

To construct my chronology, I used memory work and recorded the big stories that I

remembered instantly: sport tournaments, gym classes, conversations, and comments. Recalling

my memories took two forms: deliberate and spontaneous recollection. Wanting to create a full

chronology, I would find a comfortable place to "space out" and return to the past. The places

that enabled my deliberate memory work included my office, bedroom, and corners of a quiet

library or coffee shop. The privacy and anonymity (especially in public areas) allowed me to

freely envision the surroundings of my past. With minimal to no distractions, my memories

began to creep into my mind. For example, to help remember and add depth to already

remembered stories, I went back into the hallways of my schools, or the soccer field I spent

many summers on. This deliberate form of memory work allowed me to write year by year

starting with elementary school and finishing with university. My spontaneous memory work

occurred at various, unplanned times both inside and outside the research process. Given its

spontaneity, this process of recalling did not solely happen when working on this thesis in front

of my laptop. Instead, even when running errands or enjoying my leisure time, thoughts, phrases,

and conversations would pop into my mind. For example, when riding the bus home from

grocery shopping or when making dinner, vivid memories came into view. When this occurred, I

would immediately record these memories on whatever I had on my person (i.e., cell phone, scrap piece of paper, or the back of a receipt). Deliberately and spontaneously filling the gaps little by little allowed my chronology to be full and rich with my experience, as well as, achieve its linear organization. The stories detailed in the chronology are candid. After several drafts were written and rewritten to include more stories and descriptors, I separated my chronology into 3 sections to help with the writing of my autoethnography: (1) my experiences before I decided to quit sports; (2) the decision to quit, and (3) my life after I quit.

3.3.1. Writing My Autoethnography

Satisfied with the current completion of my chronology, and understanding its foundational purpose for my autoethnography, I began to choose stories, or vignettes, that I felt had the greatest impact. Reviewing the vignettes, I copied and pasted them into a fresh Word document to begin the construction of my autoethnography. My rationale for choosing these vignettes was founded on my desire to illustrate the linear progression of my athleticism, and then the eventual withdrawal from sport. That is, each story was meant to show the gradual movement. Choosing each vignette was a way for me to craft a specific sequence to guide the reader through my experience with me. Finishing my conscious selection of vignettes, I began to fill in more blanks, bring more emotion into each one, and add more depth. To do this, I used a few autoethnographic methods. First, I consulted my sport memorabilia (soccer team photos, trophies, medals and ribbons) and yearbooks in order to support my memory work and aid in the description of events and settings (Duncan, 2004; Holbrook, 2005; Chang, 2008). For example, my team pictures assisted me in remembering what our uniforms looked and felt like, recreate the feelings of being on a team, and reconstruct the playing field or gymnasium. Reviewing my sport memorabilia allowed me to go "back in time" and relive some of the moments. While

going back in time, I employed introspection. Keeping myself in conscious awareness, I paid special attention to the images that came into view, the emotions felt, and the physiological reactions of my present body. Reliving the emotions of my experience allowed for events to come into the foreground and become more vivid. The vividness of some imagery and memories let me go deeper into the moment and play it out as if I were in a movie scene. Even to this day, when reading about scoring my first goal I still get goose bumps. Therefore, the reactions I had to each story segment were promptly recorded in order to add extra layers to my narrative, inform my written poems, and see a more complete view of my sporting experience and my life (Muncey, 2005).

Secondly, I have included the voices of others in actual dialogue. The voices belong to my teachers, friends, classmates, and parents. Some dialogue could not be written verbatim due to the passage of time; therefore, some conversation has been recreated by me with the meanings still intact. To this end, my autoethnography is not meant to reveal my past "as is"; rather, it conveys the meaning of my experience (Reissman, 1993). The gathering of my parents' memories, however, has been done through informal conversations and used to fill in some gaps, answer questions, and ultimately deepen my understanding of my sporting experience. Their voices are especially important because I cannot remember everything from my early childhood (Carless, 2012) nor was I privy to the politics behind closed doors. Furthermore, including the voices of others has allowed me the opportunity to conduct a member check (Havitz, 2007)

Lastly, when composing the last section of my autoethnography, I had to rely on my life at the present date. The capturing of present-day experience is important because the present-day is still a part of my story. The way I feel, the thoughts I have and my behaviours are important for understanding the trajectory my life has taken as a result of my decision to stop playing sport.

Furthermore, it is my current life that has informed my decision to write my story in the first place. Recording my current feelings, thoughts, and behaviours has paralleled the methods I used to create my chronology. Thoughts and feelings felt at the present day were also recorded as soon as possible which has allowed me to capture raw emotion and vivid details from what I have just experienced (Chang, 2008).

The creation of a full, lengthy autoethnography left me with a full progression and regression of my sport experience. Such an in-depth narrative satisfied my need to "tell the readers everything" but it began to feel overwhelming. I had told "too much story" and to understand the autoethnography I had to sift through all the vignettes. My writing guided the reader through my experience but the key components were lost. Therefore, I restructured and revised my autoethnography, a process similar to the revising of my chronology. Breaking my autoethnography into manageable themes, I chose a few vignettes to explicitly demonstrate each theme. Although I encourage readers' interpretations of my autoethnography, simplifying my autoethnography focuses on the most important and meaningful moments. The newest reiteration of my autoethnography found in this thesis is not the final draft; instead, the process will be life-long. Nevertheless, each draft crafted must be meaningful, not only to myself, but to those who read it. To ensure I write a meaningful autoethnography, it is crucial that I review criteria for judging autoethnographies.

3.4. Criteria for Judging Autoethnography

An autoethnography is not completed once the last word and punctuation mark have been inked on the last page. Autoethnographies should have lasting impressions that cause the readers to reflect on the narrative and their own lives (Sparkes, 1997). Part of this reflective process is the judging of the autoethnography itself. Laurel Richardson has developed five criteria in which

to evaluate autoethnographies. First, the text has to make a *substantive contribution* in that it develops a deeper understanding of the social world (Richardson, 2000). Second, there should be a level of *aesthetic merit* whereby the text is carefully crafted to invite the reader in to interpret what is being uncovered in an interesting, and not boring, fashion (Richardson, 2000). The third criterion is *reflexivity*. Reflexivity is the continual awareness of the researcher's motives and impact on the research process, and resulting product. With respect to reflexivity, Richardson (2000) questions whether the researcher has been consciously aware of her impact on the research, including the underlying reasons for writing an autoethnographic text, its subjectivity and accountability to those involved and the readers' ability to evaluate the point of view undertaken in the text. The evaluation of the perspective used in the text lends itself to the fourth criterion: *impact*. In addition to a substantive, perhaps academic- or research-based, contribution, it is important to determine whether the text impacts the reader herself (Richardson, 2000). This is especially important since emotions are vital to the creation and meaning of an autoethnography. Therefore, it is important to ask whether the text moves the reader emotionally or intellectually, and if she asks questions and takes action (Richardson, 2000). The last criterion relates to whether the text *expresses a reality*. It is important to question whether the narrative accounted in the text is indicative of a real lived experience that encompasses the social, temporal, and cultural contexts of an individual or community (Richardson, 2000).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

An autoethnographer has a high level of power as they construct their stories (Lovell, 2005). However, it is important to be conscious of the representation of other actors in one's story (Couser, 2004). The actors in any story need to be protected in and during the research process (Creswell, 2009), regardless of their level of visibility in the story. This means that all

actors – whether they are active in the foreground or passive in the background – need to be

protected (Morse, 2002). To ensure research is conducted in accordance with ethical

considerations, I have kept in mind informed consent, right to privacy, and protection from harm

(Fontana & Frey, 2000). Acknowledging that ethical dilemmas can occur in research is

important, especially since my identity is disclosed (Chang, 2008). Therefore, without writing

under a pseudonym, the audience may be able to identify different actors in my story. Given that

the events portrayed in my research occurred 7-10 years ago, some actors in my story have been

lost in time and their whereabouts are unknown to me. Consequently, I was not able to get their

informed consent. Instead, to ensure their privacy is respected and protected, I removed or

altered their names and any distinguishing characteristics to protect them from harm.

Furthermore, it is important to note that it was never my intention to portray any of the actors in

a negative or depreciative light. For the actors in my story that can be easily identified (i.e., my

parents), I have received informed consent where they have agreed to be a part of this research

despite the possible risks of participation (i.e., criticism over parenting methods or beliefs)

(Creswell, 2009). Whether I received participant consent or not, I also tasked myself with asking

myself whether certain topics, dialogues, and explanations were pertinent to the research when

including the voices, behaviours, or values of others. As the author of this autoethnography, I

chose to exclude certain vignettes if I felt it would bring harm to the participants in my story,

whether or not their identities were disclosed or undisclosed.

3.6 Data Analysis

The difference between writing an autoethnography and sharing a story is the use of

analysis (Allen, 2006, as cited in Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Therefore the completion of

my autoethnography is not the end; rather, it is only the beginning. Although my

autoethnography has been reworked and re-crafted many times throughout the last two years, the data analysis has remained relatively constant. To analyze and understand the meanings of my autoethnography, I utilized a method similar to coding. Rather than labelling each segment of data, or vignette, with one description, as seen in coding (Charmaz, 2006), I created memos to accompany each vignette. Charmaz (2006) states that memos are important for the research process because they help to analyze your data through the making of comparisons and connections. As such, I utilized memos as a means of coding and to, later, inform themes and sub-themes.

To begin my analysis, I read the whole autoethnography to get an overall feel of the narrative (Charmaz, 2006). Next, I labelled each story with a letter, and read them individually. Reading each vignette individually allowed me to understand the pure essence of each story segment, without any influence from the others. Furthermore, isolating each vignette means that each one is given attention and its unique and diverse messages can be appreciated and used to create distinct memos and, thus, give each subsequent theme various layers and complexities. Once each vignette was read, I recorded its meaning, and any additional thoughts I had (Charmaz, 2006). The memos I wrote included comments about what had happened, why it happened, the vignette's connection to literature, my current perspective as an adult woman, and questions I wanted to answer. However, with many vignettes and lengthy memos written, I began to feel overwhelmed and unsure of how to proceed. From the memos alone, I could acknowledge some emerging themes; however, I needed to reorganize my memos to create themes. Therefore, in order to create themes, I implemented a three-step system. First, I read each memo comment and coded it to summarize its meaning (Charmaz, 2006). Secondly, I created a conceptual map with two major sections: (my) research consistent with current

literature and (my research's) new insights. Once this map was drawn out, I placed each newly developed code into one of the sections. However, the placement of some codes, despite the mutual exclusivity of the two sections, straddled both. For example, one code could be underpinned or informed by current literature (and therefore, consistent with it), but also built upon the literature, thus making it a new insight. The dualistic nature of some codes gave the subsequent themes complexity that enabled them to support and/or refute current or foundational pieces of literature. And thirdly, once each code was placed in one, or both, sections, I began to colour code and group all similar codes together to create themes. When all themes were created, I read each one again.

3.7. Significance of Research

The reasons for conducting research are underscored by the knowledge created and the resulting implications. Aligned with feminism, my research aims to bring about social change for adolescent girls and women involved in sport. Personal accounts and narratives, such as the autoethnography I have written, can be powerful avenues for social change (Madison, 1993) as they evoke a real-life, candid, and emotional depiction of what is being experienced within a specific phenomenon. Not only do I hope my autoethnography elicits a response from my readers to critically reflect on their situations, I chose to purpose autoethnography because of its accessibility. Autoethnographic writing is an accessible form of writing in that it can reach non-academic communities (Berger, 2001). Reaching non-academic communities is especially important because adolescent girls are not found within higher education contexts and it is this population that, perhaps, needs to hear this narrative the most. Simply writing my own story and leaving my reflections on the pages will not bring about social change or justice. Non-academic communities are the local neighbourhoods and community centres where adolescent girls can be

found. Reaching these adolescent girls is best accomplished through my involvement in their

neighbourhoods or recreation spaces as a volunteer or paid employee of a township, municipality

or city. Interacting with them, using the knowledge I gained throughout this process, has enabled

me to be an active supporter and advocate of their sport participation. Being a support and

advocacy system for adolescent girls can help them understand that they can participate in sport

regardless of the societal messages they receive otherwise. In this case, they may be able to resist

gender prescriptions and enjoy a full, active lifestyle with sport as an integral part. Furthermore,

my research can inform sport and recreation programming or become a foundation for

incorporating the needs of girls and women, as users of sport and recreation services, when

organizing and implementing services. Lastly, this text further aims to highlight the reality of

sport – its gender inequity and heterosexism – and in doing so, make policy recommendations to

eradicate such devastating realities. With the completion of this research, I will create an

executive summary of it, highlighting the problematic nature of sport and possible solutions. To

extend its potential impact, the executive summary will be sent to community sport organizations

in the hopes that they use the information to inform the ways in which sport is organized and

conducted in Canada, including the revision of current sport policies.

