A Discursive Analysis of Children's Recreational Adult-Organized Sport: When Do Children Get to Play?

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Abstract

Adult-organized children's sport attracts millions of participants in Canada and the United States each year. Though there is a great deal of research that considers children's sport, little of it focuses on recreational or house league sport and less of it offers a deep examination of children's experience of their participation. Using observations, interviews, and focus groups involving ten participants in mixed-gender recreational basketball, this qualitative research project examined their experiences. With Foucault's concepts of correct training and the panoptic gaze in mind, I used discourse and deconstruction analyses to consider the children's descriptions along with my observations of their basketball experience. I was particularly looking for prevalent discourses on sport, childhood, and gender and how they affected their experiences. Despite the league's discursive emphasis on fun, participation, fairness, and respect, that was not necessarily what the children experienced. While most stated they enjoyed their season many also expressed serious disappointments. Size and particularly skill very much determined who was most involved in the action and thus actually *played* basketball. Gender also played a significant role in their sport experiences. My findings invite questions about what genuine sport participation actually is and how it might be alternatively imagined.

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Chapter 1—Introduction

1.1 Background—the problem with children's sport

Organized children's sport has been considered problematic for several decades. In the late 1960s critics started recognizing that the main problem with organized children's sport was that it was being run like professional sport (Donnelly, 2000). Children's sport was dominated by several key beliefs: that children sport was entertainment for adults; it needed to be organized by adults; children were simply small adults; being a winner was most important (Smith, 1975 as cited in Donnelly, 2000). Adults were perceived as the main problem in that they were preventing children from enjoying organized sport and were often the reason children gave for quitting (Donnelly, 2000). This mentality created a backlash among critics that created a significant shift in beliefs that still show up in the themes of even current research. Starting in the early 1970's there was a concerted effort to address the problems associated with children's sport in Canada (Orlick & Botterill, 1975). Researchers questioned the value of sports organized by adults versus those improvised by children. There was concern that children were not only losing out on fun, but also valuable opportunities to develop their organizing and negotiating skills (Devereux, 1976), which more current research confirms can be acquired in child-organized activities (Adler & Adler, 1998). As a result there were two solutions proposed: get rid of the adults or change the adults (Donnelly, 2000). Clearly sport organizers have chosen the latter option.

The problems associated with children's sport inspired a variety of responses from concerned adults and occasionally resulted in gatherings to develop solutions, for example, *The Conference on Children in Sport and Physical Activity* held in Kingston,

Ontario in 1973. Terry Orlick and Cal Botterill (1975) provided a long list of recommendations that emanated from that conference. Among the suggestions were: de-emphasize competition, focus on fun, make sport more inclusive and active for all children, and keep adults from intruding too much on the children's sport experience. As well, the conference recommended that more research should be done with children's sport; the growth in research in children's sport suggests that scientists listened. Researchers suggested new ways to organize children's sport (e.g. Haywood, 1984; Orlick, 1984; Pooley, 1984). As well, presumably because coaches were seen as most teachable (or culpable), many training programs for coaches have been developed. Examples of these include, National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), American Sport Education Program, Positive Coaching Alliance, and Coach Effectiveness Training. All the new research, recommendations, and programs have resulted in some significant changes in the nature of children's sport. Clearly there has been a concerted effort on the part of some adults to make sport better for children. What is not always clear is whether all the changes are for the better; do they actually improve children's experience of sport? It is also vaguely ironic that the role of adults in children's sport has actually increased—the teachers, the researchers, and even parental involvement[1].

One of the bigger changes to children's sport has been the increased emphasis on ideas such as: fair play, sportspersonship and a de-emphasizing of competition and winning (*Fair Play,* 1994; McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). For example, changes have been made to league practices that emphasize sportspersonship and fair play (Wells, Ellis, Paisley, & Arthur-Banning, 2005). Such interventions produce more "well-

[1] Parents have long been fixtures at children's games; however many also now regularly attend practices. As well, many drive children to and from games and practices.

behaved" children, though it is not clear that the *children's* behaviour was the problem with children's sport. Trophies have also become more common-place, that is everyone receives a trophy, regardless of where they finish in the stands. It is unclear if simply giving every participant a trophy, playing fair, and repeating the mantras "it's just a game" or "just have fun" actually lessen the desire to win or improves the quality of children's participation.

The influx of girls into organized sport (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997) has also changed the dynamics of children's sport. For example, girls and boys competing against and alongside each other in mixed-gender leagues is now commonplace. Interestingly, researchers do not seem to be asking much about how well that is working for children—especially considering that pubescent girls and boys are sometimes still playing together. This is significant because clearly the distinctions between girls and boys become much more rigid as they age. Though it may be telling that puberty is often when girls and boys are once again separated on the playing field. Michael Messner (2002) noted that some leagues for young children that were once mixed-gender have gone back to segregated teams. He observed that gender seems to disappear when young girls and boys are completely segregated on the playing field. However, he also stated that when they are simply in the same space (not necessarily competing with each other) gender once again became salient with "highly charged gendered interactions between" the girls and boys (p. 11). Pubescence also marks the beginning of a great decline participation in sport (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004), as many as 70% of children may be walking away from sport by the age of 15 (Steelman, 1995). The drop-out rate peaks by the age of 14 or 15 and

many children seem to be leaving because of the adult approach to sport (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997).

The dropout rates suggest we need to continue evaluating children's sport. Sport may not be doing what adults have long hoped it would do and, more importantly, what children may have long wished it would do. However, we should be careful not to focus simply on quantitative research; rather we must also examine socio-cultural side children's sport in greater depth through qualitative work. The dominance of positivistic worldviews and methods has taken sport out of context, diminishing our understanding of people's purposeful and meaningful experiences of participation (Brustad, 1997). The motivation for my own research project springs from the desire to ask meaningful questions and provide depth and context to children's responses. Some of the questions that interest me have been touched on in the literature, but usually in different contexts. Other questions I have simply have not been asked.

1.2 My interest in children's sport

My own experience with children's sport began as a participant during the early and mid 1970s. I lived the concerns the researchers of that era described. More recently my involvement has been as a coach in children's recreational sport. I have seen sport be a positive experience for children, but too often I have seen it be a negative experience. Because of these influences, I wanted to closely examine children's sport with the aim of contributing to the understanding of what can make a positive experience for children in adult-organized sport. It should be noted that I have an undergraduate degree in kinesiology and some formal coach training through NCCP. This education is important to be aware of because clearly it has guided my understanding of children's sport. Both

ultimately present children's sport as a good thing, though flawed, but clearly the belief is that with some adjustments, these flaws can be minimized. I did not start this project with the idea that children's sport should be altered dramatically or that we should look for other ways to do sport, I just wanted to understand it better. I must acknowledge that as a result of my research, I have made a paradigmatic shift that has inspired me to question the nature of mainstream sport. I now wonder if it is necessarily the best choice for children seeking to be physically active and play sports. The Foucauldian theoretical framework that guided my work has inspired me to reassess the importance of the role of children's own creativity and desires in their participation in sport. That is, I question whether sport allows children to experiment with and discover their creative bodily capacities because they must submit to the discipline and requirements of sport, childhood, and gender.

1.3 A qualitative project

Regardless of where I travelled intellectually in this project, when I started I was simply interested in what children thought of their experience of participating in sport. I wondered if it was what children hoped it might be. To that end I used qualitative sociological research techniques to ask questions that would provide deep, expansive, and insightful answers. I observed children's involvement in a mixed-gender recreational basketball league and then through interviews and focus groups I asked them about their understandings of this involvement. In particular, I was interested in the discourse that they were surrounded by on the court and how they used it to explain and rationalize their experiences.

Sport, like any other institution, has its own discourses that help create and reinforce participants' beliefs and behaviours and I felt they were worthy of closer inspection. Three main discourses were of particular interest in this project: sport, gender, and childhood. I made those discourses central to my investigation because they seemed the most prominent to me. That is, in children's sport these three discourses intersect and have a tremendous impact on the children's experience. The importance of sport discourse seemed self-evident; certainly how sport is described and what is presented as valuable in sport must be considered important in any socio-cultural examination of sport. As well, in countries like Canada, sport has become a key site for the production of masculinity (Whitson, 1990). However; since the 1970s girls have also become more abundant in sport thanks to legal shifts[2]. Problematically, the possibilities for participation for girls did not lead to an immediate discursive shift in terms of gender. As Lenskyj (1986) points out, initially girls were not always welcomed, particularly when they joined boys' teams. She provides various examples of how male coaches and athletes limited girls' participation, from simply quitting when girls signed up to refusing to pass to girls. Sports that have girls and boys playing against each other may still be problematic for both. Finally, the discourse of childhood is clearly important because it is adults that tend to determine what the dominant childhood discourse is (Kamp, 2006) and adults are everywhere in children's sport. Major sources of discourse were literature, either popular and academic, and common expressions or clichés. All express what we are thinking and doing, both in sport and more generally in society. They also reflect the contradictions that frequently exist within discourses. For example, when much research

[2] For example, Title IX in the United States in 1973 and various Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Human Rights Code challenges in Canada in the 1980s.

focuses on the importance of sportspersonship, we might expect that this is passed on to the level of sport organizers, coaches, and participants. While it is true leagues incorporate rules that emphasize sportspersonship and we tell children that "it's just a game" or "it doesn't matter whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game". There are other clichés that circulate through sport that challenge those, for example, "a winner never quits and a quitter never wins" or "nice guys finish last". As well, maintaining standings and holding championship games make it very clear that winning matters.

1.4 Research purpose

The focus of my research was to better understand children's experience of recreational adult-organized children's basketball. I wanted to know how children's sport operated—what was expected of them and how they dealt with these expectations. I wanted to know how adults treated the players and how the children responded to it. I wanted to know what worked for them and what did not. I wanted to examine the various discourses that the children used to describe and explain their experiences, particularly in terms of competition/winning and expectations or limitations based on their gender as they play alongside each other. I also sought ways in which the children resisted discursive domination in an effort to make their participation more reflective of their own desires and interests. Finally, I looked to the participants for suggestions about how their league could be improved.

1.5 Research questions

- How do children describe their experience of adult-organized recreational basketball?
    - Do their descriptions match what I observe of these experiences?

- What is most important to them about their experience and what aspects of their participation would they like to be different?
- How is discourse reflected in the choices, actions, and explanations of the participants?
- How does gender affect young basketball players' experience on the court?
- In what ways do these children challenge the prevalent discourses and resist the domination of the adults that surround them during their sport experience?

1.6 Conclusion

Forty years ago adult-organized children's sport was first seen as being problematic. In the intervening years there have been a variety of changes made to children's sport; however, the impact of some of these changes remains unclear. Based on my previous experiences in children's sport, both as a participant and a coach, my goal was to examine the effect of the changes in depth through a qualitative sociological investigation into a children's basketball league.

Chapter 2—The Literature

2.1 Introduction

The problems previously described have resulted in a wide variety or research on children's sport. However, most of it has been either quantitative and/or from a psychological perspective. While such research has provided very useful and interesting insights, on their own they have not been enough. However, they do provide a sense of the common themes and discourse that are prevalent in children's sport. They also provide significant pieces of the childhood discourse. Therefore, I first provide a brief overview of the common themes which is not meant to be comprehensive instead is provided to give a sense of the issues that are most prominent in children's sport. These themes include: educating adults; winning and competition; sportspersonship, fair play, and character; why they participate and why they quit. In the next section of literature, I have focused on the research that more deeply examined children's experience of sport. Here there was an emphasis on gender and children's experience of traditionally organized sport as well as other versions of sport. Most of this research asked different questions than those that interested me; however, their findings have provided key insights that have created a foundation for me to work from. It should also be noted that much of the research does not focus on recreational sport, but rather it was drawn from athletes and coaches involved in more competitive versions of sport or, in other cases, alternative versions of sport.

2.2 Educating adults

The obvious response to the early recommendations was to create ways to assist the education of the adults involved in children's, particularly the coaches. Several major

training programs can have a positive impact on children's experience of sport (Smith & Smoll, 1997) and children that have more good experiences with their coaches are more likely to stay in sport (Lesyk & Kornspan, 2000). However, such programs cannot fix everything. It is estimated that only 10 to 20% of coaches actually receive any training (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997). Coaching at the recreational level is voluntary and many parents are only coaching because no one else is willing to do the job. As well, the vast majority of volunteer coaches are there to coach their own children (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997). This means that if they tend to coach only as long as their children continue to play, then a high attrition rate for children also means a high attrition rate for coaches. As well, research shows that the relationship between coach-parents and child-athletes is complicated and challenging. Weiss and Fretwell (2005) examined these relationships between 11 – 12 year-old boys and their fathers. They elaborated the many advantages and disadvantages of such a relationship and its impact on teams. Ultimately they encourage training for the coaches so that they can better handle the situation.

There have also been efforts to educate parents and other spectators at children's sport events this is in part due to the much publicized examples of the more outrageous adult conduct (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that organized youth sport relies so heavily on parent volunteers to function. In such situations, not only is the children's game or fun interrupted, but also, the children are often left confused, embarrassed, and feeling responsible for the behaviour (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997). The bad behaviour of adults is a serious enough problem in children sport to warrant a demand for a code of ethics for parents (Humphrey & Yow, 2002) and

such codes have actually been implemented in leagues and used successfully to improve the behaviour of both spectators and players (Wells et al., 2005).

2.3 Winning and competition

Competition is different from winning though they often seem to be conflated. Competition is the process of striving for something whereas winning is simply one of the potential outcomes. Both are often seen negatively in terms of they way they can dominate sport. The one aspect that the literature seems to agree on is that sport must de-emphasize winning in children's sport instead the focus should be on fun and skill development. The problem is that it is not always easy for coaches in particular to stick to this philosophy as they often succumb to parental pressure and the professional sport discourse around winning (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). Some authors emphasize the value of cooperation over competition (Humphrey & Yow, 2002; Iso-Ahola, 1980). However, there is an acknowledgement that competition is here to stay (Humphrey & Yow, 2002). As well, others argue that competition can be a positive aspect of sport (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Martens, 1988); when done properly and it may even make children's sport participation more satisfactory (Green, 2001). However, the focus must be on the process or striving rather than the result (Drewe, 2003; Martens, 1988).

2.4 Character, sportspersonship, and fair play

The idea that sport builds character dates back to the nineteenth-century notion of "muscular Christianity" (Donnelly, 2000). The belief then was that by participating in team sports in particular, men developed good character, manliness, piety and patriotism (Stephenson, 2003). Athletes have traditionally been perceived as hardworking and

dedicated in their attempt to win and that this is done *strictly through skill and effort*[3] (Stephens, 1993). The problem is that there is no evidence that sport *on its own* builds character (Miracle & Rees, 1994; Sage, 1998) in part because there is no consistent definition of what it is (Stephens, 1993; Stoll & Beller, 1988). As well, when coaches think they are teaching it, they have trouble explaining what it is they are actually teaching and how they are teaching it, and equally importantly, when winning became a priority aspects like fairness in playing time are forgotten (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). The physical act of performing a skill does not teach moral action, though clearly there is potential for such development through social interactions (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997). Qualities that may be valued in sport may be ultimately problematic (McCormack & Chalip, 1988). That is, coaches might prefer obedience among players and find creativity or independence problematic. Which qualities are better and which ones are accepted, especially in team sport? Do we value the resistance of those who go against the norms of sport; is that not courageous and a sign of character? (Donnelly, 1981).

Character is very much linked to sportspersonship which has become a more generalized notion of how sport should be played and certainly includes female athletes. It is presented, by academics and popular writers alike as a key aspect of sport (Brown, 2003; Engh, 1999; Martens et al., 1981; Thompson 1993; Thompson 2003). Fair play is basically sportspersonship put into practice. The latter can be seen as a complex, multi-dimensional construct that includes: respect for social conventions of sport, rules and officials; full commitment to participation, concern for opponent, as well as the absence

[3] This may change with the revelations of widespread use of performance enhancers by high-profile athletes, but I suggest that the mythology is still intact, particularly for the beginning amateur. That is, children would be said to be *playing sport the way it was meant to be played.* This is not unlike how women's hockey is often described (Theberge, 2003), meaning it remains largely untainted by money, unlike men's hockey.

of negative approach to sport (Vallerand et al, as cited Joyner & Mummery, 2005). Fair play is realized when there is respect, honesty, and the rules of the game are followed (*Fair play,* 1994; Stephens, 1993). Finally, emphasizing sportspersonship may also be a way to de-emphasize winning, putting the focus put on the process and organizers may see it as helping to keep excessive competitiveness in check.