4.0 My Autoethnography

The Athlete

I eye his movements
My body battles my urges
Desires to leave the splintered bleacher
Longing to run alongside him
His face determined like it should be
His legs fluid, no rustle from the green grass
"Let me play, Coach" I privately yell
Too young for the roster.

Her body slams into mine and I ricochet off her like a pinball. My feet temporarily lose their planting as I reach out for the brick wall to brace against the tumultuous current of bodies. I see the white sheet of paper clearly, but the text is blurry. My shoulder crashes into the girl beside me. The butterflies expand the lining of my stomach with their fluttering wings and my lungs weigh heavy in my chest. I push the girl beside me out of the way, inching closer toward the paper. My palms and soles are clammy. I badly want to see my name on that paper, but what if I don't? How can I look my friends in the eyes when I show up for school daisy fresh while they are sweaty from morning practice? What will John think? He plays soccer really well so what will he think if *his* own little sister can't make the school team? I have to be on that team! I just have to be! In one last push against the crowd, I break free and reach my index finger to the white, crisp paper tacked with silver push-pins… "Keri. F." My lungs rid themselves of the stale air locked inside them as I exhale. I forgot to breathe.

Diffusing, vibrating, rising
To the top from my toes

45

Yellow swirls of gas
Lifting higher and higher
Reaching my T4 and T5
Enclosing them in its aura, they ascend.

My back is straightening
Feeling taller, yet my tearaways haven't shortened
Higher the gas rises
Into my chest and outstretched fingers
Like Midas, everything is turning to gold.

The blob of Lucy's pink and purple wind jacket becomes more refined as she nears me.

"Keri, Keri, You missed school yesterday! Were you sick?"

"Yeah, I had a stomach ache."

"I can't believe you missed school! Ms. Beatty had us do the Greek Olympics and we had to race each other. You should have been there – our team would have won! We needed you!"

Basking in fields of marigold and honey
My facial muscles work, work, work
Underneath my skin, they contract and hold their positions
Dragging the corners of my mouth closer to my ears
Gas reaches my exposed forehead
My body is full of its presence
My skin glowing like zesty lemons
Do I reek of citrus?

Our graduation ceremony is well under way and my butt has been numb for 10 minutes, at least! The orange plastic chair supporting my body is nothing like the couch at home. I

daydream while the principal drones on, finally arriving at the most important part of the ceremony: athletic awards.

"The student who receives the O.A. Birch Award has demonstrated superior athletic skills and has shown passion and dedication for athletics and sport…"

Enough already, we get it.

"…and the winner of the boy's O.A. Birch Award is Samuel Sidorov."

Ignoring the burning sensation filling my palms, I continue clapping for my best friend until my claps become soft echoes. Suddenly, my stomach drops to my knees. I'm surprised he won. Of course, he's as fast as a cheetah, but he wasn't on all of the sports teams. *How could he have won? Is it more about the quality of your athletic skills than the amount of teams you are on?* My stomach slips lower in my body and I forget all about Sammy's achievements. My mind sinks into my own world. *What if I don't get it? Is being on all the teams not good enough? I deserve this award! I* deserve *this award!*

"…and the winner of the girl's O.A. Birch Award is Keri Freeman."

ME! Relief floods my body and my stomach pops back into its rightful place. I walk towards the stage to retrieve my award.

<center>

Sniff, sniff, I have an aura of freshness
But I should, I should
My muscles strengthened
My pace quickened
My passes accurate

</center>

I close my eyes

I love my aura

My fortified heart pumping

Turning out my fragrance

What a beautiful smell!

Falling From the Podium

My crispy skin doesn't mask my glow

My summer sweat doesn't wash it off

Can you see my lemons?

Let me show you what they can do

Let me brew you a glass of lemonade

I feel the car rumble to a stop in our sloping driveway while Dad turns the key in the ignition. Throwing open the door, I hurdle out of car and take the stairs two at a time to the front door. My lungs are gasping for air, the excitement of my first practice still bubbling in my head. Reaching the kitchen, the cold white tiled floor is refreshing against my bare feet. I fill Mom in about my practice.

"…but there's no boys on my team."

"Yes, your team is a girls-only team this year"

"But, why? Did no boys sign up for soccer this year?"

"No, Keri, lots of boys signed up for soccer. You know how the teams are selected, right? All the coaches get together after registration closes and they choose the players for their teams. So, when they were choosing their players, the club owners noticed that no one was picking girls for their teams. They asked the coaches why and they said it was because they didn't want the girls to get hurt."

"We won't get hurt any more than the boys! We may accidently trip, but it's not like we are punching each other in the faces!"

"Well, that's what they said, Keri. That was their reason for not wanting girls on their teams."

"So instead of making them have us on their teams, they just made our own team?"

"I know, it isn't right, but they thought this would be the fairest thing to do. Having an all-girls team means that all of you will be able to play the same amount and you won't have to compete with the boys to play. If the coaches don't want you on their teams, Keri, they won't be playing you."

Do you not like the lemonade?
Do you not like the taste?
Is the acidity too stark a contrast
For your preferred sweet tooth?
Is my blend too exotic for your palate?

"Oh my gawwdd. I bought those sweatpants this weekend too! I can't believe you wore them first, you bitch. They look good, though. Your butt looks great" They giggle.

Who cares if she wore them first? You wear the same clothes anyway so one of you is bound to wear something first. Idiots.

"But did you see Georgia today? Ohmygawd, you have to look at her in French today. She's so….strange. Oh shush, shush. Spencer is coming…. Heeeyy Spencer!"

"Hey ladies! How are you doing this fine, fine afternoon? You want to hang out after school?"

"Sure, we have nothing planned after school!" She sweeps her hair behind her ears.

"Basketball try-outs were announced this morning, you girls gonna be ballers?" he jokes.

"Ha! Don't make me laugh, Spencer. We'll see you after school."

Licking my lips, I attempt to seal my mouth shut and keep my thoughts to myself. My rusty locker pleads for WD40 as I shut the dented door and fasten my Dudley combination lock. Hearing intelligent conversation once again in the hallways, I turn on my heels and notice Spencer is still in the area.

"Hi Spencer!"

"Oh hey Keri..." Spencer trails off and looks down the hallway. Following his gaze with my own eyes, I see the giggly girls arm-in-arm disappearing into a classroom. Smirking, I nod to myself while my backpack turns to lead.

"Okay, well, bye." I half smile and turn to walk in the opposite direction.

"Yeah, see ya"

<div align="center">

The blaring light flashes in my eyes

A warning

A message for me to hear

A siren twirling around and around

Is something burning?

Is someone hurt?

Is something wrong?

The light violently flickers its answer

But what is it? What is wrong?

-.-----..- (You)

Me? How can that be?

.-..-------.- .-.-.---..--.-..(Look around)

</div>

I am a student like everyone else, aren't I?

-.--.... .--.-.. -.--- (Yes and No)

Yes and No? Why aren't I like everyone else?

.---..-...- .-..-------.- .-.-.---..--.-.. (Just look around)

Wrapping my tired hand around my grey and black gym uniform, I yank the cotton garments from my rusty locker and descend the stairs. My feet are heavy on the concrete slabs as I pass the giggling duo.

He can hang out with them all he wants but don't expect me to say "yes" when he wants to play on the weekends. He has chosen them over me and that's the way things will be from now on… but how could he? We were good friends. At least I thought we were. What have I done for this to happen? Did I do something wrong? What have I done to deserve this? What did I do? Did I hurt his feelings? How could I have hurt his feelings? When could I have done it?

Throwing the lightweight material over my left shoulder, I finally reach the basement and step onto the rubberized gym floor. My shoulders depress and my thoughts fade as I walk into the change room.

Multi-coloured polka dots invade my aura
Splotches of deep purple mingle
With flares of red
A harmonious co-operation, sharing their presence
Yet combating against my resident colour
Growing, the spots monopolize my head
Becoming hostile, turning Grey.

Pixelated with blurry edges
The Grey descends upon my T4 and T5
Gripping them in their new chromatic dyad

Caving like weak soldiers, my spine arcs
My feet, a closer friend

Aqua blues devour the purple flecks
At the feel of worn leather and polyester
Only to return
A slim contrast to the Grey
Squashing my orchard
My lemons are dying.

The orange basketball hurtles into my open palms and I grasp both hands around the bumpy leather. I pivot keeping one foot in place and begin dribbling the ball with my right hand a few paces closer to the basket. A barrier of silence surrounds me only letting the voices of my teammates and coach flood in. Spectators line the court, their mouths opening and closing but no sound reaches my ears.

"C'mon, girls, keep the passing lanes open. Keep your feet moving!"

"FOUL! Ref, call the foul!"

"Nice pass!"

We overturn the ball and go on the defensive.

"LESBIAN!"

My barrier shatters into a million little pieces and their voices, volumes and words flood into my ears. A cacophony of noise deafens my auditory canal and the directions from my coach go unheard.

Who said that? Where did that come from? I try to scan the crowd, matching the guilty face with the voice. But there are no guilty faces to be found. *Maybe they're talking about me. Maybe they're talking about another player on my team or even the other team. Or maybe he was just trying to be a prick. I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I play basketball, so what? Why does that make me a lesbian? How does that make me a lesbian? Ugh. Stop thinking, Keri, get your head back in the game. Focus on the game!!!*

I can't focus on the game right now. I signal to Coach to take me off the court.

Perspiration glides down my spine
A path of shivers in its wake
Draining my colour, a rainbow at my feet

Swift, opaque movements
Light tricks
Their 20/20 vision betrays them.

The Lemming

My tall glass emptied

Only ice to keep its memory

Refilled, the ice cold on my tongue

The lemonade sour on my taste buds

Is this brew expired?

Too many lemons for this batch?

Or has my palate transformed?

My face scrunched

No more lemonade for me, thank you.

The raspy voice over the morning school announcements broadcasts the junior girls'

basketball team try-outs. I ignore the time and date given. Uncomfortable and fearful of previous

allegations for my basketball playing, coupled with newfound visions of muscular men pounding

down the court with aggressively angry, wide-eyed contorted faces make basketball easy to

dismiss. Sinking a few free throws in gym class, Ms. Schrader approaches me and my classmate

"She's good, isn't she?" Ms. Schrader says to Amina, and then turns to me.

"Why didn't you join the basketball team?"

"I missed the try-outs." I lie.

Dangling, my feet sway in the breeze

From South to North they travel

The cold brass bar digging into my flesh

Unbalanced, my body in the South

My body in the putrid yellow glow of marigold.

Perpetual pink sunrises fill the North sky

Inviting me into their allure

Praises echo the beauty of the view
Its rays warm on my cheek

"Ahh, much better" Rayne sighs as she walks over to the mirror to fix her ponytail. Her shorts are snug against her thigh. I glance down at my gym shorts: loose, slightly faded and slightly above my knee. I finish tying my right shoe and notice that almost everyone is finished dressing and half of the girls have shorter shorts than the standard knee-length measurements.

"You coming, Keri? Practice will begin soon!"

"I'll be there in a minute, just need to go to the bathroom really quickly"

"Okay, don't be long! And remember, there may be some spectators" she winks.

When I finish in the bathroom, the change room is empty.

Yesss!

I walk over to the mirror and imitate Rayne. Folding the elastic band three times, my shorts gradually become snugger. Shrinking in size, they expose more freshly shaved leg.

My fitted jeans, no resistance against the cold metal
I slide toward the sunrise
My cheeks dusted in rose blush
Unbalanced, my body crossing over to the North.

The phone's sudden piercing rings compete against the dialogue from the blaring TV.

"Hello? …Oh, hi Sergio, how are you?" Dad pauses, listening. "Okay, thanks Sergio, I'll let her know. Take care."

Hanging up the phone, he turns to me.

"Sergio is coaching the rep soccer team this summer and wants you on the team. They have a practice on Thursday night at the Hangar, so if you want to go, I can drive you."

Nodding, I give Dad my best poker face. My face expressionless, yet, my body screams for a session of jumping, squealing, and fist-pumping.

He wants me on his team! He wants ME! What a dream come true!

*****

"Have you thought about the rep team, Keri?"

"I'm too tired to go tonight. I just don't think I can manage it" I lie, again.

"Oh, okay. Well, if you aren't up to going, then we can stay home and take it easy. I'll call Sergio and let him know not to expect you."

Body in the North, Heart in the South
The brightest yellow at its core
Expanding in dirtied tone
Trapped under my dermis
Carnations and cherry blossoms blooming

My black-rimmed magnetic mirror slips down the inside of my locker door as I peer into it. The thin lines of my brown eyeliner are soft against the metallic gold sweeping across my eyelid. My eyelashes are lengthened by Maybelline. Batting my eyes one last time, I reach into the bottom on my locker and withdraw my chemistry textbook.

"Ready for class, Keri?"

"Yeah, let's go"

"Don't you want to say goodbye to your *betrothed*?"

I look at my slightly crumpled picture of Justin Timberlake taped below my mirror.

"No need, I'll see him again in an hour" I wink.

> Reseeded, my garden
> Flush and eager
> Taking the water from the native plants
> Stems growing from my ankles to my knees to my waist
> Careful not to crush the petals, I walk
> Their perfume filling my pores

My youth group ascends on the green luscious grass for a special outing this evening. Bringing up the rear with my good friend, Cora, I see the baseball diamond at the foot of the hill. I guess we are playing baseball tonight. Sitting on the bench chatting with Cora, the team's captain calls me up to bat.

"Open your hands up more, Keri. For better grip."

I open my hands and watch the ball soar towards me. Weakly, I hit the ball and it dribbles towards the pitcher, coming to a full stop in front of him. I stand still and look toward my team's bench,

"Could I have run on that?" I call over to my teammates.

"Yeah, you can run on anything you hit"

"Oh, okay" I nod. I already knew the answer but I didn't want to admit it.

Tipping further

The rose blush turning into sunburns

Radiating into my pores

Invading the grooves in my brain

Permeating into my reason

Unbalanced, yes

But not lop-sided

Not off-centre.

Rebirth

I know you miss it, Keri. But this is a good thing. A good thing!! This is what's

best for you. Don't you want what's best for you?

I laugh but it does not mean that I am happy.
I smile and play your card games
And talk about last night's episode.

I sit in class thoughtless
A blank mind inside my skull
A black canvas to match my soul.

My body is lethargic and my mind parallels it
Not wanting it to feel alone
"We don't need any more loneliness in this body" it thinks
My friends are all around me
Surface level creatures
They do not see the shade I feel
I must hide it well.

"Oh, I just yawned" I say when my eyes get wet
I hide my lies well too.
My eyes have become broken, mobile wells
Leaking through the stone
Small streams roll down the olive-skinned road

Why is this happening?
Why do my eyes spring new leaks?
I sit not knowing, feeling out of body

The weight of my body is pulling me deeper into this chair
The uselessness of my education brings my eyes to the window
The dark clouds roll in to my mind
But I sit in silence.

Feeling the lyrics of "Breaking the Habit" flood into my ears, I scan the cafeteria. Groupings of friends and acquaintances fill the round tables and beige plastic chairs. Inaudible sounds escape from their moving mouths and chewing jaws. Cecily steps through the double doors, hand-in-hand with her boyfriend.

There's Queen Bee.

I watch her take a seat at her usual table.

How does she do it? How does she balance it all? How can she get the highest grades, always be at practices but have time to have a boyfriend?

I alternate my sightlines between Cecily and Braedon. I work through the cacophony of thoughts creeping into my mind.

She's very athletic, yet feminine at the same time.
  She has a boyfriend.
    She's athletic and feminine
      She balances it well.
        But it seems so natural
          She makes it seem natural
            Maybe it can be natural?
              Maybe you can be both?
                Maybe you don't have to choose

How could you, Keri?

Look at her go, Keri. Look at her!! Don't turn your eyes away. She's running. Did you feel that swish of air as she passed you? I bet she's a soccer player. She's a soccer player while you aren't. She's playing sports while you aren't. She's an athlete and you aren't. She's better than you, Keri. She's stronger than you.

You lost yourself, Keri. You lost yourself to become…what? A cookie-cutter? A follower? I thought you were better than that. You stupid idiot. You're a pathetic idiot.

Shut up, shut up, shut up! I don't want to hear you anymore, okay? I know what I did! What do you want me to say? You're right? That I made a mistake? I made a mistake, okay? Are you happy now? I'm lost, alright. I don't need you telling me this anymore! I know, I know. Please just leave me alone. I beg you.

Actively reforming, reshaping and remaking

I am new. I have a new me.

Settling in

Feeling ready, excited, good.

Good?

No. Not good.

This isn't right.

Empty.

Nothing there. Nothing felt.

Simmering, thinking, feeling.

Settling out.

It's missing. I am missing.

Where am I? Who am I?

What have I become?

Carved into a new being

The grooves not quite right

Some are out of place
Some cut a little too deep.
Are they permanent?
Semi-permanent?
Can they be undone?
Can the pieces carved out be put back?
Will I find the right glue?
Can I put myself back together again?
Will I ever be whole again?

Will Nike or Under Armour put me back together again?
Will my Saucony shoes forge my path?
Will their support tip me back to being Me again?
Or will the façade be good enough?
Will they see me and say "She's an athlete!"
Will their appraisals make me complete again?

Holding, grasping, hanging on for dear life
Of my miniscule shred of her and my lost Me
But is she still there?
Can I find her? Will she be the same?

Please forgive me, I was foolish.
I am not better without you.
Come back and be in my soul
Come out from the darkness where I hid you
Move back into my heart
Please come home.

Finding My Way Back
Size 10, 12, 14, 16

My gut has grown.

My thunder thighs roar when I walk.

My chin has doubled.

Fat cells insulate my core,

A thick layer between my abs and my skin,

My shirts are stretched.

Encased is my heart,

Squeezing, squeezing, squeezing.

My face twitches, my hand rests over my pumper.

I am not breathing, the stale breath locked in my lungs

It hurts too much.

My brain synapses are flickering red

With anger and with pain

Pew. Pew. Pew.

They fire.

Red, Red, Red is all I see.

Step. Breath. Ouch. Pause.

Step-step, Exhale. Squeeze.

Breath, Breath. Squeeze. Ouch.

A concrete Everest completed.

Its grip on my heart loosens

But its burned into my memory.

Its grip on my lungs loosen

And I take in more oxygen.

Elevators to become my saviour.

Crunch. Grind.

My femur is a mortar,

My tibia a pestle.

My body feels its grinding

My ears hear their work.

My bones are to become dust.

Pew. Pew. Pew.

My synapses explode with red stars

A galaxy of everlasting light

And a sea of tears rolling down my cheek.

I am whimpering with stale air in my lungs again.

My legs encased in immovable casts

Unmoving, unwilling and unable.

A statue with a soul.

One step and the dust multiplies

Ouch. Step. Limp.

Dust, dust, dust.

My engorged frame on my fragile joint

Give me my crutches!

Red stars in a red galaxy.

Niagara Falls running down my cheek.

Paralyzed.

My spirit withering.

The couch, my second saviour.

"Come on, Keri. You got it, one more"

I hold my breath, going against her instructions, and push my planked body away from the rubber floor. Quivering, my arms hold my body in its position as I lock my elbows to secure the completed rep.

"Good job, Keri. Take 60 then one last set"

My heart is thumping against my ribs, my mouth is crying out for hydration. The gym is quiet yet the air is humid and sticky. I know my arms and legs will be jelly in an hour but stiff tomorrow. It doesn't faze me.

Swirling, my body is a basin
Of colours, tones and shades
Soaked up from the puddle at my feet
Real, physical movements

The Grey, taking on the others
My internal colour wheel reincarnated
A constant pattern of dots
Illuminating my organs, radiating in my brain

Fighting off the winter rot
The peels are thickening and brightening
In harmony
In cahoots
A dyad with the cherry blossoms
Tyranny, no more.

The summer rain has made the diamond wet and the gravel slippery under my rubber treads. The white metal bat is heavy in my hands as I take my place to the left of home plate. My heart is racing again, and the butterflies are ferocious. A few weeks into the season and I still can't shake the nervousness.

Wait for your pitch.

I grip the bat tighter and dig my left toe deeper into the gravel. The underhand pitch lobs the yellow ball into an arc at a steady pace.

This is my pitch.

I keep my eye on the ball and swing the bat.

<center>

Black jackets, Warrior emblems
Hockey, football, figure skating, cheerleading
Stitched elegantly and perfectly underneath
Proud athletes

My paths cross theirs
Strangers
Sharing the cement roadways
Although, perhaps, not unlike

A shred of hope
Dangerous, necessary, foundational
Moving my feet
Heading for the day I no longer wish
That was me

My final destination I do not know
The journey ahead I cannot see
But like Dorothy
I must follow my own yellow brick road.

</center>

5.0 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the gendered and heteronormative sporting context for adolescent girls, particularly within the contexts of recreational and school sport. Autoethnography enabled me to use my own experience to provide insights into such contexts. In particular, through autoethnography I demonstrated the relationship between gender, heteronormativity, and attrition from sports. My experience of performing femininity stemmed from societal and peer pressure to display appropriate gender and sexual orientation for my biological sex. For example, femininity and heterosexuality was pressed upon me through gender socialization and the male (heterosexual) gaze as a means of evaluation and measurement. Combined with the societal conflict of femininity and athleticism, I felt compelled to negotiate my sport participation. In this section, I discuss my findings in relation to the literature on gender, heteronormativity, and attrition in the sport context. In particular, I discuss the implications of the social construction of gender, gender intensification in adolescence (and the roles of peers), and heterosexual athlete negotiation of the lesbian stigma.

5.1 Social Construction of Gender

Young girls, by way of society and its agents, are taught what it means to be feminine and the ways in which to accomplish it. The teaching of gender illustrates that gender is not innate, but rather socially constructed (Butler, 1999). That is, people are not born with a gender. Instead, gender is developed and shaped based upon ideologies that dictate appropriate behaviour for women and men. The development and shaping of gender ideologies is seen in the social construction of gender. This development of gender is based on assumptions of the social world acquired through observation, resulting in perceptions becoming knowledge (Burr, 2003).

Therefore, the gender divisions of society do not necessarily denote real divisions but are treated

as such (Burr, 2003). The treatment of gender as a real division is legitimized by the popular

dyad of biological sex. Gender is constructed by the social processes between individuals and

their interactions (Burr, 2003). Specifically, when individuals interact our world and its concepts

and categories are constructed and sustained (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). The constant creation

and maintenance of gender make its perceived categories given and fixed (Berger & Luckmann,

1991). Consequently, gender becomes "a tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and

sustain discrete and polar genders" and become credible through interactions (Butler, 1990, p. 5).

The perceived polarity of gender does not simply operate under the notion that there are two

equal genders. Rather, gender has been constructed so that one is superior/dominant while the

other is inferior/subordinate. The presence of a superior and inferior gender illustrates the

relationality of gender, specifically between femininity and masculinity. The relationality of

femininity and masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) stems from the patriarchal society

where men are valued higher and deemed superior, while women are the inferior Other

(Schippers, 2007). Being the Other means that women are to seen as the opposite of men, as

"excess or lack" (Hennessey, 1993, p. 24). Moreover, the power labels of superior masculinity

and inferior femininity defines the relationality between the two as a hierarchy, and deems the

relationship complementary (Schippers, 2007). Further still, the complementary of the

strong/weak relationship legitimizes male dominance over women (Schippers, 2007). The

manifestation of masculinity's dominance over femininity can be an underpinning of masculine

characteristics, such as strong, while femininity is prescribed with fragile or weak. With these

conceptual frameworks already established in society (Burr, 2003), gender is applied to

individuals and done so at the beginning of an individual's life when her/his parents determine biological sex.