2.5 Why they participate and why they quit

Children participate in organized sport for many reasons, such as: fun, improving skills and fitness, doing something they are good at, excitement and competition, being part of a team (Seefeldt, Ewing & Walk as cited in Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). While children may offer several reasons for participation, both girls and boys the say first reason for participating is fun (Gilbert, 2001; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). In fact children, parents, and coaches all put fun at the top of their list for why children should participate in sport (Lesyk & Kornspan, 2000). It should noted that boys are still more likely to participate in organized sport than girls and children are now starting in organized sport even younger than in the past (Cote and Hay, 2002). The latter might be contrary to concerns expressed in the conference on Child in Sport and Physical Activity previously mentioned. That is, it said that participation should be voluntary and it discouraged adults from becoming involved too early and intruding on child-organized play (Orlick & Botterill, 1975). It inspires one to ask why children as young as three and four years old need to be in adult-organized sport—are the children choosing this for themselves?

Dropping out of sport is a prominent issue in the literature; however, there is controversy about how dropout rates in youth sport should be read. Some researchers point to dropout numbers as the crisis of youth sport (Smith, Smoll & Curtis, 1979;

Steelman, 1995; Wells et al., 2005). Siegenthaler and Gonzalez (1997) blame aspects of sport programs, such as poor coaching, for children's loss of interest in sport. However, others question the idea that is as simple as that. For example, the rates may not reflect what is actually happening because some children may just be switching sports (Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992; Lindner, Johns, & Butcher, 1991). Or if they are quitting, it may simply be because as children age they tend to develop more responsibilities and possibilities to choose from (Lindner, Johns & Butcher, 1991). Dropping out might not be a reflection of the quality of sport, instead children may simply be breaking from their parents and trying something new (Heinsohn & Lewis, 1995). The implication here is that we may be over-estimating the problematic nature of children's sport.

2.6 Gender and children sport

Gender is a very common topic in sports generally. Researchers occasionally addressed the issue of gender in children's sport but mostly in terms of simply acknowledging that girls and boys may have different interests or experiences (Jones, 2005; Lesyk & Kornspan, 2000). There is some research on either girls *or* boys and what role gender plays in their participation, but there is almost no research that considers the role of gender when girls and boys play against each other. This is surprising considering how prevalent this now seems to be.

2.6.1 Girls in sport

Sometimes girls felt like intruders in a boys' world (Jeanes, 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002) or simply overlooked. In her study of a children's soccer day camp, Rhys Jones (2005) found that even though there were equal numbers of girls and boys, and they were generally treated as equals in terms of opportunities to participate, the girls

noticed that most of the coaches were male and the instructional videos they watched only showed male soccer players. Ruth Jeanes (2005) found that girls were acutely aware of their secondary status on the soccer pitch field because of their femaleness. While they knew it was acceptable for them to participate, they were also very aware of the limits of their participation. To some extent sport is still seen as being incompatible with becoming women (Coakley & White, 1999; Jeanes, 2005). Jay Coakley and Anita White (1999) suggested that this incompatibility relates to the notion that boys become men through sport, and the fear is that women can too. Perhaps contributing to this was the fact that they also found that parents tended to be more protective of girls, meaning girls had greater limits on what they could do, especially activities that would keep them out after dark or on their own.

Even among young children in sport gender is an issue. In her ethnographic study of girls and boys in grades 1 – 3 Cynthia Hasbrook (1999) found that the children relied heavily on the notion of gender difference. Boys tended to diminish or insult girls' physicality, especially when girls were clearly superior to them. In many cases, the girls seemed to accept the boys' attitude and behaviour. Hasbrook also found that children move in gender-specific ways and that "physicality is not simply a function of the biological body" (p. 11). If we communicate through movement, then observing children in action could be a wonderful source of insight, creating understandings that cannot be found just through questions and interviews.

2.6.2 Boys in sport

Sport is used to teach boys what it means to be men, at least that may be the case when the teams are all-male. Alan Ingham and Alison Dewar (1999) examined 13 and 14

year-old boys in hockey while Gary Fine (1987) studied 8 to 12 year-old boys playing baseball. Both works focused on masculinity and found that the men involved in teams regularly used sport to teach and reinforce what it meant to be men. For Ingham and Dewar, violence, both real and symbolic, was prevalent and both studies showed that girls were kept at the periphery of sport—where they were largely sources of prestige or derision. Fine (1987) also described the importance of a variety of themes in boys' baseball such as, character building, effort, sportsmanship, teamwork, and winning and losing. Both studies invite questions about how the players' interaction with each other and the coaches might change if girls were added to the teams. In the same way, a girls-only environment invites different emphases in discourse and behaviour as well, particularly among peers.

2.6.3 Girls and boys together

On occasion researchers compared or contrasted girls and boys and their realities or interests on the playing field (e.g. Jones, 2005; Weiss & Chaumeton, 1992), but only one specifically looked at what happens when they play against each other. Shakib and Dunbar (2002) provided some fascinating points to consider on how gender works on the basketball. Their qualitative project examined high school basketball teams. The girls and boys did not actually play together, except in informal situations, but those moments were highly revealing. Both girls and boys perceived the boys' skill and game to be better. Even when girls outplayed boys, their success was rationalized away (e.g., the boy was not really trying). They also provided examples of how devastating it was for some boys to be beaten on the court by a girl. Girls were very aware of the risk of playing "like

boys" or beating them at their own game—it made them vulnerable to attacks on their femaleness or their sexuality.

2.7 Child-organized sport versus adult organized sport

Using mixed methods Coakley (1983) studied children (mostly 10 to 12 years old) involved in informal or child-organized sport[4] (COS) and formal or adult-organized children's sport (AOCS) and found clear differences between the two. COS were child-controlled, competitive, and had flexible rules that maximized action and involvement for everyone; here skill and size mattered less. COS sport depended heavily on friendship, interpersonal relations, decision-making, and organizational skills. In sharp contrast, Coakley found that in AOCS, action and involvement were largely under adult control. As well, player positions became very important and playing time was often related to skill, so smaller, timid, and less skilled players were more likely to sit on sidelines. The rules were about standardizing the competition, controlling behaviour, and maintaining the organization. Rule enforcement was based on universal criteria and never considered the child's skill level or other factors. For most children, lack of opportunity to play was their main source of disappointment. Clearly control is a key difference between these two forms of sport. Coakley's (1983) work suggested that children could be missing out on very productive learning opportunities, such as gaining skills that come from problem solving and doing, without adults telling them how it should be done. Children readily change the rules of sport to allow them to play at their own level (Cote & Hay, 2002), so why does the adult-organized version have to be so rigid?

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[4] Child-organized sport and adult-organized sport are terms I use not Coakley. I use them to emphasize the fact that his findings clearly support the idea that "informal" sport can actually be quite organized.

It is important to not overlook the potential problems with COS. Coakley (2001) acknowledge problems that may be associated with sport that is not supervised by adults. For example, girls may not be welcome in games with boys and bigger children may bully smaller ones. But with AOCS, children may take on the norms of adult world and some authors question if this is the best thing, suggesting that children might learn better through spontaneous play, away from adult influence (Coakley, 1993; Devereux, 1976; Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997). Because of the flaws in both versions of sport, Coakley (2001) recommends hybrid versions of the two, that is, where children have much more control and adults are there more as subtle guides. Just like AOCS, the child-organized version can be problematic, but the real value rests in looking to it for ideas and understanding of what children want from their sport experiences.

Recent research in AOCS comes from Andy Pitchford and collaborators. Their study represents early findings of a five-year project on sport policy in the United Kingdom. "The voice of the child in the amateur sport is repeatedly marginalized or overlooked" (Pitchford, et al., 2004, p. 44). They found that children's influence on policies and practice is minimal, despite claims of greater sensitivity to their needs. In spite of this, they did find that many children enjoy a range of positive experiences, though one major complaint was that they wanted less intense adult supervision, particularly in terms of the critical remarks from the sidelines. The last point is one that Gilbert (2001) also found to be true among girls aged 8 – 13. When she asked them what they liked and disliked about any of their experiences in sport the girls stated they liked to hear supportive cheers from spectators for their *contributive* performance, but really did not appreciate the critical comments on their effort, as perceived by adults.

2.8 Power/performance versus pleasure/participation

Coakley (2001) provided two broader models of sport and the COS and AOCS versions of sport can be located within these models. The power and performance model focuses on strength, speed, and power. It emphasizes excellence through competition, and success comes from hard work, sacrifice, and risk. Records, technology, and hierarchical authority are important. It is meritocratic in that skills are presumed to determine success and finally, opponents are seen as enemies. In contrast, the pleasure and participation model emphasizes active participation for everyone. Relationships and connections between participants are important. It is built around fun, health, and individual expression. It also reflects democratic decision-making, cooperation, and power sharing and finally, participants compete with rather than against each other.

2.12 Recreational sport

Coakley and Donnelly (2004) provided a general description of sport which they suggest is built from commonly used explanations of what activities must encompass in order to be considered sport. They must be physical activities, competitive activities, played for intrinsic and/or extrinsic rewards, and institutionalized. The last aspect has several distinguishing features as well: standardized rules, official regulatory agencies, importance is given to organizational and technical aspects and finally, the learning of game skills is formalized. For the purposes of my project I would simply clarify that recreational sport, as opposed to more competitive sport found in select or travel leagues, allows any child that is registered in a league to play and theoretically receive an equal opportunity to play. There may be a lesser emphasis on winning, but it is by no means excluded from the recreational sport experience.

2.13 Alternative approaches to sport

Some sport organizers have sought ways to improve children's sport opportunities that went beyond simply trying to change the adults involved in traditional recreational sport. Instead, they sought new ways of doing sport. Rather tellingly, creating alternatives sport programs can be challenging because many adults are resistant to changes to the traditional models (Green, 2001).

Christine Green (2001) studied an alternative soccer program. It involved no formal competition but rather used playgroups lead by adults in which various soccer-related games were played. Each game was tailored to skill level and adult intervention was minimized. The program was generally successful though it ultimately had to be changed to provide children opportunities to compete. *On the Move* was also an attempt to try something different with sport. The program was created specifically to address the sport and physically activity interests and needs of girls. Fenton, Kopelow, Lawrence, and Millar, (2000) examined this Canadian program for girls 19 and under. In it local groups organized activities with full input from the participants, meaning the activities offered were based on participants' expressed interests. Some activities were the same as traditional sport while others are not.

Wells et al. (2005) modified a traditional basketball program in an effort to maximize sportspersonship. The authors used a variety of techniques to downplay competitiveness and increase sportspersonship, such as posters, t-shirts, and assessing new fouls. By the end of the season parents and staff at the recreation centre agreed that sportspersonship (the children's behaviour in particular) had improved throughout the season and over previous seasons. Ostensibly this research is about making the sport

better for children, but it might also be seen as being more about creating "well-behaved" children.

Steven Aicinena (2002) also did not venture too far from typical recreational sport, but he did focus on trying to balance the power/performance and pleasure/ participation models of sport. He experimented with this for 14 years as a coach of recreational and select soccer teams. He argued that the reason for much of the conflict on the sport field is that different people emphasize one model over the other. He found that the right balance created both success in the standings and resulted in more satisfied participants.

2.14 What is missing?

Previous research on children's sport remains somewhat lacking (Pitchford et al., 2004), particularly in terms of social science that looks beyond elite sport (Tinning, 1997). Much of the most relevant research I found focused on either select sport (Fine, 1987; Ingalls & Dewar, 1999; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002) or atypical sport circumstances (Fenton et al, 2000; Green, 2001; Jeanes, 2005; Jones, 2005; Wells et al, 2005). Of the research that looked at gender, only two (Hasbrook, 2001; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002) really examined girls and boys in the same active space and what happens when girls and boys play with or against each other. However, this interaction did not occur within a league and neither looked at the age-group my research involved. This may be important simply because there is so much going on between the ages of ten and thirteen, particularly with the strong gender distinctions, both physical and social, and growing sexual interest that come with puberty. Jones (2005) did examine gender differences in terms of interests, but did not consider girls and boys interaction on the soccer field.

In terms of methodology, some research provided a nice breadth of knowledge but not the depth of understanding of children's experience I wanted (Aicinena, 2002; Coakley, 1983; Pitchford, et al, 2005). While others (Fine, 1987; Ingalls & Dewar, 1999; Jeanes, 2005) provide illuminating depth, they only involved boys or girls, not both. Finally, as far as questioning the validity of typical organized sport three of studies moved outside the traditional sport model (Fenton et al, 2000; Green, 2002; Jeanes; 2005). While these sport alternatives are intriguing and may provide possibilities for the future, they do not provide insight into of children's experience of traditional sports, which is where most are actually participating.

2.15 Conclusion

The previous research provided very useful points of departure for my project; they just did not ask all the questions for which I sought answers. Part of the reason for this is that some of the research came before some of the significant changes that have occurred in children's sport, particularly in terms of the gender make-up of many leagues. However, these do provide a nice contrast to more current research. Ultimately, the key piece of research that is missing would examine the impact of girls and boys playing alongside and against each other in organized sport. As well, it would examine how children are responding to the changes that have emanated from all that concern 30 to 40 years ago. None of the previous research really attempts this.

I also took a different theoretical approach to children's sport than the previous literature. I examined children's sport through Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, particularly in terms of correct training, the panoptic gaze, and discourse. The reason for this that I believed it would help me understand the how relationships worked

on the playing court and why people made the choices they did. As my theoretical understandings grew over the past two years, Foucault's work was helpful as it allowed me to examine more closely whose creativity and desires were being valued and whose were being limited. That is, traditional adult-organized children's tends to start with the premise that adults *do* know best, and that while sport is flawed, overall it is the best approach for children. By examining how parents, coaches, and organizers used correct training, surveillance, and discourse, I was able to evaluate for myself if traditional sport necessarily is the best approach for children.

Chapter 3—Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

> A Foucauldian analysis of sport is concerned with how relations of power target and shape the body through different types of practices, forms of knowledge, and a set of norms in order to produce specific bodily capacities and particular attitudes towards the body and self. (Maguire, 2002, p. 293)

As Jennifer Maguire suggested, we might ask what kind of knowledge is created via children's sport and equally importantly, what other knowledges are overlooked in this particular disciplinary process. That is, we seem to assume that children's sport requires adults to teach specific skills and these specific skills are required to play basketball. Specific skills create effective and efficient players and teams. Other skills (and ideas) that are brought to the court are often pushed aside or perhaps humoured briefly. Coaches often have very clear ideas of what makes a good basketball players and teams. The children are not surveyed for their thoughts on the matter; though occasionally a coach will invite the players to bring ideas to the court in terms of drills or games they might try. However, this appears to be more an effort to keep the children engaged in the practices, which is clearly a challenge at times.

I drew much of my theoretical foundation from Michel Foucault and those who draw from his work; however a variety of authors, particularly post-structural and post-modern, have contributed a variety of concepts and nuances to my ontological and epistemological stances and therefore my theory/methods toolkit[5]. As Brustad (1997) explains, a post-modern approach accepts and integrates different ways of knowing. Because there are many ways of knowing, there are many ways of learning, all of which can bring greater depth and understanding to what young athletes are experiencing and

[5] Foucault suggests that theory should be a source of instruments or tools to be used reflectively as circumstance requires; my objective is to use what works, with an eye toward coherence.

the meaning they give it. As well, Brustad (1997) argues out that positivistic research tends to inspire more psychological explanations of behaviour rather than sociological ones. The problem with this is that there is too little acknowledgement of the social reality that people operate within. Making generalizations may make us feel better or more confident in our findings; however, it does not make it inherently any more accurate.

I have chosen a post-modern approach because I was not only interested how children describe their experiences, but also how they might come to such descriptions and explanations of what they are experiencing. A post-modern analysis allowed for the examination of the local stories that reflect the experiences of a heterogeneous group of young sport participants. It permitted me to delve beyond the comfortable simplicity of statistics to consider the inconsistencies and contradictions of experiences; while the various players had many things in common they also had many differences in their sport experiences. Such an approach acknowledged and embraced such multiplicity rather than glossing over differences in an effort to create generalizations. It also emphasized the importance of the role of discourse in social relations, allowing me to push beyond obvious responses to consider what might be influencing them. As Laurel Richardson (2000) explained, language is not a reflection of social reality, but rather the former creates the latter. As well, she indicated that it is through language that we define social organization and power and we construct our sense of selves. "Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration and struggle" (p.8).

What follows are descriptions of my understanding of the key theoretical building blocks of a Foucauldian epistemology that I used and how they were relevant to adult-organized children's sport.

3.2 Power and power relations

Power is a relation of creative forces that sometimes work against or with each other (Deleuze, 1988). Michel Foucault (1980a) describes power as something that cannot be possessed but rather it is a way of relating. He states that power is not "a group of institutions or mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state" (1980a, p. 92). Instead, he argues that power is everywhere and does not exist in the form of a binary of those who can use it and those who cannot (i.e., adults and children, respectively). While power is not a binary Foucault (1980a) he says, "Where there is power there is resistance" (p. 95) and by declaring that such resistance is the "irreducible opposite" to power, which can perhaps be more clearly described here as domination. This implies that resistance and domination are expressions of power and neither exists without the other, or rather, they are the same thing just working in different directions (Deleuze, 1988). These forces of creativity/resistance and domination exist in the same moment and constantly cycle through each other, over and over again; an act of resistance inspires domination, which inspires more acts of resistance, and so on. And importantly, Gilles Deleuze (1988) clarifies that it is the resistive force that always comes first. This is important because it is a creative force and domination is merely an attempt to control to this creativity; however, the dominative force can never completely contain it, hence the constant cycling.

Power is a key element in understanding the social reality of children, particularly in terms of their creativity and resistance on the playing court, whether it is their initial desire to simply play or their reassertion of that desire. David Halperin (1995) provided a helpful elaboration of where resistance can be located. He points out that since domination is everywhere opportunities for resistance are also everywhere. He suggests that people will resist at the "fault lines" of discourse. That is, in the very moments discourse is used to dominate and control us, we have greatest opportunity to resist. For example, when a coach is yelling at a child from the sidelines to run faster or stay in the correct position that is when the child can most effectively resist, perhaps by ignoring the coach and simply wandering about on the court. In this way she or he is refusing to succumb to the coach's attempt at domination. It should also be pointed out that not everyone resists domination when they experience it, many will, in fact, emphatically embrace the domination (Alvesson, 2002).

A relationship of power can be summarized as one person's effort to guide the behaviour or action of others and importantly it is the possible actions that are acted upon, rather than the individual herself or himself (Maguire, 2002; Markula & Pringle, 2006). As well, a key element of this relationship is freedom, that is, though there may be imbalance in their ability to exercise power, all parties must have the capacity to act—power is not unidirectional (Maguire, 2002; Markula & Pringle, 2006). On the basketball court adults and children may not be equals, but each has the capacity to affect the behaviour of others. Markula and Pringle suggest that the point of understanding power relations is to examine how power is exercised and what happens as a result of this. As

well, it allows us to recognize weaknesses in relationships of power and since they are not fixed or stable, we can transform them.

3.3 Discourse

Tinning (1997) offered a simple definition of discourse, describing it as "a recurring pattern of language (or visual images) about a phenomenon which portrays reality in a certain way" (p. 101). It is our taken-for-granted understanding of how something is understood (Tinning, 1997). Discourse is everywhere and yet nowhere in particular (Markula & Pringle, 2006). We are never outside discourse and language defines our experiences (Raby, 2005). Mats Alvesson (2002) suggests that to understand an "object", in this case a young athlete, it is not sufficient just to simply observe the athlete; one also needs to examine the language and practices that surrounds the child athletes and also the discourses they incorporate into their explanations and rationalizations of their experiences and choices. Discourse can found in different sources, of particular use to me were literature (both academic and popular) and prevalent clichés, especially those written about or heard during sport events (e.g. "it's just a game", or "it doesn't matter if you win or lose, it's how you play the game"). Other clichés that relate to gender and children were also relevant (e.g. "boys will be boys" or "children should be seen and not heard").

3.3.1 Sport

Of particular interest was the discourse that was that created, support, and maintain the institution of children's sport. If, as Rebecca Raby (2005) suggested, resistance is the disruption of discourse, then clearly the various discourses enveloping children's sport become key elements of this research. The various discursive themes

addressed in the literature review were used in my analysis of the data. Of particular interest were the discourses of the power/performance and pleasure participation models of sport. The latter model is ostensibly largely that of recreational sport. However, was the discourse surrounding this league consistent with the pleasure/participation model, or was it interrupted by or even drowned out by the power/performance model that clearly dominates Canadian professional and elite sport?

3.3.2 Gender

Another relevant discourse is that of gender because children's sport has a strongly masculine-centred tradition. A significant emphasis of organized children's sport from its inception at the beginning of the 20th century was to counter the influence of mothers, teachers, and other women that surrounded boys while fathers were at work (Coakley, 2006). Sport has been used to try to turn boys into men for a very long time, but what happens to boys who do not want to be there or do not "measure up"? Does such a discourse create problems for them? Also, at the heart of sport is the notion of play—something that is fun and creative (Feezell, 2004). Perhaps boys do not want sport to be a life lesson in becoming a man they may just want to play.

It is not difficult to envision such a discourse being problematic for girls. Though girls in Canada generally have similar access to participation in most sport leagues, it may still be questioned whether they are, in fact, as welcome on the field as are boys. Even today girls are aware they may be considered intruders on the sport field (Jeanes, 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). Girls who play sports have been and are still called tomboys and women who continue to play sports, especially those in traditionally

"masculine" sports often face scrutiny or accusations in terms of their gender or sexuality (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1998; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002).

3.3.3 Childhood

The concept of childhood is culturally defined meaning it varies with time and place; however, what is less culturally variable is that the prevalent discourses that determine childhood are primarily determined by adults (Kamp, 2006). According to Ruth Kurth-Schai (1988), children in Western society tend to be discursively positioned in terms of adult society in one of three ways: as victims, as threats, or as learners. She explains that the first requires adults to be their protectors and always available to keep them from harm. The second treats children as wild and in need of adult control. She describes the final vision of children as resting somewhere between the first two, where children are basically incomplete adults, meaning they are incompetent and need adult guidance. Related to the three conceptions of children is the fairly recent ideal of the *good parent.* Coakley (2007) states that this perspective links parents' moral worth to their children's behaviour, one that has certainly become prevalent in children's sport. He states that through their children's behaviour and achievements on the playing field, parents can cultivate their own culturally sanctioned moral worth. In this discourse, good parents become responsible for their child's *every action at all times.* The potential impact on children's participation in sport becomes evident, particularly when they intersect the various sport discourses on sportspersonship, winning, or not being a quitter.

It was crucial to consider the various discourses that were prevalent on and around the playing court as they helped determine how the game was played and people's

reaction to it. Looking for key words and ideas in the courtside chatter and the league's literature made what was truly valued more evident.

3.4 The panopticon, discipline, and docile bodies

In his book, *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*,[6] Foucault (1995) describes and explains the panopticon as a powerful tool that is used to help create discipline and the docile body. The panopticon prison design makes the prisoners highly visible, allowing an observer to monitor them without the prisoners knowing for certain they were being watched. This inspires prisoners to discipline themselves—behaving within acceptable parameters. The observer is anonymous and need not even exist as the *possibility* of being watched is internalized and the prisoners take over their own surveillance.

For Foucault the panopticon is a social diagram, meaning that it and its ensuing discipline are generalizable and can be applied to a wide variety of institutions and environments. In this way, discipline becomes a widely used technique of power; "a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use" (Foucault, 1995, p. 205). He stated that this panoptic diagram has been incorporated into many of society's institutions and people have internalized the panopticon gaze. This means people are now subject to constant self-surveillance constantly monitoring our choices and behaviour. For Foucault, this discipline results in the *docile body,* one that accepts the correct training, the surveillance or the power relations as they are.

3.5 Discipline and the gaze on court

Noel Dyck (2003) described venues of children's sport as "decidedly purposeful spaces within which significant matters related to child development are expected to

[6] Unless otherwise indicated, this section is drawn from *Discipline and punish.*

transpire" (p. 58). The usefulness of the panoptic diagram in understanding children's sport was evident and helped explain some of the behaviour and choices of both the adults and the children. Games have a very specific geometry that creates a highly visible stage, not unlike the backlit prison cell; what Foucault describes as "discipline observatories". Games are frequently surrounded by many adults just outside the perimeter of the playing field, putting them in good position to watch. At any point during the game one or more adults may be watching any of the children. The basketball court has parameters that invite a focused observation. In fact, stepping outside the boundaries to get away from the adult gaze could simply draw even more surveillance. "What does she think she's doing? Where is he going?" As well, any member of the public has the right and even an implicit invitation to enter the area of the playing field and pass judgment via applause or comments. Whether the children like it or not they can do little to stop it; the game will and does go on. This situation entails the most important aspects of the panopticon in that the children are highly visible and would be acutely aware they are probably being watched.

As Foucault (1980c) emphasizes, the interiorization of the panoptic gaze is absolutely key to understanding discipline. Discipline can be easily maintained on the court because the children internalize the adult gaze, along with their approval or disapproval, and it will guide their choices and behaviour. With the near-constant commenting and applause from the sidelines, the young athletes are reminded of what is expected of them and even more importantly, that they are constantly under surveillance. It is not just the observing, it is the judgment that is integral. Foucault (1995) explains that penalty and discipline become normalized through their constancy, for example, the

endless adult commentary from the sidelines. It is true that children, being familiar with the sport, gender, or other discourses will also judge each other, but there is a difference. The relation of power is likely to be less unbalanced. Children can more readily fight back against other children, though they may need to keep it out of purview of adults, which may mean they will have to save it for another occasion—lest they be judged and punished for their behaviour.

Adults are encouraged to observe young people at play; they are invited, in essence, to participate in the event and offer judgment on the children's performance. And this judgement is not just reserved for their own child, but any child on the court and just as importantly, the performance of the on-court officials. In fact, the worst commentary is generally saved for the referees. The officials occupy a rather intriguing position on the court. While they float among the children, the referees essentially lead the surveillance of the young athletes, but at the same time, they are also a major focus of the parental surveillance. Parents and other adults often feel quite free in offering up genuinely unpleasant descriptions of referees and their efforts. Children cannot help but hear and learn from such judgment. As they listen to the discourse surrounding alleged officiating errors they would certainly become very aware of the meaning of making mistakes, or more importantly, being perceived to make mistakes. As well, the actual meaning or importance of the game and winning would be made abundantly clear. There are no private spaces for the children on the field away from the adult gaze and their judgment of behaviour and effort. "Visibility is a trap" [7] (Foucault, 1995, p. 200).

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[7] According to Foucault (1995) the panopticon requires temporary and anonymous observers. Though the children will know some of the spectators, many will be unknown to them. As well, spectators come and go frequently during games and are often distracted from the game due to conversations and other activities.

Should a child wish to escape this adult gaze at an unacceptable time (i.e., in the middle of the action), she or he may be literally pushed back onto the court, reminded of the fact that she or he *chose* this and it is costing good money that will not be *wasted.* What is most interesting is that even when they know they are likely being watched and are potentially subject to punishment for their behaviour, children may still resist adult wishes and do as they please.

3.6 Correct training

The coaches' role in the discipline was also key in that they provided what Foucault (1995) calls "correct training" and this is accomplished through "hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination" (p. 170). Markula and Pringle (2006) offered a relevant hypothetical example when they state, "Through hierarchical observation... a coach can implement additional workouts for the unfit, skill sessions for the unskilled, and punishing drills for the tardy" (p. 41). They also explained that in this way athletes can be more efficiently moulded. Coaches are also assisted by various others (Markula & Pringle, 2006) involved in games and practices, for example, referees, parents, players, and various other observers. This surveillance provides a normalizing judgement, where even small mistakes can lead to punishment, "a whole series of subtle procedures was used, from light physical punishment to minor deprivations and petty humiliations"[8] (Foucault, 1995, p. 178). Foucault (1995) describes normalization as a great instrument of power, but it does not produce "clones or dupes" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 42). Rather it creates homogeneity, while at the same time making distinctions or creating

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Thus it is never certain that one is being watched and it can be difficult to discern the individuals from the crowd, particularly when the children are focused on the game itself.

[8] Observing even more light-hearted practices in children's sport can provide examples of each.

gaps between individuals. "The perpetual penality that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes." (Foucault, 1995, p. 183).

The coach puts the young athletes through the drills, teaches them the correct role they must play and exactly how to become a productive player. He[9] is the greatest influence in terms of normalizing them as basketball players, or more generally as athletes. He is the one that constantly surveys their actions in both practices and games. He is the one that corrects their movements; their decision-making; their attempts at creativity. It is through the control of activity (Foucault, 1995)—scheduling the events and efforts, establishing the rhythm of movement, establishing the correct body movements how to handle the ball correctly, constantly correcting the movements and ball-handling—the coach creates a docile body that will do as he, and sport, insists. "Through this technique of subjection a new object was being formed" (Foucault, 1995, p. 155); the young basketball player is being created.

3.7 Control on the playing field

Deleuze (1990) extended Foucault's ideas of a disciplinary society saying it has become series of sites of confinement where "individuals are going from one closed site to another, each with its own laws..." (p. 177). He offered as examples such institutions as the family, school, and work, and points out that each insists on different types of behaviour. The playing field of adult-organized children's sport can be listed as another site of confinement. Specific behaviour is expected of children here that might be very

[9] In most cases it is he and in my research project, all the coaches that participated were male; there was only one female coach in this age division.

different from other locations and it is often not a place that a child can easily leave on her or his own, without the approval of a parent or guardian.

Deleuze (1990) stated that in a control society individuals are never left alone for too long. Some evidence of this in children's sport seems to exist. Children are driven to and from practices and games by parents. As well, though it was usual for parents to attend children's games, it is now fairly commonplace for them to stay for practices.[10] Organizers, all adults, decide the rules of the game, what athletes will wear, playing field dimensions, who will be on which teams, when and where games will be played, who will officiate, and breaks in play can occur. Coaches are also usually adults and they generally decide how much playing time each player will get, and heavily influences the tone of the team experience. The coach decides who will play what position and when, without necessarily even asking what the young athletes want to do or what they think they are capable of. Instead they often choose children to play certain positions to maximize winning. Should winning be more important that giving children the chance to try new positions or test their skills as they see fit? This can be particularly problematic for the athletes who get stuck playing the less action-filled positions all the time such as the goalkeeper in soccer or right fielder in baseball or softball. Children are often put in certain positions because they will do the least damage to or the greatest good for the team. What does this do to the children—especially since they are likely to be aware of the discursive and lived reality of such positions? Parents determine how much money will be spent for their children to play. They have the final say in what organized sport

[10] As a coach in youth sport, I have even had parents make snide comments about other parents who have simply dropped off their children and left; they describe such parents as using sport as a babysitting service; perhaps reflecting the good parent discourse

will be played and at what level. They also often determine whether their children show up for games and practices on time or at all. Finally, they make up the majority of those that stand or sit on the sidelines reminding children of how they are doing throughout the game. Almost three decades ago a *Bill of Rights for Young Athletes* was created (Martens & Seefeldt, 1979). It provided a list of rights children should have while participating in sport that are genuinely intended to make sport more responsive to children. However, rather tellingly, only one right actually allows for any control of children's sport to be wielded *by children.*

3.8 Alienation on the playing field

Why does it matter that children have little control over their sport participation? Drawing from Karl Marx[11] (1978) when control over creativity is lost in oppressive circumstances it leads to alienation for the creator. "Alienation is the condition of separation or otherness" (Henricks, 2006, p. 38). Though Marx (1978) was referring specifically to labour his theories can also relate to play and sport (Henricks, 2006). Thomas Henricks (2006) states this is so because Marx did not make significant distinctions between work and leisure in that people need to operate freely in all spaces and that the place of leisure should not be freedom from work. Rather, for Marx, play or sport should, like work, simply be another "pathway for the fullest expression of human capability" (Henricks, 2006, p. 51).

Play is creativity that comes from children's choice and desire, whereas adult-organized sport is quite literally an adulterated form of play. Children are being asked to play games invented by adults with little room for alterations that would suit the needs

[11] While Foucault is critical of traditional understandings of Marx, they do seem to connect on the importance of the creative force and the expression of human capacities.

and whims of those playing the game. Adults create rules and insist that children follow them, whether they like them or not. What might have started out as fun and an outgrowth of children's desires has been largely shaped into what adults desire for their children. Coakley (1993 &1983) has found that children tend to want four things from participating in sport: action; personal involvement in action; close scores and challenges that match skills; and opportunities for friendship. Are these possibilities being maximized in adult-organized sport?

3.9 Governmentality, critical attitude, and ethic of self-care

"One always must suspect that one governs too much" (Foucault, 1997a, p. 74). Foucault (1984) encouraged us to examine our world and determine what is necessary and what is not. Governance should not be an end in itself rather it must serve a purpose (Foucault, 1997a). His point was that we should know if governance is necessary and to what extent. By critiquing the very existence of government (or administration) we may be able to see where it can be done without. It seemed worthwhile to question the role of governance in children's sport, particularly when virtually all of it comes from those who do not even participate in it as players.