Parents gender their newborns through dress, names, and toys to demonstrate whether the child is a girl or boy (Lorber, 1994). This gendering process by parents, themselves, occurs because parents are gendered and do not want to be asked constantly whether their child is a girl or boy (Lorber, 1994), or because they feel pressure to raise appropriately gendered children. This pressure stems from feelings of accountability to others (those who will assess the child's gender), in order to shape their children's gender to the traditional notions of gender (Kane, 2006). That is, biological males are gendered into masculinity, while biological females are gendered into femininity. In relation to girls, the social construction of femininity, as a subset of the social construction of gender, begins at a young age as well. Although children have been disproved to be "mini adults" (Postman, 1985), the ideology of womanhood is often applied to young girls. It is important to note that ideology is a way to organize a collective or group that illustrates the group's social, moral, and political values, which then, informs behaviours; however, ideology can mask reality making an ideology a set of stereotypes that plague that group (Schwandt, 2007). Therefore, the ideology of womanhood can be seen as a manifestation of oppressive stereotypes. This means that when parents gender their children, it is possible that they are gendering their children in stereotypical ways. In relation to the gendering of daughters, parents may gender their daughters in specific ways to meet such stereotypes. For example, the dressing of girls in feminine colours (i.e., pinks), styles of dress (i.e., skirts, frilly socks) and hairstyles, as well as, calling her "baby girl", "big girl", and "princess" show the daughter that she is, in fact, a girl and models appropriate clothing and self-identification. The selection of toys like dolls or kitchen sets over cars and action figures gender her to be caring, compassionate and

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warm (Kane, 2006). The gendering of children by parents demonstrates how children are socialized into gender. Gender socialization can also happen through sport (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Enrolling boys in hockey and karate, for example, and, girls into ballet, dance, and gymnastics reinforces ideas of appropriate sport and leisure. Furthermore, using different language to describe daughters ("delicate", "weaker", "less attractive", and "softer") versus sons ("strong", "better coordinated", and "more alert") can socialize her into internalizing such attributes and incorporating them into their gender schemas (Fagot, Rodgers, & Leinbach, 2000; Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). The deliberate gendering of daughters is also accompanied by the child's observation of her mother and father. Different parenting behaviours of mothers and fathers can model gendered behaviours for children, in which they will often try to emulate (Lorber, 1994). Accordingly, parents and their parenting practice reflect and are major players in the social construction of gender.

The social construction of gender differs for girls and boys, particularly in the policing of gender boundaries. For boys, they are policed heavier and at a younger age (Kite. Deaux, & Haines, 2008). For girls, some parents are not as stringent on traditional notions of gender and allow them to decide which elements of femininity and/or masculinity they wish to pursue. The autonomy given to young girls can result in tomboyism. As a cultural phenomenon, tomboyism is demonstrated in young children and adolescent girls who choose traditional masculine dress and activities like rough and tumble play, and sports (Carr, 1998; Malcolm, 2003). As a young girl, I was a self-identified tomboy. Tomboys are often thought of as "pseudo-boys" (Carr, 1998); however, this description is problematic. By labelling my tomboyism similar to being a boy, it reinforces the gender binary. Instead of embracing that girls can stretch the boundaries and redefine femininity by participating in masculine styles of expressions and endeavours, they

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are typecast into a different gender. The placement from one gender to the other does not seek to break the binary and gender's perceived fixed categories; rather, it supports the stereotypes of masculinity, while supporting what femininity is not. However, the mere presence of tomboyism, specifically my integration of what I perceived to be masculine traits and activities into my behavioural repertoire and identity, challenges the social construction of femininity. The lack of "hold" femininity had on me can be attributed to the leniency of gender non-conformity for myself as a young girl. An example of this leniency is seen in the way my parents did not deliberately gender me to steer me towards femininity. Rather, they let me autonomously decide what I wanted to do. As my mother posits, "We let you do whatever you wanted. We wanted you to experience lots of different things" (D. Freeman, personal communication, November 17, 2013). Subsequently, my parents praised and rewarded me for my efforts and successes on the soccer field. The support garnered from my parents, and by extension coaches and school (evidenced through the winning of the athletic award in elementary school), cemented my athleticism as privileged. As my own support system, they gave me an advantage because they encouraged and assisted me in my athletic pursuits but also praised me for my efforts and accomplishments. Moreover, I was free to pursue sport or physically active leisure because I know I was not going to be reprimanded. I had household chores I was responsible for but I did not have to contend with greater household, familial, or childcare responsibilities that would constrict or eliminate my leisure time. Rather, the acceptance my parents, specifically, displayed for my athletic behaviours, and gender non-conformity, is consistent with Kane's (2006) study examining parental responses to children's gender non-conformity. In her study, parents accepted their daughter's gender-crossing behaviours and perceived them as positive, demonstrating that girls have an easier time pursuing non-traditional pursuits than boys. The

praise and ease given to girls supports Galambos, Almeida and Petersen's (1990) assertion that the attractiveness of masculinity or masculine traits and activities lies in the devaluing of femininity and the recognition that it holds a subordinate status.

Nearing the end of childhood, I began to acknowledge a gender inequality between myself and my male peers (Neff, Cooper, & Woodruff, 2007). As a young girl in late childhood, I sensed that my male friends were somehow higher than me on an unknown ladder. For example, they were always asked to help carry bins of recess equipment, or chairs and desks when re-arranging the organization of the classroom. I resented the teachers for asking the boys to carry things when I knew I was capable of doing the same things. Moreover, not being asked to carry heavier objects inferred that girls, including me, were weaker. As such, I realized that there was some kind of advantage for being a boy. Equally noticed was the ways in which some of my female peers behaved. The "girly girls" did not play sport and were focussed on their clothing and hair. Feeling like this was a waste of their time, I rejected their interests and them. Wanting the same advantage as the boys, as well as, rejecting the "girly girl" interests and behaviours, I resisted prescribed gender roles, such as passivity and an interest in my appearance or fashion. However, my tomboy lifestyle and resistance to femininity was not static and eventually changed over time (Shaw, 2001). Although, the leniency of my gender nonconformity afforded me a positive space to pursue the sport and leisure activities I was interested in, it constricted as I entered into adolescence (Carr, 1998). The constriction of my agency demonstrates that the policing of femininity is not linear within the social construction of femininity. To this end, as a young girl, my autonomy and freedom to show gender agency was limited to childhood, which proved to have several implications as I moved into adolescence.

5.2 Adolescent Negotiations of Gender

Autonomy, or self-rule, is defined as "the rights of individuals to manage their own affairs" (May, 1994, p. 139). Despite the rights to live one's life accordingly, environmental or external forces can influence behaviour. It has been debated whether actions, as a result of the assessment of the external forces, are considered voluntary or involuntary (May, 1994). Although some scholars assert that external forces must not and do not cause involuntary behaviours, others suggest that feelings of fear, for example, can cause individuals to unconsciously alter their behaviour without control over the situation (McKeon, 2009). For example, adolescence is a time when gender tends to intensify reflecting feminine and masculine behaviour sets for both girls and boys, respectively. This intensification is found in the gender intensification hypothesis.

Previous research has debated the existence of the gender intensification hypothesis; however, the current research supports its existence. As a young girl, before entering adolescence, I did not perceive or feel any pressure to be feminine. My tomboy status alone illustrates my freedom to do gender the way I wanted. Given the support this research provides to the gender intensification hypothesis, in turn, it refutes the assertion that gender becomes more fluid as children age (Martin & Ruble, 2010; McHale, Kim, Whiteman, & Crouter, 2004). Rather, in my environment, it seemed to have the opposite effect; gendered beliefs about girls and boys expanded and became more sophisticated (Sinno & Killen, 2009). Like the social construction of gender, gendered beliefs that underscore gender intensification are disseminated through social interactions, including others' ideas, practices, expectations, and conversations (Burr, 2003). With the onset of puberty and the increasing importance of peers in adolescence, it seems only natural that peers primarily facilitate the social interactions needed for gender

intensification to take place and is best explained using Cooley's (1902) theory of the Looking Glass Self.

5.2.1 Looking Glass Self

The Looking Glass Self as coined by Cooley (1902) positions an individual's social reference within the eyes of her peers. She, in turn, sees herself as she imagines the ways her peers see her and consequently self-feelings are elicited in her based on those imagined judgements. Adolescence is a time when girls "interpret and integrate" their own experiences with the experiences of others to form an "overall assessment" of their self (Reid, Cooper, & Banks, 2008). The inclusion of others' viewpoints allows for adolescents to see "social categories from multiple standpoints" (Halim, Ruble & Amodio, 2011, p. 935). To this end, the understanding of where one person's social reference lies is a result of the culmination of internal and external appraisals. Internally, I was proud of my athletic accomplishments and prided myself as being strong, athletic, and dominant. Nevertheless, the external appraisals I perceived from my peers and their resulting behaviours did not match my own. Rather, as my autoethnography reveals, my perception of how others viewed me as an adolescent girl was athletic, masculine, unattractive, and lesbian. Through my peers, I started to see my own reflection and appearance as they saw me. Consequently, their appraisals superseded my own. My response (taking on the perspectives of others) supports Erikson's (1968) claim that adolescents are "morbidly preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others" (p.128). In the context of adolescence, the "others" include both female and male peers. McHale, Kim, Dotterer, Crouter, and Booth (2009) identify same-sex peer groups as one major avenue of gender socialization; however, my male peers proved to be of greater influence. Consistent with patriarchy, the social experience and choices of adolescent girls are not just being evaluated and

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valued by other girls but rather they are being judged by boys and their criteria (Hirschmann, 2002). Such watching and judgement from male peers speaks to the male gaze.

5.2.2 The Male Gaze

The male gaze is an evaluative observance of girls' and women's bodies (Slater & Tiggeman, 2011). Highlighted as a means for boys and men to sexually objectify girls and women, the male gaze turns girls' and women's bodies into sex objects (Calogero, 2004). This objectification evaluates their physical attractiveness (Roberts & Gettman, 2004) and promotes appearance as an important element for femininity. The promotion of appearance and being physically attractive is a way that the male gaze polices femininity and disciplines girls' and women's bodies (Valentine, 2000). The male gaze begins to operate in adolescence because entry into adolescence is also an entrance into a "heterosexual gender system of teens" (Kane, 2006, p. 158), where romantic and sexual relationships begin to develop (Miller & Benson, 1999). As such, the male gaze is also a means to encourage and cultivate heterosexuality (citation). The cold shoulder I experienced from my male peers and "friend" could be one way in which they determine a potential romantic or sexual mate for themselves. As an adolescent tomboy, I was not seen as a viable mate because of my lack of femininity, and thus, complementary status. Such a dismissal impacted my self-confidence. Becoming unhappy with my lower status while wanting to be a part of the "dominant peer culture", I began to self-objectify (Valentine, 2000, p. 264). By doing so, I thought about myself and my body from another's perspective rather than my own (Huebner & Frederickson, 1999). In particular, self-objectification focuses on physical attributes, including sexual appeal (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005). As such, I became more aware of my bodily appearance, including what I wore, to craft a

"successful heterosexual feminine identity" (Valentine, 2000, p. 264) while repositioning myself in a higher social standing.

The male gaze transcends to girls and women as they become critics and judges of their own and each other's bodies (Davis, 1993). The judging of girls' and women's bodies results from the internalization of the male gaze (LaCelle-Peterson, 2008) and is measured against the "culturally defined image of beauty" (i.e., thin, tall, long-limbed, flowing hair, and narrow face [Gimlin, 2002]) (Bullock, 2002, p. 188). In addition to judging other's bodies, girls and women are often policed by other woman to ensure that conformity to the ideal standard of beauty occurs (Toerien, Wilkinson, & Choi, 2004). For example, Rayne's suggestion that (male) spectators may be watching our volleyball practice indicates that she was interested in my ability to be physically attractive in the eyes of prospective spectators. Although her actions were a form of policing, rather than overt criticism, it further illustrates females' embodiment of the male gaze and beauty standards (LaCelle-Peterson, 2008). Because of this, the new heterosexual feminine identity I was crafting for myself was built on what my male peers liked but also pleasing to my female peers. It can be argued that the ideal standards of beauty my male peers held were a result of the social construction ideology of womanhood. Therefore, the femininity I was about to enact was based on feminine stereotypes.

5.2.3 Gender Stereotypes and Performances

Being a feminine girl meant that I needed to act differently than how I had been in the past. My tomboyism did not meet the needs of the heterosexual system I had entered and did not afford me any heterosexual attention. Instead, in this new environment, femininity became the rule that needed to be followed (Sroufe, Bennet, Englund, Urban, & Shulman, 1993). Rather than being strong and dominant, like I was accustomed to, I started to accept a subordinate status and

hide the (athletic) skills and knowledge I had to appear passive (Reid, Cooper, & Banks, 2008). Continuing to follow the faces, bodies and behaviours of my gender conforming female peers, I became more aware, and even critical, of my physical appearance. The importance of physical appearance and attractiveness is a central pillar within the social construction of femininity (Silverman, 1997). To appear pretty and dainty (Cejka & Eagly, 1999), I began wearing lip gloss and brightly coloured hair clips. Shortly after, I moved into more feminine territory by wearing heavier eye make-up, straightening my long hair, and decorating my ears with dangling earrings. My physical appearance could not be completely upheld when I was sweaty from soccer practice in the mornings. The inconsistency between my sweaty body and my attempt at femininity was underscored by the incongruence of femininity and sport/athletic participation (Clément-Guillotin & Fontayne, 2011). To fulfill the feminine stereotypes, I began to shift from athlete (undesirable trait) to spectator (desirable trait). My newfound importance of femininity as a way of being gradually ousted my love for sport, and I began to withdraw.

The enacting of these feminine stereotypes demonstrated my new gender performance. A gender performance is the active doing of choices and decisions made about ourselves that demonstrates our femininity, masculinity, or a combination of both. Specifically, it is the mundane, repeated styles of bodily movements, gestures, and enactments that show an individual's gender (Butler, 1988). The repetitive nature of a gender performance is a re-enactment of socially established meanings that an individual has internalized and performs externally, or publicly (Butler, 1990). Given that femininity is often associated with physical appearance, my feminine performance included the regular application of make-up because it meant that I was a (budding) woman. My gender performance was constrained by my strategic plans to maintain the appropriate gender and sexual orientation ascribed to my biological sex

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(Butler, 1990). Moreover, trying to maintain femininity was especially important for performing within the gender binary because gender performances have punitive consequences, especially for those who do not conform (Butler, 1988; Kite. Deaux, & Haines, 2008). The threat of punishment as a result of gender nonconformity refutes previous research that states that gender performances are optional (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Given the social nature of gender, performances, quite like a play, are observed, judged, and critiqued by the audience. To make the audience approve of the performance, elements of it need to be pleasing to such audience and align with their preferences and values. As an adolescent girl, who played various sports, I did not only have to perform my femininity off the playing field, but on it as well. The reasons for doing so stemmed from having to further maintain the gender binary, and attempting to avoid the beliefs of female athletes who ignore the femininity/athletic disparity.

5.3 Heterosexual Athletes Negotiating the Lesbian Stigma

The descriptions applied to lesbian girls and women vary; however, there are stereotypes or preconceived notions of what lesbians look like. Descriptors can include "butch", "masculine", "manly", "tomboy", "short hair and Birkenstocks". But another stereotype is "athletic". This stereotype stems from the automatic connection between athleticism and lesbianism (Cahn, 1994), especially for masculine-typed sports. The gender-typing of sport categorizes each sport into a "female" or "male" description based on the physicality/bodily contact needed to perform and its aesthetic nature (Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). As such, sports that require more physicality, use of force, and bodily contact were labelled as masculine, while sports that necessitate grace, beauty, and an overall aesthetic appeal were deemed feminine (Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000). Therefore, when females pursue masculine typed sport, they are committing gender nonconformity and exhibiting masculine behaviours, which spark questions

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about her sexuality. The questioning of sexual identity and sexual orientation for female athletes has sprung out of unfulfilled conventional behaviours or appearances for girls and women (George, 2010). Historically, it was believed that sport has "masculinizing effects" on girls and women (Klasovec, 1995). The masculinizing effects on girls and women were thought to result in acquiring the sexual appetite and aggression of men, such that they would begin to seek out a man's normative sexual desire and become attracted to other women (Cahn, 1993). The questioning and suspicion of sexual deviance has substantial hold on the athletes because they feel compelled to respond. Literature has suggested that all women (of any sexual orientation) experience this questioning and the intent of this assumption is the same for all women (Sartore & Cunningham, 2008). To this end, the pejorative and derogatory uses of the lesbian label seek to devalue all women as viable athletes regardless of their orientation and preferences. The devaluation of women as athletes is further seen in the application of the lesbian stigma, which reflects contempt on girls and women "who stretch the boundaries" of prescribed gender roles and behaviours of femininity (Blinde & Taub, 1992, p. 522). Given the antithesis of femininity and athleticism, girls and women who participate in sport and/or masculine sports are seen as deviant and receive less power, status, and prestige (Anderson, 2002; Herek, 2007). Although the use of the lesbian label and stigma is utilized on all women with similar intentions, women respond to this accusation differently. Previous research conducted on the lesbian stigma has been studied only with lesbian athletes. Conversely, this research aims to address the gap in the literature by demonstrating my negotiation and response to the lesbian stigma from a heterosexual perspective.

First, to understand the responses by heterosexual women to the lesbian stigma, we must seek to understand how they perceive and understand a stigmatized and marginalized identity.

Heterosexual adolescent girls embody a valued and "natural" identity, which they benefit from because society has positioned heterosexuality as the norm (Griffin & Harro, 1997). However, when they engage in sport and are labelled as lesbians, they confront a stigmatized identity that is new to them and may not be able to handle. For example, individuals who are stigmatized regularly can develop coping strategies that negotiate or diminish the stigma felt. If individuals are not stigmatized regularly, they may not have the coping strategies or skills in place. Being labelled with a stigmatized identity can produce negative affect (Goffman, 1963) and drive her to negotiate this threat in order to return to her equilibrium. Stigmatized identities are threats because they are identities that are rejected and discredited by society (Goffman, 1963). When I first encountered the reality of my athleticism and the associated stigma, I was surprised and threatened.

For me, heterosexuality was a social role that needed to be performed. Hearing the spectator holler "LESBIAN!" was not a question of potentially being "outed" by others and eventually admitting to a same-sex attraction. Instead, it was a question of being "wrongly accused" and labelled with a stigmatized identity. It threatened the positive appraisals and benefits from adhering to heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the assumption that there are only two genders (based on opposing biological sex) and the sexual attraction between the two genders is natural and acceptable (Kitzinger, 2009). The naturality of the sexual attraction between women and men only seeks to strengthen their assumed binary and continue to be the way in which girls and women are measured and evaluated (Myers & Raymond, 2010). To this end, heterosexuality is naturalized and for girls and women to achieve femininity is to achieve heterosexuality. However, simply knowing I was heterosexual was not enough; instead, my heterosexuality needed to be acknowledged, accepted, and positively appraised by others. This

means, to be feminine I needed to be "sexually attractive to men" (Jackson, 2006, p. 152). To adhere to this principle is to adhere to emphasized femininity – one form of performing femininity (Connell, 1987). Accordingly, emphasized femininity can be thought of as an exaggerated form of femininity that places boy's/men's desires over girls'/women's (Kimmel & Aronson, 2008), as well as, define girls and women in relation to the "heterosexual market" (Thorne, 1993, p. 170) which further dichotomizes gender and sexuality. Placing the desires of my male peers above mine, to prove my femininity, heterosexuality, and viability as a potential romantic partner, I subscribed to the heterosexual market and my place within in. Compliant to patriarchy and as products of patriarchy, I accepted that I needed to fulfil the desires of my male peers (Connell, 1987). Operating under uncontested knowledge of gender and femininity, I blindly followed what I has witnessed and heard, and employed several strategies to perform heterosexuality and avoid the lesbian stigma.

5.3.1. Performing Heterosexuality in a Heterosexist Context

To avoid the lesbian stigma, I employed various strategies to perform femininity on and off the playing field. My performance off the field has been discussed as a means to demonstrate and achieve femininity; however, the performances on the court held deeper symbolism, and perhaps, a deeper urgency. While I continued to play sports, I was not being consistent with femininity; therefore, while on the playing field, I acted and displayed my femininity and heterosexuality to bridge the disparity. The urgency of performing femininity on the field is underscored by the urgency to dispel any whispering, criticism, or questioning of my sexual orientation (Cahn, 1994). For example, rolling up my shorts to expose more skin and make them tighter around my buttocks was a means to show some sexual appeal in anticipation of my male peers' spectatorship. As such, I was demonstrating my availability within the heterosexual

marketplace. Likewise, overtly displaying pictures of and talking about the men I had crushes on,

furthered my attempt to appear heterosexual, despite my heterosexual orientation. My

performances off the playing field were not only attempts to perform acceptable femininity and

heterosexuality, but were also used as a means to apologize for my athletic behaviour. To this

end, my autoethnography supports the existence of the apologetic in female sport. The female

apologetic in sport arises when female athletes "apologize" for their participation in sport by

"emphasizing their femininity" (Davis-Delano, Pollock, & Vose, 2009, p. 131). The apologies

are manifested by compensatory acts (Crosset, 1995), such as deliberately looking feminine,

appearing heterosexual (by spending time with men and limiting contact with women in public),

and apologizing for any aggressive behaviours committed in sport (Davis-Delano, Pollock, &

Vose, 2009). Apologizing for their participation and demonstrating their femininity and

heterosexuality is used as a means for managing stigma (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Given that my

apologetic occurred both *on and off* the field refutes the claim that the apologetic is only done

outside of the sporting arena (see Fallon & Jome, 2007; Ross & Shinew, 2008; Theberge, 2000)

or only in the sporting arena (see Adams, Schmitke & Franklin, 2005; Ezzell, 2009). Rather, the

apologetic can happen both on and off the field because the male gaze does not operate in one

setting, and sport participation is not forgotten once the game is finished. Additionally, my

experience of constrained behaviours as a result of the gender intensification hypothesis and the

male gaze resulted in my personal apologetic being deliberate, calculated, and intentional. The

intentionality of my apologetic further contests previous research citing that the apologetic is

unintentional and unconscious. If the apologetic is unintentional and unconscious, then gender

conformity out of fear, for example, is not possible. However, the fear of others' negative

appraisals, as well as, my recognition of the "cultural contradiction" of a female athlete (Malcolm, 2003, p. 1390) was the driving force of my apologetic and gender conformity.

Fearing negative appraisals, my strategies on and off the field were means of protecting myself. However, the best way to protect myself was to remove myself from the situation that was causing this threat: sports. Withdrawing from sport bridged the gap and afforded my femininity to flourish. Moreover, I could no longer be seen as masculine, sweaty, or aggressive (Banet-Weiser, 1999) and I could spend more time passively socializing with my friends while keeping my morning beauty routine flawless for the whole day. Withdrawing from sport was my most destructive strategy, and contributed to the gendered nature of constraints. As Samdahl and Jekubovich (1997) explained, constraints are the reasons for not participating in specific activities, events, or behaviours. For women, constraints to leisure include limited monetary resources and time restrictions resulting from other social roles in life (Roster, 2007), such as being wife, mother, and girlfriend (Koivula, 1999). Although I appreciate that women face multiple constraints, I did not experience a lack of money or time as sources of my constraints as an adolescent girl. However, understanding leisure experiences, including sport participation, is a complex picture of multiple aspects of life because constraints do not exist in isolation (Samdahl, 2007, 2013). Rather, this research supports the interconnectedness of various sociocultural phenomena that impact sport participation. To support Shaw's (1994) claim, my autoethnography further reveals that patriarchy and gender ideologies underpin women's leisure constraints, but expands that notion to adolescent girls. The pressures to behave in socially and culturally appropriate ways, that is, conforming to gender ideology and performing compulsory heterosexuality underscore the gendered nature of constraints and part of the attrition rate for adolescent girls. To illustrate this pressure, my withdrawal from sport initially started as a quest

for increasing my femininity and decreasing my athletic image; however, it quickly became a quest for displaying my heterosexuality, and eliminating the lesbian threat. Given that the lesbian stigma is abundant and pervasive in sport, withdrawing from sport left me on the "right" side of the femininity/athleticism conflict.

My "voluntary" withdrawal from sport as a result of the lesbian stigma was powerful and devastating. Such withdrawal speaks to the power that stigma holds and the way in which it is a "vehicle of social control" (Clarke, 1998, p. 150). The use of this label to deter me from participating in sport reinforces compulsory heterosexuality, as well as, the heterosexist environment of sport. Withdrawing from sport and distancing myself from my athletic identity to become more feminine resulted in a new found social position and new, positively perceived judgements. In turn, I internalized the positive, accepting, and welcoming judgements and incorporated them into my new, valuable, and endorsed self.