"Foucault's strategies of social transformation did not center on revolutionary tactics for changing social structures but related to more localized and less coordinated approaches focused on the connections between discourse and subjectivity" (Pringle, 2005, p. 271). In his essay *What is Enlightenment*, Foucault (1984) emphasized transforming reality by adopting a critical attitude and truly understanding it. He invited people use this attitude to be experimental and test new ideas in the real world. He urged us to examine how we got to where we are, but also operate within contemporary reality

"both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take" (Foucault, 1984, p. 46). The goal is to sift out what is not logically necessary, but has made us who we are, with ultimate goal of leaving the unnecessary behind or "no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are do or think" (p. 46). This can be achieved through an ethic of self-care.

For Foucault (1996), this ethos led people to cultivate and improve themselves through self-knowledge, and significantly, it included a concern and care of others. "Attending to oneself is therefore not just a momentary preparation for living; it is a form of living" (Foucault, 1997b). If a relationship of power involves people working to guide the behaviour or possibilities of other (Markula & Pringle, 2006), then clearly how we act toward others must be considered important. For Foucault, through developing an ethic of self-care, we can work to minimize the domination in our relations of power. He describes this as "the hinge point of ethical concerns and the struggle for respect for rights" (Foucault 1996, p. 447). By maintaining a critical attitude and using an ethic of self-care, we can experiment with and challenge our present and at the same time, minimize abuse and arbitrariness in our power relations, both in terms of the research process and in seeking ways to make sport better.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained my ontological and epistemological approaches to this research project. I explained why I believe this theoretical approach has been useful and productive for me. I relied heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, but I incorporated the work of others as well. Finally, I laid out the concepts I used to design my project and collect and analyze the data and I explained why each is useful to my effort.

Chapter 4—Methodology

4.1 Introduction

A post-modern approach required a mix of data collections techniques that would provide multiple angles of understanding and the opportunity to gather a variety of voices in-depth. Therefore, I used three different data collection techniques. I also used two types of data analysis—discourse and deconstruction. As well, because this is qualitative research, I have placed great emphasis on reflexivity and trustworthiness. Finally, because this is work that involves children, I have also taken great care to outline the important ethical issues I have addressed in this project.

4.2 Quasi-ethnography

Alan Prout and Allison James (1997) suggested that ethnography is a useful way to examine children's experiences in that it gives them a greater opportunity for a direct voice and participation than is often the case in research. They suggest this is particularly important because though social science has paid attention to children, their voices have been largely muted. Ruth Emond (2005) describes the usefulness of ethnography when researching children as it allows us "to gain insight into *what factors are significant* to those children under study rather than assuming *what we as researchers see as significant* in childhood" (p.136). My project was not a traditional ethnography in that I did not become a participant-observer (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Emerson and colleagues (1995) describe ethnography as research that involves entering a social setting and learning about those within it. A key component involves getting close to people's everyday activities and experiences, meaning it does not allow the researcher to be detached or passive. They suggest that ethnographers try to immerse themselves in this

world with the purpose of gaining insight into what these individuals experience as meaningful and important. Ethnography requires "both being with other people to see how they respond to events as they happen and experiencing for oneself these events and the circumstances that give rise to them" (p. 2). It is in this respect that my study is ethnographic in nature. Part of my objective was to learn about how a basketball league operated; to understand the power relations and discourses that guide it. I felt involvement at some level would be the best way to facilitate this. In order to better understand the limitations, expectations, and possibilities available to the young basketball players I needed to see and hear them for myself. Such observations allowed me to better relate to and incorporate the participants' descriptions and explanations of their sport reality; however, I decided it was best not to become directly involved in their activities, say as an assistant coach. My reason for this is manifold. I wanted to draw players from the entire league (in that age division) as opposed to a single team. Being a direct participant in their activity would have required my involvement in six different teams. That would have been unwieldy and probably impossible to do. Even if the participants in my project thought it was a good idea, what about the rest of the players? Or the coaches? Clearly my participation would have been intrusive. If I was twelve or if they had been adults, I might have been able to be "just one of the players".

I could have become an assistant coach and still attempted to include players from all the teams but that also would have been unnecessarily complicated and it would only offer the close up insight for one or two of the participants. Of greater importance, being a coach would not allow me to know how it feels to be on the playing court as a pre-adolescent. As well, I was interested in the participants' response to the coaches that are

there rather than trying to bring my own ideas of coaching to the playing court. It would have been very difficult when it came time to assess the participants' understandings and experiences of their coaches. I suspect getting them to tell me the truth about me might have been rather unproductive. There was already a distinct imbalance in our power relationship, being a coach would only have added to it. Therefore the logical place for me was on the sidelines observing. I should point out that I was close enough to see the action well and hear much of what was said.

I believe my project still retains much of the spirit of ethnography in that I wanted get close to their sport experience as much as could; to understand how the league worked at their level; to get a strong sense of the relational dynamics among the players, coaches, officials, and spectators. This certainly cannot be done from a distance. Simply sitting down with them away from the playing court would not provide the necessary insight. The intimate observations, listening to the comments, watching their bodily behaviours and reactions, and sensing their emotions on the court very much fed and moulded the very questions I asked them. I did not know what it is like to be 10 or 11 and play in this basketball league so I needed this closeness to maximize my understanding and this approach allowed me to minimize my intrusiveness. So though it would not seem to be traditional ethnography, I would suggest that it is quasi-ethnographic. This is the closest I felt I could actually get to actually doing ethnography and still achieve the goals of my research. I used techniques as laid out by Emond (2005), and adapted them to my particular sample.

4.3 Research site

I had considered several possible sports and decided the most suitable would be soccer or basketball because they are both popular sports among children in Canada. For example, even many elementary schools have select teams in these sports and both are often used in physical education classes. They both are also relatively inexpensive in terms of participation and most importantly, it easy fairly easy to watch much of what is happening on and near the court from the sidelines.

After receiving approval from Brock's Research Ethics Board (see Appendix I), I initially approached a soccer league, but ultimately I chose to work with a basketball league in Ontario[12]. John Creswell (1998) suggests that certain individuals within organizations should be approached in order to facilitate research access. I chose this particular basketball league because I casually knew the organizer of the league. I thought this would help increase my likelihood of success in gaining his interest and therefore access to the league. This particular league was part of a YMCA. It was a highly suitable league in that it had girls and boys playing together at all ages, and it had an age division that covered the age group I was most interested in examining, 10 to 13 years old. There were ten teams in that age group with 9 players on each team. The boys outnumbered the girls 2 to 1; however, as Sam[13] pointed out, the numbers of girls participating was increasing each year, to the point where he was now considering dividing the league by gender, assuming the number of girls stayed steady or increased.

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[12] I originally wanted to examine a soccer league, as it is the most popular sport in Canada among children; however, after finding a league it became apparent that the individual expected to assist me was not interested in facilitating my research. After this experience I decided to place more emphasis on genuinely connecting with a helpful gatekeeper rather than focus on the particular sport.

[13] He is the league organizer. I have given any non-participants I mention a pseudonym as well.

I gave Sam a letter that explained the basics of my research and a copy of all the forms and letters for the coaches, parents, and participants (see Appendix II). I also took the time to explain what I was trying to do and why. Not only was he willing to allow me to set up my research project in this league, he actually welcomed my research project, recognizing it as an opportunity for feedback on what he was doing, with the hope of improving his own work. With the approval of that particular YMCA and the league organizer I was allowed to approach the coaches. I simply introduced myself to each coach individually, explained briefly what I was doing, and gave each a copy of a letter that specifically laid out what I was trying to do (Appendix III). If they did not express interest or willingness immediately, I suggested that they might examine the letter and let me know if they were willing. All I wanted from the coaches was to be able to attend a practice so I could briefly explain my project and distribute the literature I had to the players and their parents. If they did not respond immediately or later, I did not approach them again.[14]

Once I had the coach's agreement, I went to the next practice and explained to the players what I was trying to do and invited them to consider participating. I gave each player a letter to give to her or his parent(s) that explained what my project was about (see Appendix IV). Often the children's parents were also at the practice so it gave me the opportunity to answer questions immediately. As Malcolm Hill (2005) points out, in much research certain children are often overlooked, in particular, those with communication difficulties. This was one of my concerns, though it is difficult issue to

[14] I did this because in my ethics application I had stated that the league organizer would ask the coaches about their potential interest in allowing me to approach their team. This was to be done through a coaches' meeting. However, that meeting didn't happen and Sam asked that I simply approach the coaches myself. I only approached them once in order to be respectful and not seem as if I was trying to pressure them into allowing me access to their team.

address in this project. For example, with shy or socially uncomfortable children, it is hard to do anything about that and as Wendy Frisby (personal communication, October 13, 2006) suggests, it is important to respect those who do not want to participate and not try to force the issue, even if their voices might be valuable to hear. To that end, when I spoke to the children, I used humour, I emphasized that I wanted to talk to all sorts of players. I did end up with several children that did self-describe as shy, so perhaps my effort worked.

To make myself easily recognizable, I wore a sweater with "Brock" written on the front to each of my presentations to the children. I then wore it to next couple practices and game days. I left it up to the children or parents to approach me as I did not want them to perceive me as being too pushy or intrusive. Several of the parents approached me during the games to ask more about what the project was about and what would be required both of the children and themselves.

4.4 Participants

To keep the sample size manageable, I sought 10 to 16 participants. I only invited players in the 10 – 13 years age division for several reasons. At this age, children are going through many changes in terms of motor development and girls tend to go through puberty earlier than boys (Malina, Bouchard, & Bar-Or, 2004). For example, at this age many girls will have a size and strength advantage they will not have in a couple years, meaning this age group could contain some very interesting dynamics. In addition, the drop out rate increases dramatically after puberty (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997), suggesting that sport in one way or another is not meeting the needs of many children. In fact, in this league, the next age group (14 – 17 years) had just four teams. As well, this is also a good

age to examine because the children will be old enough to be able to articulate their experiences and opinions.

Emond (2005) offers several points on maximizing trust, participation, and most importantly, the ethicality of my work. She says parents, coaches, and organizers need to understand the point of this research and my role in observation. They also needed to trust that I was not there to judge or evaluate their efforts and practices. Therefore, when I had the opportunity I explained to the parents that I was trying to capture the children's experience. As per Emond's suggestion, I also let them know that I was not there to take an adult role in their children's life. For example, I was not be there to give the children advice or tell them how to play basketball although certainly during the interviews I challenged some of what the children told me and they challenged me in return. The children also have the right to know why I wanted to do this research and about any potential outcomes (Emond, 2005), including what it means for me in terms of my education. Therefore, I included this information in my letters and forms and discussed it at various times during the interviews, particularly in terms of passing the results on to the league organizer and trying to share what they have to say via presentations and articles, both in academia and popular media. Finally, Emond warns about making promises of any direct effects the research might create. Hill (2005) says such promises can also create pressure on children to participate making them may feel obliged to help and this is not appropriate. Just because I might like to help improve children's sport does not mean I can and I advised the children of this. This of course was assuming they thought any changes actually needed to be made—which was not the case for some.

4.5 Sample

I was looking for a diversity of experience. This might have been found on one team; however, part of my concern was that because the coach can loom so large, she or he could greatly affect the children's experience. That is, a particularly bad coach might have created many negative experiences. Alternatively, an especially good coach might have created many positive experiences. Either way, the resulting sample would have lessened the diversity of experience. A variety of coaches would more likely create a variety of impacts, which would be more reflective of a diversity of experiences. In terms of ethics, choosing from several teams also means that those who really do not want participate should feel less pressured to do so, this probably would not be the case if I looked at one whole team. Therefore, I sought participants from as many teams as possible. Coaches from two of the teams expressed no interest in my project and I was also unable to draw participants from two other teams.

My intention was to create a maximum variation sample (Creswell, 1998); however, that proved thoroughly unrealistic. The idea was to create a sample that was reflective of the makeup of the league, choosing participants to represent as many demographics as possible, but only eleven children volunteered, so I had no opportunity to choose. Fortunately I did end up with an equal number of girls and boys. I was originally concerned it could be very unbalanced which would have hampered my ability to examine the gender component. Eleven children expressed interest, five girls and six boys, all between the ages of 11 and 13. However, after the first interview I decided one of the boys would not be able to fully participate in this project. He was autistic, and although he was verbal, he would not really have the capacity to answer questions in the

final interviews and the focus groups.[15] The league is largely white and middle-class to wealthy in terms of socio-economic background. While the YMCA does offer subsidized memberships, they may still be prohibitive for some parents to afford. The participants did not actually have to be members of the YMCA, though clearly those children would be most aware of the basketball league. Joining the league itself cost $70, in return the children received a basketball, a basketball jersey, had the opportunity to participate in at least 11 games were given pizza and drinks at their awards ceremony following the championship game. Each child received at least a participation medal as well. Even if the registration fee was affordable, the location of the YMCA and the limited public transportation possibilities meant a car would have been needed to get to the games and practices, which also might have limited the participation possibility of children from lower income homes.

After being approached by a parent or child, I chatted briefly with the child to make sure they knew what was required to participate and when they expressed understanding of this, I made sure all the consent forms (Appendices V & VI) were signed and then we completed the first interview.

4.6 Data Collection

I used three data collection techniques: individual interviews, observations, and focus groups. By incorporating three information-gathering techniques I was looking to create several vantage points, thus enhancing the opportunity to capture the multiplicity of realities of the participants' experiences.

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[15] In order to give this boy an opportunity to participate in my research I have amended my original ethics application to pursue a case study. I am seeking to better understand his experience of sport and how his autism affects other involved in children's sport. The idea is that with the help of others, including his family, teammates, coaches, etc. we can get a fuller sense of his involvement in organized sport, in a way that he is unable to explain himself.

4.6.1 Individual interviews

Donna Eder and Laura Fingerson (2003) suggested that interviews are a very useful tool in gathering data with children. Through interviews children are able to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts. They said that researchers are able to examine areas that are important to children that might not come up in ordinary conversation. My observations provided greater opportunity to see how the league worked, how coaches acted, and how the participants played basketball; however, it was also helpful to raise these instances in an in-depth interview. I was to clarify details and correct some of my mistaken assumptions and interpretations of what was going on.

The initial interviews took place as soon as possible after each player expressed interest in participating. Because it took several weeks to gather all the participants, some completed the first interview within a week or two of the league start-up, whereas others completed it about half way through the season. My original intention was to try to get these done as near to the beginning of the season as possible, but I do not think the timing was terribly relevant. The aim was to gather the foundational information: their demographics, their previous sport participation, why they participate, and their hopes and expectations surrounding the season ahead (see Appendix VIII). It was also a good opportunity to commence building rapport with the participants. The hope was that it would help them feel more comfortable with me being around the basketball court during my observations and make it easier for the longer conversations necessary for the final interview and focus groups. The questions in the first interview sought what they hoped for from their participation. Their answers might have been altered after playing for several weeks, though I have no way of knowing if this happened.

After the consent forms were signed I invited the participant to go to a quiet space at the YMCA with me. Parents were advised that they were welcome to be within sight of their children but they needed to be out of hearing range. I was trying to balance the need for confidentiality for the children and concern on the part of the parents. They did not know me and may have been concerned about their child going somewhere private with a stranger. However, none of the parents wanted to be there for the interviews. We sat in a quiet room and I explained to them that they did not have to answer any questions they did not like. I also advised them if them needed to or wanted to stop at any point that it was okay to do so. I advised them when I turned the audio recorder on and off and made it clear that the interview was beginning and ending. The initial interviews were audio-recorded and only lasted five minutes or less. Because they were so brief, I simply transcribed the basic details to create a profile for each participant. As well, I transcribed any quotes that would later be helpful in creating the next set of questions or provide insight during the analysis. For example, when I asked them what they expected from their season, in some cases I was able to observe to see if this was happening for them and see how they responded to it. In the initial interview I asked the same opened-ended questions of each participant. While the questions were structured, I remained open to the possibility that any of the participants might want to go in another direction and allowed for it. This did not really happen, though one of my questions asked them if they had any questions for me. Only one person did.

For the second interviews, Russell's (1994) suggestion of a semi-structured interview was appropriate because I had limited time and no follow-up interviews. This way I was able to follow issues as they come up but still have specific issues to ask

through my question guide (see Appendix IX). I conducted the second interviews once the entire basketball season was finished. They lasted significantly longer and varied in length from 25 minutes to 80 minutes. These interviews took place either in the participant's home or in a quiet room at the YMCA. For the home interview I let the participant and their parent choose the location, but I ensured that it would allow for privacy and for me to be able to record both of our voices adequately. Again I advised each participant that they could refuse to answer any question they did not like. I also encouraged them to ask me questions if they felt confused or unhappy with any of what was being discussed. I told them to let me know if they needed to take a break at any point. I advised them when I turned the audio recorder on and off and made it clear that the interview was beginning and ending. As I asked questions I allowed time for the participants to consider their answers and if they did not seem to want to offer more detail, I let the issue drop. The second interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Because of the short time between the final interviews and the focus groups I was only able to listen to them again in order to pull out some emergent themes to add to my questions for the focus group discussions. It would have been better to transcribe them and do at least some basic coding; however, I wanted to get the focus groups done before the children lost interest in the project or had too much time to forget their experiences.

I asked each participant 45 to 50 questions—some were simple yes/no questions, while others sought elaboration. Approximately two-thirds of the questions I asked of all the participants, many of which I had planned before I even started the data collection and were based on predetermined themes. The rest of the questions were drawn from the

initial interviews but mostly from the observations. As each player had a different background and different on-court experiences, it necessitated different questions. I also invited the children to tell me what they thought was important, though this was not terribly productive in the interviews. This might have been because, as Russell (1994) suggests that early on participants tend to worry that they are answering questions correctly and will basically oblige the researcher to lead. He urges that it is important to invite them to set the tone because they are the ones that should to be defining what is important and so I tried again in the focus groups to marginally greater success—usually the conversation just went well off-topic, especially with the boys.

I attempted to follow the advice of various researchers when creating and executing my interviews. Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that a researcher's behaviour and style can very much affect the outcome of an interview. They recommend researchers avoid asking school-like questions, where there is evidently a right answer. I was flexible, asking my questions from my guide but also going with the flow. In order to build and maintain rapport I even followed tangents with them. Hill (2005) advised using informal language and taking care not to physically loom over the participant. I sat at the same level and across a table from them generally. I sat back in my chair and tried as much as possible to not simply read from my question list, but rather made the questions part of a larger conversation. For example, when I would check my list for the next question, I would sometimes change the wording to reflect the words or style of language the children and I had been using up to that point. Emond (2005) found that her role as a student helped her create a level of comfort for the children as they viewed her as an atypical adult and thus more accessible. She said she was perceived as being less

powerful and in need of the children's help, so they were more willing to participate. I doubt that the children really identified with me as a fellow student, but I did try to mark myself as an atypical adult via the language I used and simply the questions I asked.

Russell (1994) states that people will tell more in supportive and non-judgmental environments and it should be made clear there are no right or wrong answers. He advises to be careful of leading too much and suggests using terms and phrasing that are neutral and non-judgmental. According to Eder and Fingerson (2003), researchers should avoid controlling behaviours and always initiating the questions, instead children should be invited to ask questions. They also recommend, as does Emond (2005), reporting back to the children so that they can comment on my interpretations. Unfortunately time did not allow for that, but I did try to do that during the interviews. For example, I asked them to describe their playing style, how they thought they played basketball. When they were finished I gave them my description and asked them to tell me what they thought of it. I also sometimes restated my understanding of their answers in order to make sure I understood what they meant and to allow them to correct me. Considering the theoretical underpinnings of my investigation I tried to always remain cognizant of the imbalance in our power relationship. While I could not eliminate imbalance I could certainly do as much as possible to minimize my domination. Finally, Russell (1994) warned that interviewing could become boring and fatiguing for the researcher due to the repetition and the energy required. Aside from the diminished enjoyment factor for me, Russell says this is significant because the interviews may get shorter.[16] This means that later interviews may not have the same level of thoroughness and richness and that could

[16] The first final interview was the longest. This was in part because of some interruptions (smoke alarm, barking dogs) but also just my enthusiasm for what I was doing. As well, that particular participant was extremely thoughtful and wanted to explain her thoughts and experiences with much detail.

lessen the trustworthiness of the data. For this reason, I limited my final interviews to no more than two per day.

4.6.2 Observing participants

Despite their enthusiasm for interviews, Eder and Fingerson (2003) say that on their own they are inadequate. They recommend observing before the interviews, even if they are only brief. They make this recommendation, as does Patton (2002), because it allows the researcher to get a sense of the typical language and culture of the participants. As well, it gives the opportunity to build rapport. I was able to watch a few games and practices while I waited for participants to volunteer. I wrote a few notes in a small notepad at these events just to familiarize myself with the nature of this game as it was adapted slightly due to the gym size and the age of the participants. I also used the opportunity to familiarize my self with how children actually played the game as the only basketball games I had watched previously involved adults. My observation time did not really provide any opportunity to build rapport; the initial interviews and occasional conversations during the season provided more of that.

Initially the emphasis of my research project was going to be on the interviews—that was where I expected to gather most of my data. However, as I considered more what I was trying to do, as I was about to commence my data collection I decided to do as much observing as possible.[17] The observations allowed me to really get to understand how the game and the league worked. I knew I did not know a lot about basketball, but I was surprised to find out how little I really knew. I also learned much more about how

[17] In part my choice was related to the fact that I quickly realized (during the initial games I observed simply to familiarize myself with the league) there is a lot happening. In order to be able to get enough useful information, I felt I needed to have more opportunities for observation. The bonus was that it also allowed me to see the players go through changes during the season, e.g. improvements in their skills.

the coaches operated and was able to see directly how the children reacted to it. I could see what bothered the children and what made them happy. And the observations combined with the interviews allowed me to gather more accurate information. Things I could only guess about during my observations could be cleared up in the interviews, sometimes to very surprising ends. By asking questions, I sometimes realized that I had read the situation incorrectly. It also allowed me to ask about thoughts and emotions behind some of the actions. By bringing up certain incidents I had observed, particularly negative ones, I was able to ask the children about them. If I had not raised the issues, they might not have remembered or been willing to do so in the interviews perhaps because they might be fear being perceived as misbehaving. I needed to structure the data collection to feed the analysis (Kvale, 1996a).

I observed and took notes at 34 games and 12 practices,[18] each lasting just under one hour. I sat on a bench or chair and took notes on a clipboard. At practices I kept track of the numbers of players involved and adults that observed. I noted the types of drills and other activities they did. I also noted any interesting actions or comments by the coaches, participants, or people observing the activities. I only used first initials rather than names in my notes in case they were somehow lost or viewed by others. Interesting meant it was indicative of the themes and concepts I have already indicated or other remarkable occurrences that I did not or could not have anticipated.

At games I had sheets divided into eight sections—one for each period. I kept track of the number of players on each team and when my participants were on the court or off. My objective there was to be able to determine their playing time and so that I

[18] I am not including the initial games and practices I observed while I was initially recruiting participants as I had no participants to write about.

could ask them if they happy with their playing time. I also kept track of the score at the end of each period and noted who was on the floor during close games. Mostly I noted typical behaviours and actions of each participant to be able to build a sense of how they played basketball, including their general skill level and comfort with the game and their physicality on the court. For example, on rebounds I noted whether they would jump into the pack for them or hang back from the crowd. I was looking for the same basic elements that I did in the practices, so that I could ask about them during the second interviews. Finally, there were more interactions to pay attention during games as there were many more spectators there and there were also referees. For example, in games a coach might become upset about the officiating or and in games parents were much more likely to cheer loudly or make comments to her or his child.

Generally I avoided seeking conversations with participants or others at games or practices, as it would have very much intruded on my focus and note taking. However, when approached I did not avoid it since I wanted to maintain a good relationship with anyone involved in the research or with the league. I kept my notes with me at all times and put them away during casual conversations. I realize I might have learned more about what was going on during games or practices, but I had told the children I would not interfere with their participation and I did not want to become burdensome. If a participant said she or he did not want others to know of their involvement, I made a point of not talking to them first and then only as much as they wished. On the occasions I did converse with the children or parents it usually provided helpful information that enhanced my understanding of the league or even my understanding of basketball. These casual conversations were also a good opportunity for me to get feedback from the

children and the parents on what they are experiencing in terms of what I was doing during the observations (Emond, 2005).

Researchers have to determine their level of involvement in participant observations, which can range from detached observation to full involvement in participant activities (Emond, 2005). As noted previously, I chose to sit on the sidelines and I always chose a spot that would maximize my ability to observe the entire court. I was also quiet; I could not avoid being part of the panoptic gaze but I did not want to also be part of the explicit judgment. I also wanted to cultivate my atypical adult status and did not want to be lumped in with the parents and coaches on the sidelines, being quiet was one way to do that.

Emond (2005) also warned that some children might see note taking during participant observations as very intrusive. This was not much of an issue for me since I was not be directly involved with their participation in basketball. During any casual conversations I had with the children or others I did not take notes, rather I waited until the person involved was no longer in my vicinity. Interestingly, parents were, at times, very cognizant of my note taking and me.[19]

4.6.3 Focus groups

Kitzinger (1994, as cited in Pugsley, 1996) describes a focus group as a group discussion with the aim of exploring specific themes. Eder and Fingerson (2003) favour this method for interviewing young people, in part because it is a more natural conversational environment for them. They say younger individuals are more inclined to have more revealing conversations with each other rather than adults. They suggest that a

[19] I elaborate this further in the data analysis as it relates to the sport discourse and the importance of winning in this league.

focus group is generally more relaxed and lessens the opportunity for imposing adult language as the children are in the majority. For them the major value of focus groups is that the children can build on each other's comments and may take the topic in new directions. Because of this, Pugsley (1996) says that focus groups provide the researcher access to data that is not readily available in individual interviews. The optimum number of participants is six to eight (Pugsley, 1996; Russell, 1994). Eder and Fingerson (2003) recommend holding the focus group in a familiar context with unstructured conversation, allowing children's concerns to emerge. They also suggested non-directed, open, and inclusive questions to create great collaboration among the children for answers. I had themes I wanted to discuss and I had specific questions (see Appendix X), but as they answered I invited them to build on each other's ideas. For example, if one girl or boy raised a particular issue, I would ask the others about their experience with it and if they had other ideas about it.

Once all the final interviews were completed I invited all the participants to contribute to a focus group. I had also advised them I would provide pizza and drinks after the discussion. The point of the pizza was to say thank you but also to keep an air of informality about the focus group. There were two focus groups, one for the girls another for the boys. I did this for two reasons; it kept the groups small enough to handle and audio-record reasonably well; also, it also made it easier to delve into gender issues. My concern was that if girls and boys were together in the focus groups, they might be less willing to speak freely about playing alongside and against each other. The focus groups were held at the YMCA in a closed room to allow for confidentiality. Five of the girls and four of the boys attended. We sat around a table and I placed the audio recorder at the

centre of the table. I reminded them that they did not have to answer questions they did not like. I advised them whenever I turned the recorder on and off, and advised them when the discussion began and finished. I also urged them to let me know if a break was needed.

I had hoped that having the pizza party at the same occasion would be helpful in setting a relaxed, friendly tone in a circumstance would likely be familiar to the participants. I had planned to also provide them pizza and drinks after the discussion, so as not to interrupt the conversation; however, it was impossible to estimate how long the discussion would take and how long it would take for the pizza to arrive. The pizza arrived early for both groups—especially the boys', so rather than let it get cold I offered it to them immediately. I turned the audio recorder off while they ate their first slice of pizza. After a brief break (just long enough to consume one slice), we continued with the discussion and they continued eating. Although in some ways it did take the discussion a bit off track, it also created a discernable relaxation in the mood of each group, especially the girls', and actually facilitated a more productive discussion. The audio recording was transcribed the content verbatim.

Pugsley (1996) recommends finding a moderator closer to the children's own age. While I had originally planned to have a younger student assistant me in the focus groups, I eventually decided against it for two main reasons. During the individual interviews I had the opportunity to develop rapport with each of them and I thought that would be more conducive to a better discussion, especially since I was bringing up many issues I had already talked to them about. Also, time and other practicalities would have prevented an assistant from being adequately familiar with the subject matter and the

themes I wanted to pursue. I wanted to be able to draw on specifics from observations that would have been impossible for an assistant to genuinely know and understand the relevance. In the end I probably would have had to interrupt the discussion numerous times in order to get deeper responses. Therefore, I decided to conduct the focus groups myself. It might have been useful to take notes during the discussion (Pugsley, 1996), for example, I might have picked up on several really key questions that I overlooked while facilitating the discussions. However, logistics seemed to dictate my choice, that is, if I had a co-worker that was there for all or most of the observations and interviews, that person as a moderator would have been a very helpful choice.

The individual interviews were conducted before the focus groups so that I could see the effect of peer influence because beliefs expressed in interviews sometimes change in the focus group (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Pugsley (1996) warns that the focus group is a precarious proposition, meaning it can work very well but can also fail badly, mostly because it relies so heavily on group dynamics. Keeping this in mind, I made sure I pursued these themes well in the final interviews. I saw the focus groups as an opportunity to delve deeper into information they had already provided to provide new directions to follow and more insights. It gave them a chance to build on or reiterate points they had previously made. Or in some cases, they were able to change their mind on an issue. There was a surprising consistency to their answers, with just a few exceptions, which will be elaborated in the data analysis.

4.7 Trustworthiness

There are seemingly innumerable ways of creating trustworthiness in qualitative research; again I turn to Richardson (2000) for some guidance. What follows is an

abridged version of the five main criteria she uses to assess ethnographic work. "(1) *Substantive contribution.* Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life? (2) *Aesthetic merit*[20]. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? (3) *Reflexivity.* How did the author come to write this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of views? (4) *Impactfulness.* Does it generate new questions or move me to action? (5) *Expresses a reality.* Does it seem true—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the 'real'?" (pp. 15 – 16). Richardson does not offer these as a definitive test of the value of a particular work in fact she resists those who would attempt to regulate writing social science as it would limit researchers' exploration.

4.7.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was the key element of my project. The other criteria that Richardson lists are also important, but reflexivity is foundational and absolutely key to the ethnographic process. I see the rest of the criteria as the product of solid reflexivity and, of course, many crucial research methods. To that end I offer a fuller explanation of what I considered as I tried to figure out just what reflexivity is and does.

"Researcher reflexivity represents a methodical process of learning about self as researcher, which, in turn, illuminates deeper, richer meanings about personal, theoretical, ethical, and epistemological aspects of the research question" (Kleinsasser, 2000, p.155). It is a fairly straightforward definition, regrettably it is not nearly so simple to understand how it works, beyond the obvious that a researcher should look closely at

[20] The article I draw from was largely about what she terms "creative analytical practices" or CAP ethnography, i.e. work that blurs the line between science-writing and literature or "wherever the author has moved outside conventional social scientific writing" (p. 9). I plead for leniency on the aesthetic merit, as I do not consider this work outside the conventional; however, I do find the criteria quite helpful.

her or his beliefs, values, and biases and consider their effect on the research. As Bolam, Gleeson, and Murphy (2003) point out, while everyone talks about reflexivity and claims to do it, it is rarely clear exactly *how* people do it. I believe that my entire project involved reflexivity. I have taken ideas from many others with much more experience than me and used them to inform my own notions of what is appropriate. I have changed my mind and approach many times as I acquired new understandings, particularly those I received directly and indirectly from the interviews and observations with the children.

According to Emond (2005) reflexivity emphasizes that "researchers are not 'other' from those they research" (p.126). For her, reflexivity is especially necessary in ethnographic work involving young people. In particular, researchers often neglect discussing the children's understanding of the adults studying them, and even more, the impact of the research has on the children's world. She suggests researchers make their work meaningful to each participant. I talked to the participants about my research and invited them to ask questions throughout, but I waited till the final interview and focus group to ask specific questions about what they thought of it and the things I did throughout. As Emond (2005) warns, there's no point pressuring them to understand the point of the research before building a relationship with them. In the final two phases they could understand more of what I was doing. I explained to them what I had been watching for in the observations, and with the detail of some of my questions it would be apparent to them what I was noting during games and practices.

Key to reflexivity is addressing how I have influenced this research (Macleod, 2002). I wish to be careful that my voice does not drown out that of the children, but clearly my age and role as a researcher have played a part here; as an adult and an

academic the power relations are tipped in my favour. As Jeanes (2006) reminds us, suggesting that such research gives voice to the previously silenced is too simplistic, since researchers ultimately control both the process and the final product. No matter how careful I have been to listen closely to what I am being told and how thoughtfully I present the children's own words (e.g., through direct quotes), I am the one providing the context; I am the one to deciding which quotes represent what the children feel and believe, and even more significantly, I am the one initially interpreting the overall meaning and value of their words. It will be their voices but filtered through my experiences, beliefs, and preconceptions. And certainly the children have no way of controlling how other adults listening to or reading my words about their words will perceive what they were trying to say.

Due to the fact that I see this research as an enormous learning project, in terms of theory, methods, writing, presentation, and more, I also included several other techniques to help establish trustworthiness. I chose these methods because I felt comfortable with them, they were doable, and they would be useful to my learning process and strengthen my work. They included triangulation, maintaining an audit trail, and creating prolonged engagement. I used these because they pushed me to examine and re-examine what I have done and why, in part, forcing more reflexivity.