5.4 Identity Formation

Identity formation is the pinnacle of adolescence. Forming an identity, "or a sense of sameness and continuity" (Muuss, 1996, p. 51) includes the negotiation of past roles with skills and aspirations of the present and future (Erikson, 1950). Identities are meant to serve as an everlasting answer to the question "Who am I?" Identity can include sub-areas about what an individual does, where she is from, which groups she belongs to, or even who she spends her time with (Hoover & Ericksen, 2004). However, it is important to note that identity can be two-fold. First, there is a gender identity in which individuals determine whether they are feminine, masculine, both, or neither. Second, although a gender identity is its own entity, it is a part of an individual's larger identity. The process of forming an identity occurs within one's social context (Siegler, Deloache, & Eisenberg, 2006). The onset of adolescence and the changing dynamics

and importance of interpersonal (peer) relationships and roles creates a new ideological domain where creating a sense of sameness and integrating past lives with anticipated future lives can be difficult when past, present, and future roles are inconsistent. When past, present, and future roles conflict, an identity crisis can occur (Erikson, 1950).

An identity crisis is not meant to denote a calamity and downward spiral; instead, it is meant to symbolize a "critical turning point" that leads to a different life path (Kroger, 2007, p. 207). My turning point, or crisis, arose when gender intensified resulting in the pressure to be feminine. Consequently, the pressure I felt with no acceptable alternatives to femininity left me with a limited amount of negotiation. The concept of "negotiation" during identity formation within adolescence is debatable. Negotiations are meant to end in a compromise where all parties, for example, benefit; however, the antagonist nature of the femininity/athletic conflict did not end in a negotiation for me. It *started* with a negotiation as I tried to perform femininity while on and off the playing field, but later became apologetic. As a result, one side of the conflict gained all the benefit: femininity. To this end, gender conformity and compulsory heterosexuality are not only barriers to sport participation, but also barriers that limit individual developmental options. These barriers support Bem's (1981, 1993) predictions that pressure to perform femininity, for example, can hamper a full range of options for self-expression, as well as, obstruct feelings of autonomy, and result in shame for gender nonconformity. Furthermore, this research provides insight into the relationship between external barriers and (autonomous) developmental processes, especially identity formation, as called for by Yoder (2000).

But, how does this inform attrition rates? What is the link between identity formation and attrition rates for adolescent girls? Feeding and developing my gender identity and broader feminine identity, I distanced myself from the source that brought on my tension: sports. The

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dynamics of my athletic identity no longer served me well and could not fuel my self-confidence. As a result, I tried to leave sport out of the picture; I tried to slowly evict it from my identity. By choosing to be feminine over masculine/athletic, as well as, decreasing the presence of sport in my life, I was no longer using sport as the answer to what was I doing, what groups I belonged to, or who I spent my time with. If sport was absent from the answers, it was by extension, absent from my behaviours. Goffman (2002) asserts that identity is not merely a state of being and doing but sustaining "the standards or conduct and appearance" of an individual's social group (p. 81). My social group was that of my peers, where their behaviours were often modelled for and imitated by me (Muuss, 1996). In addition to the imitation of behaviours, ideals and beliefs are also shared and replicated. Given that all-girl social groups often embody notions of traditional femininity (Reid, Cooper, & Banks, 2008) I had to also embody those beliefs to maintain my place in their group. Consequently, as I embodied the stereotypes of femininity, my identity reflected it as well. Adhering to femininity, and thus passive roles and behaviours, sport was invariably left out of the picture and my identity. As such, my identity and behaviours became mutually exclusive from sport, which resulted in my decrease in sport participation, and eventually non-participation. Therefore, as I achieved my identity by mid- to late adolescence, my decreased sport participation contributed to the devastating attrition rate.

5.5 My Life after Sports: Consequences of Withdrawal

My life after quitting sport took a different trajectory than I planned for myself as a young child. My life was to involve and revolve around sport. Never did I ever think I would be writing about my sporting experience as an outsider, a quitter. I was to be a professional athlete, but somehow my passion for sport was overpowered by decisions I made about myself as an adolescent girl. Despite the personal nature of autoethnographies, I believe the meanings of my

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experience illustrate a portion of the social context in which adolescents live, and shed light on some experiences of adolescent girls. My withdrawal from sport can be summed up in three main consequences: unhealthy bodies, the reinforcement of gender roles, and feelings of loss.

5.5.1 Unhealthy Bodies

Health has been conceptualized in various ways where the medical model has dominated the way society views the body, its ailments, and functioning. However, the medical model focuses on the absence of disease as a pinnacle of health (Warwick-Booth, Cross, & Lowcock, 2012) and separates the body from social and psychological processes (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006). Instead, health should be constructed within the social, psychological, environmental and cultural processes that influence and determine health and lifestyle behaviour (Earle, 2007). Consequently, a social model of health has been formulated with a popular definition of health from the World Health Organization (WHO) (1948), which defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". As an athlete, I reaped the rewards of physical exercise and experienced a good level of health; however, as I decreased and ceased my sport participation, my health status also downgraded. Such a downgrade is consistent with the literature that outlines sports' positive contribution to health. However, sport is not just a means for achieving high health statuses. Instead, the absence of sport (as a category of physical activity) can result in lower health statuses, and this connection is highlighted in research examining the somatic effects of sport withdrawal.

Physical activity is popularly associated with weight maintenance and control. Given this association, a decrease in sport participation is likely to result in increased body fat (Dietz, 1996). Comparably, throughout my four years of high school, my lack of physical activity did not mitigate against the calories entering into my body, insofar that I gained 50 pounds. The

increases in mass undoubtedly affected my cardiovascular, pulmonary, and skeletal systems (Daniels, 2006). My rapid weight gain brought on chest and knee pains along with laboured breathing after small amounts of energy exertion, such as climbing a set of stairs. However, despite my stronger performances of femininity and heterosexuality, my newer, rounder body did not quite conform to the thin body ideals found in the ideology of womanhood (Hesse-Biber, 1996). My femininity dilemma had taken on new dimensions. My social reference climbed a little from middle school but at the expense of my athletic skills. However, becoming a self-identified "fat girl", I did not receive the same attention as the other feminine (thin) girls (Dietz, 1998) and anticipated the male gaze to diminish as a result of my fatness. I had moved from the fringe into a more central space only to move back to the fringe again. More so, my social and friendship circles were drastically smaller since I was not a part of various sports team and meeting other girls. Organized sport, whether inside or outside of school, enables players to develop and strengthen their social capital and create bonds with other players (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003). In turn, these bonds form networks of support. Nevertheless, my non-participation did not afford me the opportunity to meet and bond with other athletes, and as such, I experienced feelings of loneliness and some social isolation (Wolinsky & Driskell, 2002). My feelings of loneliness, specifically, were also accompanied by other negative emotions. My dissatisfaction with my body, and feeling that I was unattractive, led me to more negative feelings (Dietz, 1996). For example, depressive symptoms and mood disturbances (i.e., irritability) are experienced, even as early as one week after sport withdrawal (Boecker & Dishman, 2013; Mondin, et al, 1996; Weinstein, Deuster & Kop, 2007). Less than optimal emotional well-being is prevalent in the general population but classified as subclinical (Biddle, Fox, & Boucher, 2000). Despite the numerous explanations as to why the general population

exhibits subclinical levels of emotional well-being, it is argued that cultural reduction in physical activity and sport (as a result of gender ideology, for example) exacerbates such feelings (Biddle, Fox & Boucher, 2000). The sad feelings I felt during high school supports this research claim. After decreasing my sport participation, I was less happy and fatigued. I, however, do not claim to have been "depressed" as it carries serious implications and I did not seek diagnosis, help, or support from a professional. As an alternative, I kept silent hoping it would pass. My silence also mimicked my silence in the classroom. In high school, I did not participate in class discussions, I skipped classes, and as a result, my grades started to slip. Moving from "student-athlete" to "non-student-athlete", my lower test scores, grades, and overall academic performance supports Wilson's (2000) conclusion that student-athletes perform better academically. Better performance is a result of higher brain function essential for skills needed in the classroom, like concentration and problem solving (Bailey, 2006; Boecker & Dishman, 2013). The change in my academic performance could stem from my lower levels of affect, or could have contributed to them since I was no longer obtaining high grades. My once unexplained feelings of negative affect can now be explained in conjunction with the physical, social, and cognitive consequences of sport withdrawal. The interdependence of these consequences mimics the interconnectedness of the realms of health. Therefore, they influenced and compounded each other to make the health consequences of my sport withdrawal holistic, which greatly impacted my health status.

5.5.2 Reinforcing Gender Roles, Stereotypes, and Relations

The current understandings of gender are problematic because they fit individuals into two boxes that are confined with rigid edges, despite that fact that there are many unique identities that individuals embody. Gender as a dyad is no longer relevant in society. In fact, the lack of understanding of dynamicity in gender has made individuals take precautions to achieve

an accepted social status and adolescent girls are privy to this phenomenon. Pertaining to sport, my withdrawal from sport has many repercussions. My withdrawal reinforces every dark aspect of sport today. Furthermore, it reinforces the masculine foundations of sport as males will continue to be the majority of participants, coaches, administrators, and governing leaders (Whisent, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). The continued gendered participation rates will stimulate, reinforce, and naturalize ideas about who are the true and natural athlete, while promoting athletics and sport solely to men (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Moreover, the promotion of sport to men reinforces ideas about women's bodies and roles, and utilized as explanations to their sporting absence (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). Continued beliefs about women's bodies and absences further perpetuates gender ideology and women's marginalization in sport, thwarting progress toward gender equality (Whisent, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Given that girls and women are marginalized in sport, it is imperative that resistance is taken up by athletes to break down the invisible barriers that prevent adolescent girls and women from participating. The fight for gender equality in sport is two-fold. The battle must be taken up on both the sidelines and on the field; the patriarchal design of sport must be fought externally and internally. On the sidelines, we have to fight for equal opportunities to get onto the playing field by challenging discriminatory rules, policies, procedures, and founding ideologies of organizations, clubs, and governing committees. On the field, athletes have to challenge the players of the other team, the referees, and even our own players. Players on the opposing team are those who believe girls and women do not have a place in sport and seek to marginalize us. The referees are the administrators and leaders who mediate our participation and rule in favour of or against us in points of conflict. But to reach the opposing players and the referees, athletes now have to actively take a stand and become creators of their own game. Athletes have the

power to change the game from within because they are deep in the plays and their voices are rich with experience and alternate understandings of the game (Hoeber, 2008). Their positions and perspectives are from the inside and they can speak to and push against the suffocating realities of the game. In fact, they can ask questions that oppose administrators' common-sense delivery of sport to "promote a kind of thinking which differs radically from established modes" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p. 132). Athletes can secure their spot on the field, refuse a substitution and directly challenge the plays of the opposing team and the referees. Athletes' resistance will demonstrate their right to be on the field and players in the game. In fact, their resistance can be an inspiration for athletes still waiting on the sidelines.

5.5.3 From Denial to Anger to Loss

I have experienced varied emotions throughout the aftermath of my decision. In fact, my emotions mimicked some of the stages of grief, as outlined by Kubler-Ross' model. Although this model was first created and applied to people who were terminally ill, it has been expanded to situations of personal loss. This model succinctly aligns with the evaluation of my journey because I see it as a great personal loss.

Upon initially reflecting on my decision, I did not experience any sense of loss. I believe this was so because I was still a part of the process or still strongly believed in my cause. I felt fine (Kubler-Ross, 2003). I missed sport, but was unwilling to admit it. Instead, I rationalized my decision as a form of denial, telling myself I have made a good, sound judgement. My decision was meant to place me on top of the femininity hierarchy so that I could reap rewards (Schippers, 2007). Aspiring to reach the top of the pyramid and reminding myself of my acceptable behaviour was a means of protecting myself (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Denial has been pegged as a temporary defence for what has occurred or what is to come (Kubler-Ross, 2003);

however, my denial lasted for four years. No longer was society and my social interactions trying to sell me on femininity, I was trying to sell it to myself. In time, I was not able to rationalize my decisions; it was time to face facts. My quest for the top of the pyramid collapsed and I came to terms with my big mistake. In an attempt to still protect myself, I projected my anger onto others (Kubler-Ross, 2003), especially women who persisted, and still participated in sport. The projection on my anger was a result of my displaced anger, as Kubler-Ross (2003) contends. I was not angry with the other women, but at myself for not playing sport and remaining strong and athletic. I was angry that I had everything going for me and I still gave it up. I had support and the talent to go all the way. Instead, the pressures I felt from the highly gendered and heteronormative context when I was thinking about and making decisions about my future (Perry & Pauletti, 2011), led me to seek femininity, strive to perform it, and abandon sport. However, when I finally stood up against the traditional notions of femininity, I felt complete responsibility for my actions. I felt weak and stupid. Once again, my anger was displaced.

Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) stated that acknowledging my feelings allow me to explore what they meant, and if possible, find solutions. The anger I felt, as I understand now, was a way to cruelly tell myself that my athleticism and athletic lifestyle was important. Somehow my anger, quite twistedly, validated sport and athleticism. As I explored these feelings, I began to think about my decision, the reasoning behind it and the state I was left in. As I began to reflect, I experienced loss – sadness and wanting of the athleticism I had once taken for granted. My sadness did not align with Kubler-Ross and Kessler's (2005) depiction of loss/depression. Indeed, I felt sad, but I was still able to get up in the morning and carry on with the activities of my daily life. Instead, I responded to my loss by proactively trying to bridge my non-athletic self with my former athletic self. To do so, I wandered into sport retailers to get a

glimpse of the life I used to live and somehow feel better. Over time, my loss became a garden for growth (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Growing from this experience, I have found acceptance. My acceptance does not mean that I am okay with what has happened (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Rather it means that I have come to terms with what has happened and the consequences of my actions. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) have stressed that the grieving process is not linear; instead, it is messy like the emotions involved. Although I have reached acceptance, there are days that I am angry or sad about my decision.

The discontinuation of my sport participation had implications for my leisure lifestyle. I did not substitute it with another pursuit outside of my family home. Rather, I sat in front of the TV day in and day out, becoming more sedentary and unhealthier. Although, watching TV has some relaxing benefits (Frey, Benesch, & Stutzer, 2007), my consumption was beyond that. My lack of leisure continued for years and it became boring. I went to school, watched TV, ate, and slept. Life did not excite me; instead, I just simply lived and wandered aimlessly without purpose or direction. My purpose in life is attached to my identity. I know I was truly lost with no purpose in life when I could not answer the age-old question: "what do you want to be when you grow up?" Each time, my answer changed and my laundry list of potential careers grew and shrank with no commitment to any of them. I wanted to be a police officer, a teacher, a paramedic, an architect, a physiotherapist, a musician, a meteorologist, a nurse, and a recreation therapist. I could not decide my future because I was lost and searching for answers (Marcia, 1980). I did not know who I was anymore, so how could I possibly commit to one occupation? In fact, halfway through my undergraduate degree, I changed my mind again. I still did not know what I wanted to do so I finished my degree and headed to graduate school in hope of enlightenment and clarity. And it happened; I finally found myself again: in sport. I belong in

sport, even if I am no longer an athlete. It has truly been my essence and I had to lose it to appreciate it. I would not say, by any means and any stretch of any imagination, that this experience had been a blessing in disguise. I have gained invaluable knowledge about myself, the social world I live in, and my purpose in life to drive me forward. Although I have learned so much in this process, my withdrawal from sport is still the biggest mistake of my life.

5.6 Social Justice Applications

As feminist research, I hope this autoethnography brings about social change – specifically gender equality in sport – for adolescent girls and women. Without a challenge to the current way sport is organized and implemented, there is no chance of change and inclusive sport participation. Through my autoethnography, my goal was to share the way in which society and sport have been oppressive with ideals that undermine who females are and what they are capable of outside and inside of sport. The practical implications derived from my experience serve to continue the battle for gender equality, challenge heteronormativity, and drive change.

Upon the completion and analysis of my autoethnography, I can provide some comparisons between my experience and the *Actively Engaged* policy. A significant part of my experience included my struggle with heteronormativity and resulting homophobia; however, these issues are not addressed or identified in the policy's discussion regarding the reasons for decreased participation rates for women. Their discussion highlights gendered beliefs and gender roles but only applies these issues to women. Given the gendered issues discussed in this research, *Actively Engaged*'s discussion about gender must be extended to adolescent girls.

Apart from the rationale for creating this policy, its governance is troublesome. CAAWS has created *Actively Engaged* yet the organization is separate from its implementation and

evaluation. The passing of this policy onto Sport Canada raises questions about their commitment to achieving the policy's mandate, given the ambiguity in the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy. Instead, CAAWS should stay close to this policy while Sport Canada becomes its primary facilitator. My concern is compounded by the 2012 federal policy and its failure to explicitly disclose girls and women as an under-represented and marginalized group in Canadian sport. Perhaps the acknowledgement of under-represented and marginalized groups is the result of *Actively Engaged.* Nevertheless, the mere acknowledgement will not satisfy the call for equality and inclusiveness in sport. Rather, discussions about gender and heteronormativity will benefit the policy, its interventions, and its overall delivery. Including such a discussion will better assist them in drafting a new sport policy to achieve their mandate: an inclusive sport system. The lack of specificity in the federal policy casts doubt on the relevance of *Actively Engaged*, as well as, a current federal policy for girls and women in sport.

The inclusion of the Policy Accountability Framework to measure the success of *Actively Engaged* is tremendous. The interventions mentioned are viable means of achieving quality and inclusive sport programs with attainable outcomes. The questions raised by my reading of this framework could result from my external reader position, in which I am not given all details of implementation and evaluation protocols and procedures. Nevertheless, I am struck with curiosity. Pertaining to their first policy intervention (alignment and refinement of sport programs), and the intended outputs of program implementation tools and processes that reflect sport priorities for women and girls, I find myself asking many questions: what are these tools and resources? Will they be the same across Canada or specific to organizations and their patrons? Will they be developmentally appropriate for adolescent girls? Will they reflect the different needs of girls and women? Who will implement these tools and processes? Will a

special educator or designate from Sport Canada come to make presentations and oversee the implementation of the tools and processes? Will this special educator or designate be committed to gender equality? Or will the staff of individual organizations be responsible instead? The ambiguity of these outputs leaves me concerned about the delivery of this policy to affect change and achieve its mission. Moreover, the absence of heteronormativity into their analysis of lower participation rates for girls and women most likely reflects an absence of tools and processes that aim to challenge heteronormativity. I speculate whether the discussion about women's and girls' participation in sport is explicitly linked to the outputs they have intended to exercise. If this is the case, the lack of connection between societal assumptions of gender roles and (adolescent) girls is not reflected in their cache of resources. Therefore, as more in-depth and comprehensive discussions are made around the gendered and heteronormative nature of sport participation for the foundation of this policy, the implementation tools and processes can also be comprehensive and better serve the priorities for girls and women.

Utilized as another avenue to affect change, *Actively Engaged* seeks to share policy research on girls and women in sport. Although, I strongly believe that sharing research on girls and women can positively impact their participation, additional outputs or steps are needed before the immediate outcome can be achieved. Sharing research with organizations is the first step in making informed decisions about program and service creation, organization, and implementation. The transition between the output and immediate outcome warrants more information as the use of this research is vague. How will Sport Canada, as facilitators of this policy, ensure this research does not fall on deaf ears? How will Sport Canada convert this knowledge into action? Will the same special educator or designate offer seminars to review the research with each organization and offer tips of translating it into action plans? These

additional steps are vital for the successful integration of policy recommendation research into the community. In sum, examples of and more detail about the plan of action set forth would add clarity for its readers and accountability to those who have been appointed to its implementation.

The dissemination of this research to affect change can continue through presentations delivered to community level sport organizations. Given that community level sport organizations are in direct contact with adolescent girls and their parents, presenting this research allows those most affected by the attrition rate to be reached. Such presentations can be made first to board members and coaches, and then girls and their parents, or simultaneously. Paralleling this research, presentations can educate those in attendance on the realities of sport and what adolescent girls may be facing or could face. Performing my autoethnography, as well as, highlighting the statistics (for those who value quantification as evidence), I hope my narrative can provide insight into, perhaps, what is going on within their own boardrooms, facilities, homes, daughters, and female family members. Aiming to move board members, coaches, parents, and volunteers to be more supportive of their female participants, as well as, having them reflect on their own practices and policies would be a stepping stone to achieving equality for girls and reducing heterosexism and homophobia within their organizations and homes.

Presentations made to schools are especially important because students spend a significant period of time at school during the day. My presentations attempt to equip school administrators, teachers, and support staff with the knowledge of supporting female students and raise awareness of the gendered, heteronormative, and homophobic components of sport. Moreover, my narrative may be an inspiration for female athletes (upon presentation to the student body) to continue their sport organization knowing there are supports in place, as well as,

persuade the student body to reflect on their own behaviours. This support is especially important if support is not found at home or in the community. Provided that some students only experience sport in the school setting, support is necessary to drive future sport participation in the community, higher education institutions, and into adulthood. With Sport Canada's mandate to create a sport system that is accessible for all Canadians, it is imperative that children and youth are exposed to a supportive, and thus, inclusive sport system.

Growing up within a public school system myself, I experienced gendered and heteronormative constraints to my sport participation, as well as, derogatory comments. These negative experiences can alter the meanings people attach to sport and the values instilled in them. If these unfair conditions persist at the school level, they may be perpetuated on a grander scale when the youth grow up and become the "leaders of tomorrow". Therefore, it is also important to instill attitudes of fairness and equality in children, youth, and adults (as they mentor the children and youth) in order for Canada to achieve an inclusive sporting space.

Coupled with the intended presentations, policy recommendations can be made specifically for schools but can be applied to community level sport organizations. Within the school system, policies about discrimination, including gender and sexuality, have been created and employed by the school boards; however, no policies on intra- and interschool athletics has been found within their list of policies. This is unsettling because information regarding the planning, organizing, and implementing practices is not readily available. In a world where girls and women are discouraged from participating in sport, policies outlining the protection of their sport participation can be influential and valuable to an adolescent girl who is struggling with whether to play or not. Given that most of my experience within sport has been taken place in the

school setting, I propose the following recommendations for creating and implementing a policy that oversees and governs intra- and interschool athletics.

Mission Statement

A mission statement should be drafted to communicate the school's desire and commitment to gender equality and dismantling heterosexism and homophobia for all students. A possible mission statement could be: "To provide equitable, fair, inclusive, and safe sport participation for all students."

Objective 1: Equality/Equity for Girls' and Boy's Teams

With the documented inequality between girls' and boys' access to sport and sport facilities, it is imperative that inequality and discrimination be rectified. Thus, it is important that both girls' and boys' teams get appropriate and adequate space for practices and games. Therefore, to maximize ideal space and equipment use, schedule the girls' teams' practices and/or games at a different time than the boys' teams (for the same sport). To illustrate, when the girls' teams are practicing/competing, they are given sufficient space, time, and equipment to adequately prepare/compete. The same considerations are to be given to the boys' teams. These scheduling recommendations will avoid conflict and monopolization of space and equipment by one team. A special note, however, must be made for outdoor playing fields. Despite their expanse, it is also recommended that one team gets the entire field during their scheduled time. Sports that require the whole field in a game setting should be given the entire field to practice to adequately prepare for games (rather than the two teams sharing the field). Lastly, in regards to uniforms, but cognizant of budget restrictions for athletic departments, it is recommended that

uniforms for each sport be replaced for both teams to avoid one team receiving new uniforms while the other team wears old, and potentially ratty, ones.

Objective 2: Equality/Equity for All Sports

Allocating appropriate space dimensions for all sport teams based on space requirements will positively contribute to full participation of both girls and boys. Ensuring that all teams get the space and equipment required will avoid monopolization of one sport over the other. As such, sports that need larger spaces (i.e., soccer, football, basketball) should be given larger spaces to run practices and host games, while sports that are confined to smaller playing space (based on mandatory markings on the gymnasium floor) can be allocated smaller spaces as long as their playing space is not negatively impacted. The allocation of space will also ensure that sports which require larger spaces are not given inadequate playing spaces, and therefore, are not disadvantaged in their preparation for competitions.