4.7.2 Triangulation

Various authors recommend different forms of triangulation as contributing to trustworthiness (Bowen, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Lietz et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). I created source triangulation in that I used three sources for my data collection: individual interviews, participant observations, and focus groups. As well, I

conducted my observations in two different contexts. The value of triangulation is that it helps capture multiple perspectives and the fact that this may reveal inconsistencies need not be seen as a weakness (Patton, 2002). Different methods will capture different elements and positions. These differences can bring greater depth and understanding of what is being examined (Creswell, 1998).

4.7.3 Audit Trail

Maintaining an audit trail can be a key way to keep track of the decision-making process and can also enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis (Bowen, 2005; Lietz et al., 2006). I have kept a log of my decisions, making sure that I not only clearly described the steps taken, but also included descriptions of the reflexivity involved with each step (Lietz et al., 2006). As per Bowen's (2005) recommendation I am submitting my record to a committee member for review and assessment.

4.7.4 Prolonged engagement

Lietz et al. (2006) have used a version of prolonged engagement that I adopted. That is, traditional ethnography tends to require staying immersed in the field for an extended period—at least 6 months (Creswell, 1998). However, the basketball season was less than three months long, so like Lietz and colleagues I tried to embrace the spirit of Creswell's suggestion and simply try to maximize my time in the field. For example, initially I had not planned much observation, instead I attended every game in which my participants played after they agreed to participate and I went to at least two practices for each after they signed on. As well, adding the focus groups increased my engagement in the field.

4.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics are always a key element of any social scientific research, but it is especially crucial in research with children, mostly because of the matters of power and informed consent (Emond, 2005; Hill, 2005). Ethical considerations need to be prominent throughout the research process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Hill (2005) provides a useful checklist of ethical considerations that I adapted and incorporated into my research efforts (Appendix VII).

4.8.1 Consent

Researchers always need to recognize and be aware of the power imbalance associated with working with children (Hill, 2005; Jeanes, 2006). This is particularly important when it comes to informed consent. Legally the age of consent is 18 years old, but there is also the practical matter of what age children can reasonably make choices about participating in research. Hill (2005) states that researchers should not make assumptions about what children understand and can consent to, based on their age; instead every child must be assessed individually. As stated previously, I left it up to the children or their parents to approach me if they were interested. A benefit of choosing players from a variety of teams is that I was able to focus just on children that are expressly willing to participate, making it easier ethically. It allowed me to minimize, as Emond (2005) suggests, making children feel compelled to participate.

Hill (2005) says children often have difficulty disagreeing with adults and researchers need to keep in mind that consent is a process, not a one-time event. This means paying attention to what children are saying, both verbally and non-verbally. Jeanes (2006) also suggests that children should be reminded that their involvement in

research is not a *commitment,* meaning they need not feel obliged to complete the whole process if it is no longer what they want to do. In each step of the research, I asked them if they were comfortable with their participation in the research and what I was doing, and I reminded them they could quit at any time if they wanted.

4.8.2 Right of refusal

With each interview I reminded the children that they did not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer. I kept the way I explained that aspect light-hearted, joking about it, so that they might more likely see it as "no big deal" to say no. I also watched for hesitancy as evidence the child might not want to answer and if so, I would have let the question go. Genuineness in informed consent makes it more meaningful and shows value to children's views and involvement (Emond, 2005).

4.8.3 Privacy and confidentiality

To facilitate privacy and confidentiality, the children have pseudonyms. In order to give them some control, they were encouraged to come up with their own pseudonyms (Emond, 2005). However, several of the participants did not bother to suggest one after several requests so I told them I would assign them one. None expressed any problem with that. Choosing players from various teams also helps with maintaining the children's confidentiality. People are less likely to know all the children involved, unlike how it might be if it was a whole team involved. In that case it could be very difficult to write about them without their identities being more obvious.

Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin (1992) warn that complete confidentiality frequently becomes impossible, as various researchers have discovered in the past. It is important to be careful about promising complete confidentiality to the participants

because the researcher does not have complete control over what others might say (Hill, 2005). For example, after participating in the focus group one child could tell another's secret. Hill (2005) recommends setting clear ground rules at the beginning that include not telling personal things about others. In her work with pre-teen girls in soccer Jeanes (2006) relates how on one occasion what was said in a focus group discussion was taken outside the research situation. Some of the girls had talked about others not involved in the research and when it got back to those mentioned it created problems for some of the participants. To that end I took a preventative approach in the focus group. First, while coaching was a topic of discussion, coaches were not. I limited the discussion of specific coaches to the individual interviews. As well, there was a rule of "no names", during the discussion with a full explanation of why. Finally, I asked that whatever is discussed within the focus group should stay there. All this, of course, guarantees nothing, so parents and participants were advised of this prior to the initial interviews and again before the focus groups.

4.8.4 Withdrawal from the field

There are concerns about leaving the field in ethnographic research with children particularly because of the potential sense of abandonment experienced by the children (Jeanes, 2006). However, this was not an issue of particular significance as I did not have much opportunity to develop a relationship with any real depth with the participants. In total in spent on average about two hours in direct contact with each, and half of that time there were others were present as well. As well, the pizza party clearly demarcated an end to the research and I made it clear that was something the participants knew about that from the beginning of the project.

4.8.5 Exploitation

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) also raise the issue of researchers potentially exploiting research participants. They suggest researchers often have significantly more to gain from research than do participants, such as prestige, royalties, or even graduate degrees. They link exploitation to power (domination) and invite researchers to question their actions and in particular, their promises. That is, if a researcher does not promise something that she or he cannot likely provide, participants will not be expecting it. They also suggest that researchers must consider their motives, For example, if the objective is simply personal gain for the researcher, this would be unethical. Clearly I have benefited from the research since another of my motivations has to obtain my Master's degree. In terms of promises, I was candid in my explanation of what I am doing. I am passing the main results of my research on to the league and anyone else who wants them. As mentioned previously, I will attempt to pass my findings with the hope of providing help; however, I made it clear to the children that I do not control the outcomes in any of these possibilities. I told the children that I would pass on their suggestions and my findings to the league organizer but made it clear that changes that might be made would be his.

4.8.6 Recompense

Hill (2005) urges researchers to be wary of recompense as a potential form of bribery though he does acknowledge that participants may deserve compensation for their participation. I told the participants they would receive $10 gift certificates if they participate in all four components of the project and that they would get pizza following the focus groups. After a couple weeks I had only seven participants so I went back to the teams I was allowed to talk to and tell them I was also making available free tickets to

one of many Brock varsity basketball games. I gave participants the tickets after the first interviews were completed and after the observations had started. Two of the final four participants had already said that they would talk to me about being involved in the research project when I announced the tickets. Upon reflection, I am not sure that it actually matters if a participant was only there for the free things. All the children participated in the entire process, except one of the boys, who missed the focus group. When I talked to him and his mother later in the day, I found that they had simply forgotten about the session and in any case he was not feeling well. As well, though some of the children were a bit shy and less articulate, all of children answered my questions with enthusiasm and none appeared to be putting up with my questions in order to get their reward. So even if any volunteered simply for the recompense, they all provided all I could have hoped for. I also believe that telling the children that they would receive something for their time and effort also let them know I valued what they were doing. In the end, I gave each two tickets for completing the first interview and allowing me to observe their games and practice. I gave them the $10 gift certificate for the second interview[21], and they received pizza for participating in the focus group.

4.8.6 Reciprocity

A key element of qualitative research is reciprocity. Michael Patton (2002) suggests that a way to show appreciation for what participants give us is to give something back in return, though it is not without implications in terms of data quality and ethics. Is it bribery? Does it compromise people's motivation for participation? On the other hand, should we not compensate people for their work? I think that someone accepting a gift or money for their participation, especially when it is nominal, does not

[21] The boy who missed the focus group still received his gift certificate.

make their experiences invalid. The tickets, pizza, and gift certificates are small examples of this sort of reciprocity considering the time and information they gave me. Patton (2002) suggests that alternative forms of compensation can be more profound forms of reciprocity. For example, simply providing these children the opportunity to give their opinions to an interested adult on something important to them and giving voice to their concerns might be even more valuable to them. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) state that interviews can provide a means of catharsis and opportunity for greater understanding for participants. They also suggest that having someone listen carefully and seriously to participants' experiences and opinions can provide them with a feeling of importance. However, they do point out that sometimes participants may experience pain through their self-enlightenment. I'm not sure the children felt pain, but several definitely expressed frustrations. To deal with that, I invited them to explain as much as they wished and then I invited them to basically deconstruct what they had experienced, so that they might be able to frame it differently and so that they might find something positive or useful in the experience for themselves.

As Patti Lather (1991) states, the main form of reciprocity for researchers should be to use their work to help participants better understand and then help change their situation. To that end I hope that our discussions and informal deconstructions[22] gave the children a chance to better understand their sport experience. I will provide feedback to the interested participants about my findings, and also to the parents, coaches, and organizers. The outcome I hope for is that the adults that surround the young players' sport experience might be more responsive to children's interests and needs.

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[22] These discussions came about more as a matter of my own conversational habit rather than something I had planned to do.

I agree that it is important to help participants change their sport circumstance, but only to the extent that that is what they desire. I also want to be careful of taking the role of the academic who knows better than those who have been running children's sport many years. Particularly since the right answer in one situation may be the wrong answer in another. "At the core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson, 2000, p. 8).

4.9 Analysis of the Data

Steiner Kvale (1996b) points out that interpreting data through a particular theory can be used to maintain distance from what is being said. He also warns that such an analytical approach will surely lead to different results depending on both the researcher and the theoretical perspective and that such variation may be mistrusted because it does not fit the positivistic model of science. But he points out that such variety may, in reality, be useful depending on the context. Since my theoretical framework is based largely on my understanding of Foucault's notions of power I have examined the data through the conceptual lens he provides.

Kvale (1996a) recommends that a researcher determine the method of analysis before interviewing begins because it will determine the direction of the question guide, the interviews, and their transcription. Therefore not only should the analytical approach be determined in advance, it should be incorporated into interviews. To this end, I sometimes clarified statements by the participant by rephrasing what they have said, repeating it to them and asking if I understand what they have said correctly. As well, some of my questions were geared specifically to addressing my assumptions or

preconceived ideas.[23] As well, when I created my question lists, I built some of the questions with Foucauldian concepts in mind. For example, I asked questions that would indicate whether they were consciously aware of the panoptic gaze.

What I was seeking in these data were examples of the larger discourses and how they play out is this particular sport environment. Of particular interest were the various sport discourses that establish what it means to be an athlete or a teammate. They include sub-discourses like sportspersonship, winning, and competition. Also of interest were gender discourses and what being a girl/woman or boy/man entails. Finally, the child discourse, that is, what it means to be children living with adult parameters, for example, respecting adults or behaving properly. I have examined how these varying and, at times, contradictory discourses intersect and how through disciplinary technologies they are embodied by the participants and how this affects not only their experience but their understanding of this experience.

4.9.1 Coding

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) recommend starting the analysis while still gathering data, as this allows researchers to focus the study and adapt as necessary as they go along. They suggest writing memos or a field log as data is gathered. As I took notes and shortly thereafter I highlighted what I believed to be important sections (based on the theoretical concepts I have previously outlined) and began a basic coding scheme. As suggested by Pamela Maykut and Richard Morehouse (1994), I went through my observation notes and the profiles I created for the participant, coding them with two or three words that indicated the themes of each data unit. This gave me a sense of the themes emerging from

[23] Kvale actually talks about proving or disproving hypotheses, but since I do not have these I instead tried to challenge the hunches I had from the start and assumptions I developed during the project.

the early data. To prepare for the second interviews, I drew from these themes but also read through the all my observation notes for each participant and created individualized questions for them. I listened to the second interviews again and simply noted repeated themes and contradictions or competing beliefs and experiences[24] and used these to help build my question guide for the group discussions.

In the next level of analysis, I went back through my early data and the rest of my, as yet, uncoded data and coded it all. I used emic[25] themes along with the concepts previously laid out in the theoretical framework. After this "vertical" analysis (Bridel & Rail, 2007), I then colour-coded each participant so that I could cut and paste, using a word processing program, and bring together pieces that shared common and contrasting themes. This allowed me to do a comparative analysis among the participants. Such an approach allowed me to develop a better understanding of multiplicity of experiences (Bridel & Rail, 2007) via commonalities and differences.

4.9.2 Discourse and deconstruction analyses

Sara Mills (2004) describes discourse analysis as being "useful in that it can allow us to analyse similarities across a range of texts as the products of a particular set of power/knowledge relations" (p. 19). Ian Parker (2005) explains that key to discourse analysis is the linking of words and phrases at the level of discourse, otherwise it would just be content or thematic analysis. He also states that the resistive value of discourse

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[24] For example, where many of the children expressed that they liked a coach that was relaxed and about having fun, one girl emphatically expressed disdain for this. My intention was to provoke discussion or debate.

[25] I did not limit my coding to Foucauldian themes I also sought themes that flowed from the participants. That is, I did not want to limit the data and its analysis to themes that I thought were important. I also wanted the children to be able to say what was important, either through repetition or emphasis (via difference or tone). For example, while I had considered the physical differences between girls and boys at this age, with many of the girls having the height advantage, it did not occur to me just how significant it was. My focus was more on the gender component of the matter. Repeatedly, almost all the children emphasized just how crucial an element, of the game and their experience, it was.

analysis is that by examining power and resistance within it we illuminate how language can maintain or challenge certain power relations. My conversations with the participants became wonderful sources of insight. As Parker (drawing from Billig, 1995) suggests that, "dominant forms of cultural identity are kept in place precisely by the banal ways the categories are repeated in everyday discourse" (p. 90). Discourses are not just descriptive but also constructive of the social world; they help create our reality (Macleod, 2002). I offer an adaptation of Heather Sykes' (1998) take on women and the impact of sexual identity discourses as justification for my use of discourse analysis. The ways children describe their sport identities and experiences is affected by sport, gender, and child discourses "that were always already circulating within their families, schools, and communities and the post-structural task [is] to attend to how each [child] took up or resisted these discourses" (p. 158).

As Catriona Macleod (2002) points out, "there is no definitive method of discourse analysis" (p. 17). I have followed the approach that she outlines—it draws on Parker (1992) and Foucault (1972). Specifically Parker's seven criteria for "distinguishing discourse are that a discourse: is realised in text; is about objects; contains subjects; is a coherent system of meaning; refers to other discourse; reflects on its own of speaking; and is historically located" (p. 21). Macleod delineates of each of these criteria along with relevant connections with Foucault's ideas on discourse formation. I have drawn from these delineations to determine the discourse existent in the interview texts and my observation notes. Parker (2005) emphasizes that research using discourse analysis should include a historical examination to provide an understanding of the power relations and so that we remember that discourse is contextual and has

historical preconditions. To that end I have gone to relevant literature to provide grounding for the discourse analysis. Such contextual information also assisted in my deconstruction efforts.

Following the discourse analysis, I attempted to deconstruct some of the "truths" that guided the participants' knowledge and understanding of their participation in sport (Bridel & Rail, 2007). "Deconstruction is a contested term which by its very nature defies definition" (Sykes, 2001, p. 28). As a form of text analysis it is generally traced back to the work of Jacques Derrida. Sanger (1995) explains that through this sort of analysis Derrida pointed out the self-contradiction within texts that opposed their actual arguments. To do this he sought out the "omissions, alternative meanings, ambiguities and contradictions, establishing that the text may be saying many other things than that presupposed by the author" (p. 91). As Macleod (2002) explains, discourse analysis is not inherently deconstructive; however, it can provide a foundation from which to deconstruct discursive practices. There are various ways to deconstruct text; she offers the three approaches formulated by Parker (1989).

> (1) Identify an opposition, and show how one of the terms is dominant in the truth stakes over the other… (2) subvert the opposition between the two terms by demonstrating that the privilege the dominant term enjoys can be made untenable… (3) sabotage the conceptual opposition. (p. 22 – 3)

The point of deconstruction is not to show how an individual is incorrect in her or his understanding of their own situation, but rather how what she or he does not say is systematically related to what she or he does say (Macleod, 2002). The objective is also not to render texts meaningless but instead, to show "that they are overflowing with multiple and often conflicting meanings" (Balkin, 1995-6, p. 3). Using Parker's approach I have attempted to deconstruct chunks of text that I felt would provide the most insight

in terms of understanding the effect of the prevalent discourses of gender, sport, and children, on the participants' experience and how they have explained it. Discourse analysis and deconstruction can be valuable tools in qualitative research in that they have the "potential to provide new and innovative insights into new areas of investigation" (Macleod, 2002, p. 23).

After laying out the discourse analysis through the various themes I went back through the data and chose several chunks for deconstruction, some were quite brief and others being more extensive. They were chosen because I saw deconstruction as a way to delve deeper into the discourse and potentially see what was being said in a new way, potentially providing other ways of understanding of the children's descriptions of their experiences.

4.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I laid out the methods I used to collect and analyze the data. This included a description of each method and its role in relation to the design. As well, I provided a rationale for each choice along with an explanation of how each was done. Included in my methods is a detailed explanation of the ethical issues relevant to doing research with children.

Chapter 5—Findings

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of my research was to better understand children's experience of recreational adult-organized children's basketball. I wanted to know how children's sport operated—what was expected of the children and how they dealt with these expectations. I wanted to know how adults treated the players and how the children responded to it. I wanted to know what worked for the children and what did not. I wanted to examine the various discourses that the children used to describe and explain their experiences. I also sought ways in which the children resisted discursive domination in an effort to make their participation more reflective of their own desires and interests.

In my analysis I examined three main discourses that included sport, gender, and childhood. I was interested in how they affected the participants' experience of playing basketball in this particular league. The interviews, focus groups, and observations, provided a variety of themes and subthemes that combined, make up the broader discourses of sport, gender, and childhood in this context. The discursive themes and subthemes were both raised by the participants (emic) and sought by myself (etic). There were seven main themes that tell the story of these children's experience, they are winning; size, skill, and action; sportspersonship and fair play; gender and expectations; support, adult intrusion, and the gaze; correct training and docile bodies; resistance and creativity. Several themes also have sub-themes that expand on understandings of the main themes.

Initially I wanted to locate each of these themes under one of the three main discourses simply to create some sort of organizational coherence. However, with most of

the themes there is overlap in the discourses, so such categorization becomes somewhat cumbersome and counter to a post-modern approach. To that end I am simply addressing each theme and where appropriate, referring back to the relevant discourses. Some of the themes are strongly related to others, so I have grouped them together as much as possible and I have drawn connections between them. In order to provide better understanding of the context in which the children were playing, I start my findings with an observational overview which is a basic description of the league and the physical spaces in which practices and games took place. I have attached a diagram of the gym where games were played in (see Appendix XI) and a basic profile of each of the participants (see Appendix XII). I have also included a basic comparison between games and practices to emphasize the similarities and the important differences. I finish the findings with an outline of the suggestions that the children offered to improve the league.

5.2 Observational overview

I did not actually know a lot about basketball. I have watched some basketball games, mostly university games and a few professional games on television—both women's and men's. I was familiar with the game, but I did not really understand all the rules or the complexity of the game. I am not sure how much this might have hampered my understanding of what was happening on court and there were certainly times when I initially misjudged what was happening.

The league is part of a pilot program for *Steve Nash Youth Basketball* (SNYB). For this particular league it meant that each coach was given a *Coaches Manual* in compact disk format and the children all wore reversible jerseys with the SNYB logo on

it. The manual emphasized making basketball child-centred and creating a fun, respectful environment; however, its main focus was teaching specific skills—what they are and how best to do it. I find it difficult to actually assess what this involvement actually meant for the league for several reasons. I have no way of knowing if the coaches read any or all of its 164 pages. As well, I had not observed this league before its involvement with SNYB, and the discourse offered by the coaches' manual mostly reflects the prevalent discourses of sport. It is also difficult to say whether the league is reflecting the program's emphasis on respect and fun, or if the league is involved with SNYB because the program reflects this YMCA's basic philosophy toward children.

The hardwood basketball court was smaller than regulation size presumably, in part, due to the size of the gym; however, other dimensions were downsized as well. The basket and backboard were lower and the ball was smaller—both adaptations to smaller bodies. With the size of the gym, it was a crowded in spots for the spectators. There was a small set of bleachers along one side, several layers deep and extending perhaps one-quarter of the length of the court. The bleachers sometimes presented a challenge on throw-ins as spectators had to pull their feet in under the bench, occasionally even turning their knees lest they bump a young player focused on throwing the ball to a teammate. There was more room on the other side of the gym where the players' benches are located. Generally no spectators stood or sat at either end of the court, except near three of the corners—it was too risky for both the players charging toward the basket and spectators.

At most of the games there were approximately 20 to 30 spectators (generally family members of the players), not including the officials; that number increased

modestly for the playoffs. Anyone could attend the games. Though the YMCA is generally for members', no one asked for evidence of membership as people entered to watch the games. It should also be noted that non-members may use the various facilities, but at a cost.

There were three age divisions. The group I observed played on Saturday's between 10:30 and 3:30. The games were divided into eight 5-minute periods. This facilitated wholesale changes rather than creating time delays each time a player needed to be replaced. It also facilitated fairness in playing time. That is, the scorekeeping officials could keep track of when players sat and when they played. A key rule of the league was that every player had to sit out for at least one period per half as long as numbers allowed—meaning the team had six or more players for the game. The scorekeeper kept track of this; however, coaches were also expected to respect this rule. Occasionally coaches would "forget" to sit their best players and other coaches or spectators would point out their omission. The referees would then confirm the situation and if the player had not yet sat out their five minutes they would be obliged to leave the court for the rest of that period, regardless of how much time was gone. There was no penalty otherwise. Considering there was no risk, it was possible some coaches did this intentionally, though they did draw some unfavourable comments from spectators, so no coaches seemed to do it repeatedly.

5.2.1 Practices versus games

Although practices were very different from games in many ways, they also had key aspects in common, particularly the surveillance and the correct training. Practices were held Monday through Thursday evenings at two elementary schools. They were

similar in size to the YMCA's gym and had similar size adaptations for the children. Practices generally involved several components. Following a warm-up that simply involved the children dribbling and shooting baskets, many of the coaches would debrief the previous weekend's game. They discussed aspects of the game they thought needed attention—both positive and negative. The largest portion of the practice was reserved for various drills. Though there were a variety of drills, coaches frequently did the same drills each week. During each drill the coaches would comment on the players' movements and strategic choices, both correcting their mistakes and complimenting the children when they did the drill correctly. Because I was not there for the earliest practices, I do not know if the coaches explained the point or relevancy of any of the drills.[26] As well, unlike games, coaches are able to stop drills when mistakes were made and instruct the children to start again and make them do it correctly.

The children generally worked seriously at the drills for at least part of the practice, but the longer the drills went on, the more likely the discipline would break down. The players (especially the boys) would start joking and laughing, at times mocking the drills or simply refusing to do them as asked. At the point the coaches took one of three responses: tell the children to refocus on the drills; tell the children to do the drills properly or there would be no scrimmage; or move on to another drill. The first option rarely proved productive, whereas the potential loss of the scrimmage sometimes worked, but really only a change in activity almost always enabled the coach to regain control of the children's behaviour. Apparently the children felt more comfortable in breaking with the demands of the coach during practices than they would in games. This

[26] If the comments in the interviews were any indication, the coaches generally did not explain why drills were chosen. The children wondered why they had to do what drills they did, suggesting they were not very helpful.

probably had much to do with the fact that with games there was the possibility of winning, or losing. During games there was pressure to do as they were told because not doing so could cause the team to play poorly and decrease the team's chance of winning. Not only might they face the displeasure of the coach, but their teammates as well.

Another frequent occurrence at practices was little competitions. The coach would divide the team into two groups and they would do a drill as a competition, for example, each player would shoot a successful jump shot in each of the six baskets around the gym. The team to complete this first would win. This usually inspired much shouting, cheering, and excitement among the children. However, it should also be noted that some of the less skilled children really struggled in these competitions. If they had trouble shooting one successful basket, shooting six was much worse. Not only did they struggle with the skill, but the added pressure of not letting their team down only got worse as they missed time after time. Throughout the competition the teammates would usually continue to shout encouragement. Most of the time the children kept trying until they finished, but for some of them their disappointment was usually visible.

Though fewer parents generally attended the practices than games, there were always onlookers. Because the coaches often stopped to talk the individual players in this circumstance, parents had many opportunities to offer advice or opinions to their children about what to do on the court. They would remind the children how to shoot, pass, move, or think correctly. Sometimes parents would even step onto the court to offer advice. Usually the children listened to their parents, though at times their irritation with this interference would become evident. Some children would simply turn and walk away

with their parents quietly shouting after them, or occasionally some of children would even tell their parents to stop.

Though most of the children preferred games for the action and the opportunity to actually play basketball, some of the less skilled players preferred the atmosphere and opportunity of the practices. In practices there was much less pressure because there was no concern with winning or losing (except during the little competitions). As well, in practices the less skilled players were guaranteed opportunities to handle the ball, in part because part of the registration fee was for their own basketball, which they always brought to practice. As well, in practices they would get passes, have the chance to shoot, and could repeat their shots until they were successful. The general atmosphere was also lighter, with plenty of conversation, laughing, and joking. Interestingly, there was a significant gender divide in most practices as well. Usually girls sought out other girls for conversation and boys talked mostly to other boys. The boys were also more likely to fool around during and between. Rarely were girls told to be quiet or hold onto their basketball when the coach was trying to explain something.

The highlight of all practices was the scrimmage game. The coaches used the opportunity to correct the children's techniques or strategies, sometimes even stopping the action completely to explain something in detail. The children were always excited for the chance to play and frequently they would ask early in practices if they could simply scrimmage instead of doing drills. The coach always said no to such a request, they never simply let the children play, with one exception. Two different teams usually held their practices at the same location, one after the other. At the final practice, two coaches decided to make their practices more fun for the players by holding a scrimmage

between the two for the last half hour of the first practice and the first half hour of the second practice. The children enjoyed this, expressing much enthusiasm and laughter. The first practice had started with drills, but the second practice simply finished with more play and food and drink for the children.

5.3 Winning

The effort to win is not inherently bad, rather it may be how it is framed (e.g., losing is failure and winning is success), or the excessive emphasis on it that can make it problematic. Several of the participants certainly made that clear. At times, the pursuit of winning hindered some players' participation. Teresa, who chose not to participate in the playoffs, was unhappy because her team was too focused on winning. She disliked a couple of her teammates because of the direction they took her team.

> *They were too obsessed with winning. They were just "win, win, win". That's all they cared about.*

Teresa's teammate Chris echoed her sentiment.

> *At the games it's always one person, "we need to win, win, win".*

Their team finished in seventh place and Chris suggested several times that often his season was not as fun as he would have liked, in part because of the emphasis on winning. However, in an interesting contradiction, he suggested that winning the championship would have been a reasonable compensation for his lack of fun.

> *If you didn't have as much fun as you wanted during the season, you would have wanted to win the whole thing.*

Both players suggested that the focus on winning contributed to their lack of opportunities to participate as fully as they wanted. The best players were trying to win the games and therefore kept the ball to themselves.

For the two participants that were on the championship team, winning was certainly good for them. They stated very clearly they liked it; however, for most of the children that were not on the winning team, it did not seem to bother them much. Little Shaq's team finished last.

> *It was fine; it was just my first year. You get teams that'll be stacked and you always win and you get teams that don't. That's fine.*
>
> *We got 4th which isn't bad. Fourth out of ten isn't bad. (Allen)*

Though his team finished second MJ was also quite happy, both for himself and his opponents.

> *It was good cuz I never got that close to first place in anything really so it was good, but we could have done better. But I'm still glad for the other team cuz they did well too.*

Betty was fine with her team's sixth-place finish, but she indicated that she knew what winning sometimes meant to others. We were discussing the fact that she rarely got passes during games. She did not like it but she also expressed ambivalence about getting more passes because of her awareness of the importance of winning.

> *Bonita: Maybe if you're figuring things out on the court, is it possible you don't want the ball so much?*
> *Betty: Kind of. Cuz I don't wanna make a mistake and then if we're losing cost us the game.*

Unlike the other participants, Reba was especially keen on winning. The fact that her team was winning more near the end of the season was the main thing she liked about her participation, but the fact that they finished in sixth place left her quite disappointed.

> *I like winning and I get mad when I don't win, and I hate it when I get these teams that fool around and come in like 5th or 6th. It just does me in; cuz like every year I get the team that comes second last.*

The children made it clear that for most of them fun was the most important aspect of their participation and they were not keen on coaches and teammates who took that away from them. When asked what they wanted from their participation, all but one said fun, learn new skills, make new friends, or various combinations of the three. Reba stated simply that she wanted to score ten baskets in one game. For most of the participants, fun was much more important than all the competition and winning. Even Allen, when asked why he spent many hours each week practicing basketball, he said it was as much for fun as improving his skills. For Bob, basketball was fun for him simply because he was trying something new and he really liked practices because his coach made them fun. Betty also liked practices because they were not

> *so serious, cuz in the game you have to be serious but at practice you got to have more fun.*

When I asked MJ if he ever worried about being good enough for his teammates, he dismissed the idea.

> *No, cuz I don't really care what they think. I'm having fun.*

Though all of the participants, except Reba, did not prioritize winning over other aspects such as fun and learning, it was certainly still very important in this league. The registration pamphlet (see Appendix XII) emphasized a focus on learning, fun, values, fair playing time, and developing co-operation through "the Y core value of Respect". It was certainly a friendlier and more civil league than some I have observed, but I am not sure winning was genuinely de-emphasized. Some parents struggled to maintain the emphasis that "it's just a game". They consoled their children after a loss, telling them that the only thing that mattered was having fun; however, these same parents would also cheer wildly when their children's teams came from behind to win in the final seconds of

a game. One parent offered an example of this dilemma. At the beginning of the game I was introduced to him by his wife, so he knew who I was and what I was doing. He had only been able to attend a couple of his son's games but when he was there, he was often vocal. He would shout encouragement or instructions to his son. At one point he complained of the lack of calls by the referees, commenting to his own father about the state of affairs. "That's two travels in a row that he didn't call". Then the player's father remembered that I was sitting just behind him and he turned to say with a smile, "Not that it matters". He then turned back to the game and while laughing, admonished himself and his father for being too competitive.

Coaches sometimes revealed a strong desire to win that affected what happened on the court. A coach provided a very vivid example of this during a regular season game. He was not a regular coach he was simply filling in for an absent coach. He seemed to throw himself into the role with great vigour. In the final few periods of the game his team started playing better, eventually taking the lead. With every basket by his team he would shout loudly and wave his arms dramatically. It was not unusual for coaches to shout, he just did so particularly loudly. He offered "high-fives" to the players on the bench drawing them into his emotions. He seemed to be trying to get the whole team excited and involved in the game. Gradually the children started imitating his behaviour and when they ultimately lost by three points, several of the players were visibly upset, as was he.

5.3.1 The role of trophies

The championship game and the ensuing trophy presentations also offered a potent example of the importance of winning in this league. The game was turned into an

event. Before it started the windows were covered making it very dark when the lights were turned off. Up came the loud music and a spotlight focused on the entrance that was covered by a banner. As the announcer welcomed the spectators to the game "you've been waiting for", each team crashed through its respective banners and waited to be called by name and number for their individual turn in the spotlight. Spectators cheered and applauded as some children preened and raised their arms, while others sheepishly moved toward the light then scurried back to the shelter of the darkness.

After the championship game, shiny awards were ubiquitous; the idea being that if everyone gets one, everyone will be happy and winning and losing become irrelevant. Perhaps they are meant to indicate that the children are winners just for participating, but certainly trophies still played a discursive role. There were clear differences between the various trophies. The first place one was largest and after second place, players received small participation medals. The awards were given out in reverse order so that each child knew exactly where their team finished[27] in the competition and the winning team was honoured last and loudest. The league only offered one individual award. The *Y Values* trophy was given to one person on each team for "working hard, being honest, and playing by the rules". Despite the apparent attempts at de-emphasizing winning, the importance of the win-lose hierarchy could not be clearer. For Foucault (1995), hierarchy and rank are very important to discipline; "Discipline rewards simply by the play of awards, thus making it possible to attain higher ranks and places" (p. 181). It is not clear that winning has been de-emphasized here, but rather it seems to have simply been polished.

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[27] I never had to remind any of the children where they finished in the standings, they all knew.

Whether the children won or not their trophies meant something to them, though at times it was difficult to discern what that something was. Most liked the participation medal, though some were somewhat ambiguous about it.

Bonita: Do you care about the team medal you received?
Betty: Not really, cuz it's how you played not what you got.
Bonita: So you'll just get rid of it?
Betty: I have a shelf that I put everything on it.
Bonita: So in a sense it does mean something to you.
Betty: Yeah.

Chris' disappointment in the quality of his participation showed in our discussion about his medal, but he still liked the idea of the medal.