Role of Adults in the Delivery of this Policy

Given that students interact with coaches, teachers, and volunteers, it is imperative that the role of adults be explicit in policy implementation. To create a safe, equitable, and inclusive space for all athletes, the adults must be educated about the realities of sport for the population they serve. This education lies in a discussion about the challenges of participation to understand the basis of this policy development. Important topics to discuss include the societal assumptions about appropriate sports for girls and boys; heteronormativity; homophobia and repercussions for crossing over the gender boundary; the role of peers; developmental considerations; attrition rates for girls; and, the need to support all students in all athletic endeavours. Understanding the way gender and heteronormativity impact the ways adolescent girls and boys choose their sport

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participation or non-participation can better prepare adults to support and speak with their athletes about their situations. Specific to adolescent girls, this educational discussion can enable adults to help athletes performing the female apologetic. Listening to their perspectives and reasoning, while understanding the female apologetic phenomenon, adults can offer encouragement or advice, if sought. Reassuring and praising students for their athletic efforts can facilitate pride and empower students to break down their own ideologies, dismiss the negative opinions of their peers, and close the discord of sport for females. Educating the adults is beneficial for the students they mentor but also for themselves. Through such education, they may begin to reflect upon their own beliefs and practices.

Apart from supporting students, coaches, teachers, and volunteers should be diligent in achieving both objectives and speaking against any inequality that is observed and/or employed. By understanding the needs of female and male students, as well as, the individual and team sports, equality/equity can be monitored.

Round-table Meetings

The education sessions are imperative but should also be complimented by round-table meetings. Gathering the adults will ensure that everyone is on the same page. It is here that the policy will be thoroughly reviewed with time for discussions to clarify any confusion, discuss points of dissention (if applicable), and ensure that all adults involved in the physical education and athletic departments are well-informed of the policy. Practice scenarios to prepare for the delivery of the policy will further the administrators, teachers, coaches, and volunteers training to achieve the policy's mission statement and objectives.

In the event that any additional roles are created as a result of the discussions (outside of coaching, teaching, and supporting their participation), these meetings allow each vacancy to be filled with responsibilities and duties clearly communicated. An example of this additional role could be an internal ombudsperson, or meditator, who deals with interpersonal conflict and personal grievances with team members, coaches, or volunteers. With this role, the meditator can speak to the grieving party and then, approach the others involved privately to try to resolve the situation. This role can be especially important if students are uncomfortable with confrontation.

Another set of round-table meetings important for the success of this policy include the student-athletes themselves. Provided that this policy directly affects these athletes, they must also be informed. The meeting with the students should be mandatory, which includes the review of the policy and a period for discussion or questions (similar to that of the adults' meeting). It is here that students will be encouraged to speak up if they have any concerns throughout the academic year.

Ombudsperson

In situations where conflicts can arise, an ombudsperson can independently examine the situation and offer her or his thoughts to reach a solution. Although a meditating role may develop as a result of the initial round-table meeting, this ombudsperson enacts when individual schools cannot reach an agreement in regards to achieving the two objectives. Despite the ways I have proposed to limit conflict, it is imperative to have conflict resolution measures in place. This ombudsperson can be elected and chosen by the school board or individual school; however, it is recommended that the ombudsperson be elected from the school boards, and not from the individual schools. Being removed from individual schools allows her or him to remain

objective for all schools but still be "local" for easier accessibility for communication purposes and possible meetings. Objectivity is extremely important, and the candidate should be able to make decisions based on the policy objectives and mission.

Multiple Vantage Points

The creation of a new policy has to be considered from multiple vantage points. The different perspectives contributing to the creation of any policy will create a more comprehensive plan of action. School administrators, teachers, and policy makers are beneficial to the process; however, the voices of past and present students are invaluable. Given that the student experienced intramural and varsity sport, they can offer insights to the schools' cultures of sport, as well as, speak to the improvements that can be made to better the experiences of present and future students.

Secondly, the voices of students should also be included on the micro level and just prior to the implementation stage. The student body at a particular school offers insights into the individual school's sporting climate, its needs, successes, and failures. The information derived from these focus groups should be used as a complementary initiative to promote and achieve gender equality. The enactment of separate focus groups is not mandatory but strongly recommended.

Accessibility of Policy

As a final step, this policy should be easily accessible by whoever wishes to review it. Copies should be made available online, in physical education department offices, and gymnasiums.

5.7 Areas for Future Research

The completion of this research has generated new questions that warrant exploration. First, research needs to be conducted to create a more dynamic and richer picture of how adolescent girls negotiate their sport experience. With that said, the experiences of adolescent girls from different races, ethnicities, sexualities, religions, educational paths, and perhaps, geographic locations must be examined because the intersections of these demographic characteristics can alter the strength and multitude of societal pressures and produce different negotiations of sport participation. Furthermore, this examination can speak to the challenges some girls may face that place them in a disadvantaged position.

A second area is a new avenue of research. Research has been conducted with athletes who have retired from sport due to age, injury, or burnout (Gould & Whitley, 2009; Kerr & Dacyshyn, 2000; Sparkes, 1998); however, the withdrawal from sport due to gendered and heterosexist ideologies have received scant attention in the leisure literature. Withdrawal from sport warrants more attention and questions about what can be done to support females in their sport participation, as well as, inform many practical interventions for ensuring full and active sport participation for all girls and women.

6.0 Conclusion

Utilizing my own narrative, I aimed to explore the gendered and heteronormative sporting context for adolescent girls. Sport is an expansive social institution on Canada with millions of Canadians participating and reaping the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social health benefits. However, sport reflects a gendered belief system that privileges men and heterosexuals, which has implications for participation. Specifically, adolescent girls have high attrition rates from sports, which is an alarming trend with implications for the health and gendered organization of Canadians.

Through a reflexive methodology, I examined and analyzed my own experience to address gaps in the literature. Gendered and heterosexist ideologies are known to influence sport participation; however, they both played a key role in my attrition from sport. Consequently, this research demonstrated the immense pressure I felt to conform to and display femininity and heterosexuality. Although identifying as heterosexual, I was still bound to and impacted by heteronormativity, which demonstrates the power it holds but also the notion that all women are measured against this standard. This measurement is especially evident in sport and has implications for participation. As a result of wanting to protect myself and be measured favourably, my withdrawal from sport was a measure against being labelled with a stigmatized identity. The stigmatization of lesbianism and its utilization as a threat proves to be harmful for all women. My negotiation of sport began in adolescence where peers are highly influential and identity formation processes are underway. Given that identity formation is a fundamental milestone in adolescence, it creates a trajectory for adulthood and sport participation. As an adult woman who was lost from sport, this research also highlights sport from the perspective of a

woman who withdrew from sport. Upon analysis of this research, and in response to the devastating attrition rate, recommendations have been made for *Actively Engaged* and its implementation, as well as, a new intra- and interschool athletic policy for the school system to ensure the eradication of the gendered participation rate of sport.

The negative consequences of sport withdrawal warrant a discussion about the re-engagement of girls and women in sport. I have re-entered into sport at the community and recreational level. My participation will not be at the same level as it was when I was adolescent girl; however, it will fulfill my desire and passion for sport. As I have begun to re-enter into sport, it is possible that girls and women who have also withdrawn from sport would also like to re-join. This desire to re-join sport illustrates the varying levels of participation through the life course. Specifically, as individuals move through different life stages, periods of change and stability fluctuate as do the responsibilities that are associated with each stage (Carpenter & Stockard, 2010). For example, midlife is often accompanied by employment, parenthood and familial responsibilities, and even changing health statuses (Corder, Ogilvie, & Van Sluijs, 2009; Tsang & Havitz, in press). Given that midlife, for example, leaves little room for leisure (Lachman, Lewkowicz, Marcus, & Peng, 1994), it is important to support the re-entry and continued sport participation of girls and women. To achieve this objective, government and community sport organizations can provide positive messaging and role models for females in sport; easier accessibility to clubs, leagues, and organizations, and promotional initiatives to demonstrate the desire for girls and women to participate (i.e., promotion of beginner or intermediate skill levels to alleviate anxiety over decreased skill level due to time away from sport). Furthermore, the commitment to defeating gendered beliefs about female bodies and the lesbian stigma will also prove to be beneficial to girls and women who wish to re-enter into

sport. It is the contestation of current ideologies and the fight against patriarchy that will drive Canadian sport to become inclusive and safe for all individuals.

Lastly, reflecting on my sporting experience and life for the last two and a half years has brought to light some positive and negative understandings of myself that I will take forward with me. My passion for sport and securing its availability to and acceptance of adolescent girls and women has strengthened. I am excited about the future and what it holds. Completing this journey has left me with two final wishes. The first is my wish to instill courage and positive belief in adolescent girls that they, too, can participate in sport. And secondly, it is my hope to challenge and change the gendered and heteronormative nature of sport insofar that sport can be transformed into an equal and safe space for adolescent girls and women.

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Appendix A

Participant Information Form

Dear Participant,

This letter is to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as a fulfilment of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Dr. Diana Parry. If you wish to participate in the study, please take the time to read through this information letter about the purpose of my research, my procedures and the nature/extent of your involvement.

My research study utilizes autoethnography to chronicle my own sporting experience. In doing so, I hope to speak to the sporting context/experience of adolescent girls and the influences or factors at play within it. Research has shown that sport positively impacts health and wellness in physical, emotional, cognitive and social domains. Given the benefits of sport, both adolescent girls and boys should be participating in sport; however, girls are not. In fact, research has reported there is a significant decrease in sport participation for adolescent girls between the age cohorts of 6-11 and 12-15 years of age. This decrease represents a 90 per cent withdrawal from sport. This suggests that there are factors at play within sport that deter or discourage adolescent girls from participating. I have chosen to look at gender and heteronormativity for this research because they were two factors that played a significant role in the decrease of my sport participation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the gendered and heteronormative sporting context for adolescent girls. However, although this research chronicles my own sporting experience, it is not without input or the experiences of others. To aid in my research, I ask for your voice to be present in the research through your memories, thoughts, feelings and perspectives of such experience.

As a participant in this study, you will be engaging in informal conversations with me throughout the process of my research. We will discuss any memories that are vivid and/or have special meaning to you, as well as, any insight you can give to help me complete my memories or provide a deeper understanding of them. With permission, excerpts and quotes from our conversation may also be included in the research findings and discussion.

Participation in this study does carry some risk. As you will be identified as a parent, your identity cannot be anonymous or confidential. Because of your public position in this research, one possible risk is potential criticism over parenting methods or beliefs if specific parent-child interaction is detailed and included in the story. However, I must note that it is not, or ever, my intent to paint your involvement in my sporting experience as negative or depreciative. Therefore, if you choose to participate in this research, informed consent is a must.

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you can decline to answer any question and/or withdraw any time. After the final draft of my research is completed, I will contact you to discuss my findings with you. At this point, you can offer any feedback to ensure that my analysis and interpretation is accurate and you are comfortable with your representation in this study. Data collected throughout the research process will be kept confidential and securely stored in the locked desk drawers of my desk and in password-protected documents. Furthermore, all information not disclosed in the research will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 226-929-4432 or by email at ka2freem@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Dr. Diana Parry at 519-888-4567 ext. 33468 or email dcparry@uwaterloo.ca.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

I certainly hope you will feel that you have benefitted from sharing your experiences with me and with the larger academic community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Keri Freeman
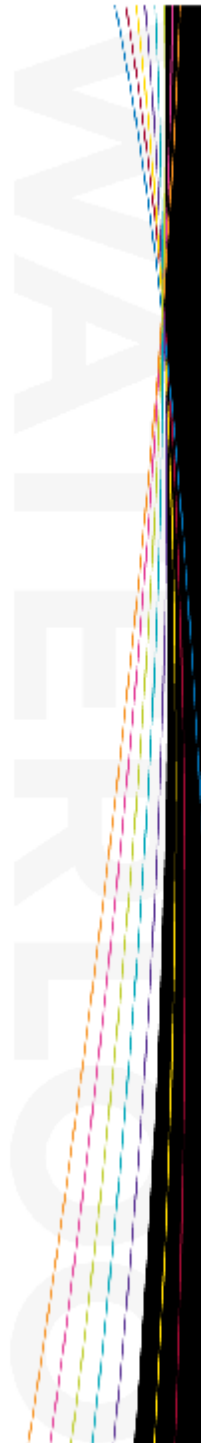
Appendix B

CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

My signature below indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree as a participant.

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study being conducted by Keri Freeman of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I requested.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director of the Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my identity cannot be kept anonymous or confidential.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand and accept the risks of participation.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the research findings and discussion.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Witness Name: _____ (Please print)

Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____