Bonita: Did you keep the medal?
Chris: Yeah, I keep it. But...
Bonita: If they never gave you one would you care?
Chris: Probably a little, cuz I like medals they're like shiny and stuff.

MJ liked his medal very much, but he put it in context.

I got a long way to work to get my dad, cuz he played like every sport and he's got 300 trophies.

MJ also won the "Y Values" award bringing his trophy total to five. I asked him if he felt any pressure to do well and keep up with his dad when he considers all those trophies.

Not really. But I try my hardest, cuz he only got to come to like three games. So I try my hardest when he comes.

Teresa did not care that she was not there to pick up her participation medal, but her attitude was more reflective of her thorough disappointment in her involvement in the league, as is evident in the following sections, rather than the medal necessarily.

I don't really care if I get a medal or trophy. I really didn't wanna participate.

Reba, for whom winning was very important was quite disdainful of her participation medal and its very idea.

> *I don't want the participation medal. I don't really care about participation medals. They're this big, "Who cares!" I want a first place medal and* [she pauses] *I dunno, it doesn't really matter to me. If you don't come in the three places what's the point in giving out all these medals? They didn't do that well, I dunno, I sound very mean right now.* [Fewer trophies] *makes it better for the first and second place teams cuz if you're the only one that gets something, you wanna win again and get more medals.*

Perhaps somewhat ironically, Reba also won the Y Values award. This trophy she was very happy about. She had won it the previous year and she had set out to win it again this year—a repeat champion of sorts. In essence, she had turned it into a competition.

> *It felt good cuz I was working for it ever since the first practice. And that's what kept me focused in practice and I wanted to beat* [a teammate] *cuz well, he was focused too. And I guess that made me nicer to the coach, cuz I didn't want him not to like me or something like that. And I don't like players that are mean to the refs and coaches so, why not be a good player and get an award while you're at it?*

This is an intriguing melding of the competition and sportspersonship discourses. As becomes evident subsequently, Reba embraces both components of sport.

5.3.2 Competition

Examples of the competition discourse were less prevalent in our conversations, the focus certainly leaned more toward winning, but it did come up. For example, I asked the participants in the focus groups what they thought makes a game good, most of the girls suggested winning made it good.

> *Bonita: What's a better game, one that's close or one that's a blowout win?*
> *Several in unison: Blowing out the other team*
> *Bonita: Okay, it's really close, but you win?*
> *Reba: Blowing out the other team.*
> *Lisa: Right!* [the others laugh]

However, for the boys it was the competition and action that seemed to matter more.

> *Bonita: What makes a game exciting?*
> *Little Shaq: The ball gets passed around a lot, it gets moving.*

> *Bob: Not to mention, one of those, like remember when Allen shot from half court in. Like an awesome shot or something. That's exciting.*
> *Bonita: What else?*
> *Allen: When there's a lot of action. A close game and it goes to overtime.*
> *Bob: A basket right at the buzzer.*
> *Little Shaq: Yeah, but sometimes that may make people a little agitated if they lost.*
> *Bonita: Which is a better, a game that's close or your team winning in a blowout?*
> *Allen: A close one.*
> *Little Shaq: I think a good game is one where the ball gets passed around a lot, it just gets moving, don't necessarily have to win.*
> *Bob: I think sort of both.*

Competition was generally seen as being a more serious aspect of sport. I asked Allen about the lack of conversation on the bench among the players. He suggested that was because this league is not as competitive as some. For Lisa, it was a negative part of the game.

> *I was afraid in the first year... I thought that guys wouldn't pass to you a lot more, but they do. Some guys are a lot more competitive. And like when people are competitive they aren't always trying to play the game. Some people kind of get upset about it.*

She also seemed to be conflating competition and winning[28]. Later she also suggested that competition is influenced by both gender and age. She described watching the older division's games and suspected the boys had become more competitive because they were older, meaning they were less inclined to pass to the girls. She suggested that parents also get more competitive as their children grow older.

> *When we get older I think parents start to get a little more like, "My son or daughter could have an actual chance of being a very good player". Or being some superstar some day. But when they're little, it's just for fun.*

Her point here seemed to reflect Coakley's (2007) *good parent* discourse, in that when it might matter, parents become more focused on competition and winning rather than just

[28] All the players in the games are competing and would be, by definition, competitive. Clearly some players put much greater emphasis on winning, i.e. they will do whatever it takes to win, including some things those less concerned with winning would not like.

fun. Conversely Reba seemed to see competition as a great thing. She stated that she really liked competitive coaches and expressed disdain for those that were not.

> *The one's that are like, "Just have fun", they're like, "Alright, we're only down by three or four" we could still win this. We've just got four minutes left. "Let's just have fun out there." It's really annoying.*

5.3.3 Not quitting and effort

A critical component of winning and competing was effort and a willingness to keep trying, even when circumstances seemed to dictate otherwise. Several times I heard coaches say they did not care whether the team won a game or not, "as long as they had tried their best". The problem here is that it makes the coach's acceptance of losing conditional, making adequate effort very important. Some of the participants seemed to accept this part of the sport discourse without question, at times to their own detriment. Chris accepted the notion that the team comes before his own needs and desires. He had complained of sometimes being tired after playing for several periods in a row and would have preferred to sit out one period, but the coach told him he would be playing. I asked him if he ever thought of saying he needed a break.

> *I probably wouldn't say that because that's really the whole point of being on a team, you have to play as much as you can, even if you are tired.*

> *Bonita: If you had the same coach next year, would you still wanna play?*
> *Teresa: If I had the same coach again, I wouldn't wanna quit because that means I'm a quitter and that's just bad. I think I would probably talk to the person organizing and say, "Can I get switched to a different team?"*

Teresa missed the last regular season game and all three playoff games. When I asked her about it she attributed it to having lost her schedule and therefore not knowing when her game was to be played. However, I challenged her explanation by pointing out that if she had really wanted to be at her games she could have simply called the Y and asked for the

time. She agreed this was true. The quality of her experience as she described it would make quitting quite reasonable, but the loss of a schedule eliminates the need to call it quitting.

I asked Reba if it is important to keep trying even when the team is losing while we discussed her team's last game in the playoffs. They had a difficult time containing their opponent's best player; when they were losing their own leading scorer quit trying and fouled out of the game.

> *Like the whole team can beat that one person. And we were just not trying and everyone was focusing on how good that one player was that we were just letting him go right through us and get all these baskets. And it's annoying when people give up cuz if you're not trying your hardest and you play bad, then the whole team plays bad and then you just get crushed.*

Of the participants Allen was the most skilled and the one that practiced the most. He was on his school team so he practiced Monday through Thursday there. He also practiced many hours at the YMCA from Friday to Sunday. One day he and a friend played almost 12 hours, only stopping for a sandwich. Reba complained about her teammates not taking practices seriously enough. She felt they would have won more games if they had focused more and tried to learn. In fact, she suggested that players should sign an agreement to be serious about practicing and playing. Although, she did preface her point saying it may not be a good idea. She also stated that anyone should be allowed to play. Chris explained that he took practices quite seriously because he needed to.

> *I take practices seriously when I'm not that great of a player, but when I find I'm one of the best, like last year I played indoor soccer, I was like the best player on the team. I would always fool around during the practices.*

MJ seemed to think he should have worked harder, though he was also happy he had fun, met new people, and learned a lot.

> *There's stuff I didn't like about myself; I didn't practice enough so I wasn't as good as good as I could have been.*

The need to try and not quit becomes problematic when it is more about winning than necessarily the quality of the children's experience, or if they are simply repeating discursive clichés that may only serve to make them feel guilty if they do quit or do not give their fullest effort.

5.4 Size, skill, and involvement in action

The triad of size, skill and involvement in the action are clearly linked to the importance of winning in this league. It became abundantly clear rather early in the season was that children's height and skill had a significant impact on their experience of basketball. That is, if the players were smaller or less skilled, they were much less likely to be involved in the action. Although, size could compensate for less skill, that is, children that were tall enough to reach beyond the other children were able to make up for their skill deficit. They were more likely to get passes and chances at shooting. As well, they were more likely to be told to position themselves under the basket for rebounds and these passes. It was simply a matter of strategy for coaches—they had greater ease in acquiring the ball and they were less likely to be stuffed[29] by their opponents.

Two boys grabbed the ball and wrestled for possession. The taller and stronger boy snapped the ball upward lifting the smaller boy a full foot off the ground. The smaller boy let go and fell heavily to the ground. This was not a rare occurrence in this league.

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[29] This occurs when a taller player blocks the attempted shot of a smaller player—essentially stuffing the ball back down onto the shooter.

The boy on the ground was the more skilled of the two, easily dribbling around the larger boy. He was faster, a better passer, and a better shooter. But basketball is very much a vertical game and here there was a height differential of almost half a metre. Jump balls[30] were a frequent occurrence in these games. Domination is inherent in the very nature of sport sports like basketball that involve invasion and defence of territory. Even in a limited contact sport such as this, the players' size and willingness to be physically aggressive or even rough are often crucial to winning. It is an idea that is abundantly clear to the research participants. The fact that the various players were going through puberty at different times and different rates meant there were sometimes great size discrepancies among the players. For example, the tallest boys were over six feet tall, while some of the children were still well under five feet tall.

In basketball a player's height and strength can affect how she or he experiences the game. Although there are discrepancies in height in any age group, there seemed to be a more pronounced variation at this age. Betty was playing organized basketball for the first time and found this somewhat intimidating.

> *The height difference between everybody, some of the kids were like really, really tall, so it was hard to play with them.*

It might seem obvious that height should matter as basketball has a significant vertical component. However, basketball also has a significant horizontal dimension; for example, running up and down the court; moving in all directions for better position; and much of the passing. Therefore, I thought, perhaps naively, that the agility that often comes with a lower centre of gravity and the ability to fit into spaces that are prohibitive

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[30] This occurs when a player from each team has hold of the ball and is pulling on it to gain possession. Instead of allowing the wrestling to continue, after a few seconds the referee will blow the whistle and award one of the teams possession. The teams alternate being awarded a jump ball.

to a larger person could provide a potential advantage to the shorter players. I raised the issue of size with Little Shaq. I asked him about his struggle with shooting during games and suggested it was because of his size, to which he agreed. I then also suggested it might also be because he did not yet have the strength. He corrected me,

Or other players would be taller and you can't get it over them.

I then asked him if his size works in his favour. His response was a simple and solid "no". I raised the possibility that it could make him more agile than some of his larger opponents that he could quickly move around or under them. To all my suggestions he offered a terse "no". It is a sentiment with which Chris concurred. I asked him if he thought that his size ever worked for him. He immediately responded by shaking his head,

Always bad, always bad.

Both boys clearly resisted my thought that somehow their size might be repackaged as a positive. I had taken this attitude before really recognizing the connection between size and skill and the impact they had. It is interesting to note that both boys also play soccer and they agreed that in that sport their smaller size could work for them.

Allen was more receptive to my reframing of his height challenge—the idea that being short might both work for and against him.

I think it's actually a bit of both because, it's easier to make passes cuz you're lower to the ground, but it's harder to make shots cuz there's a lot of shot blockers.

It should be pointed out that Allen is very good dribbler and ball-handler, therefore he was actually able to put his agility to use and this seemed to be crucial. A greater level of skill and experience, especially in ball handling, allows a player to move more easily around the floor, in particular, without having to look at the ball. This allows her or him

to get into a better position for a shot or pass, thereby diminishing the limitations created by their height.

While several of the players expressed frustration about how their size limited what they were able to, or were invited to do on the court, it was not just the smaller players that were limited by their size. The difference for the taller participants was that their size invited particular perceptions and expectations of what they could and should do. Early in the season Reba had expressed her interest in improving the offensive aspect of her game. What she wanted from her coach was to learn the game and be told what to do on the court. However, her coach put too much emphasis on her height and developed too narrow a view of her and role on the team.

> *At practice he always says, "Let's do a defensive play with Reba" and he always has a play that's just me and he doesn't really work on anything else and he's always criticizing me, and he doesn't really do anything else with the other players. So I play defence and we need to do a play about Reba and like, just cuz I'm tall but when I play from grade 9 to 11 [the next age group], I'm gonna be the shortest one. So I'm not gonna know anything to do cuz I'm always the one that has to [she pauses] there's a special play just for Reba because she's the huge one.*

It should also be pointed out that she was not just standing up for herself, but her teammates as well.

> *And the offence, I think* [her shortest teammate] *shoulda got to dribble a little more cuz he always got swarmed so no one ever passed to him because they thought that he'd get swarmed by people that were all bigger than him and they'd get it away from him. But he's a good dribbler and if they woulda got passed to more he woulda got more* [baskets].

MJ echoed Reba's experience, though he was more willing to accept it for the team's sake. When I asked him if he would rather be more involved in offence or he stated,

> *I would like to get the baskets, but I don't really mind [having to focus on defence], cuz I'm a bigger player and I know I have to block and stuff.*

Reba also felt that her size worked against her in another way and she requested that the referees not "pick on big people". She said that sometimes the smaller players get away with breaking the rules.

> *[Smaller players] do foul you, but they're sneaky about it. When I foul it's obvious cuz I'm the giant, but they should not just watch the big people for fouls, cuz I get a lot of fouls that I shouldn't get.*

The implication of Reba's point is that larger players were not sneaky or that they could not be because they are too visible. She apparently did not see that larger players like herself constantly dominated smaller players physically in full view of the officials, for example, by leaning on them, bumping them, or stuffing them. All these techniques are legal within limits and certainly everyone could use these techniques, but clearly the advantage was to the taller and heavier players. Assuming her point is accurate, her argument reinforces the value of physical domination in this league, and that smaller players should be punished perhaps for their effort to stay in the action. I asked Little Shaq about Reba's complaint and he defended the allegedly[31] fewer calls against smaller players.

Yeah and you get knocked around a lot more.

For the most part the taller players like the physicality of basketball and happily used their size advantage. Reba loved to stuff opponents and Teresa described the physical nature of the sport as a good thing.

> I love it, it's awesome. I like the running up and down, kinda getting in the way cuz I'm tall and I don't really know what to do yet.

Though all the girls expressed that they liked the physicality of basketball (e.g., the pushing, bumping, fighting for jump balls), for a couple girls there were limits.

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[31] I did not keep track of who was more likely to get fouls called against them.

Bonita: I notice you didn't seem to mind taking on the boys, say in jump ball fights.
Lisa: No, no [emphatically]. Maybe some of, like the big guys, but if I was on the opposite of [her teammate, more than six feet tall] *team, I would not touch the ball.*

Bonita: So how do you generally feel about girls and boys playing on the same team; does it work for you?
Betty: It does but a lot of the boys are like bigger, so it's kind of intimidating, but it's fun to play with them.

The smallest participants, both boys, had a hard time with the physicality and the role of their size in it. I asked Little Shaq if he liked the physicality of basketball.

Little Shaq: Not really, cuz they might have the weight advantage too. I'm not the heaviest person. I wouldn't be able to do the same things they did to me and I'd probably be on the ground.
Bonita: Do you dislike it?
Little Shaq: Well, sometimes when you're up against somebody who's really rough, but other times it's fine.
Bonita: What if it was a league full of people your size?
Little Shaq: Still, some people are gonna be rougher than others too.
Bonita: Have you been injured?
Little Shaq: Not playing a sport.
Bonita: Do you worry about it?
Little Shaq: Not really, no. Only if it's somebody really, really big.

Chris was also acutely aware of his size and how it really hampers his game. I asked him if he worried about his skills.

Yeah, I always compare myself to other people. Like, they're so much better than me. I'm like a puny little guy trying to run away from them.

I reminded him of the time he was defending against Reba and she left him lying on the floor. Though he always kept trying, I asked if he ever became discouraged playing with so many people that are bigger.

Yeah when they're bigger and you're knocked to the ground. It's like 'I shouldn't be here', like maybe I'm in the wrong league, maybe I got the wrong team.

In the boys' focus group the smaller participants suggested that the divisions in the league should be based on size not age. I suggested to them that eight year-olds

playing against thirteen year-olds might create other sorts of inequalities, that is, the older players will likely be more developed emotionally and mentally. They recognized this as a potential problem but it was a reversal they would like to see.

"Pass the ball!" shouted the spectators. Many of the parents were becoming visibly upset, but the two most skilled players on the team dribbled around the court, occasionally passing the ball to each other, but not their other teammates. One parent shouted, "Pass the damn ball!" and others chimed in loudly, "Yeah!" The two boys moved around the court looking for an open shot, but because they are the team's main scorers they were always well-covered, often by two players. This meant that usually two or three of their teammates were wide open and able to take a pass. But it was a pass that rarely ever came. In basketball parlance they were known as *ball hogs*—most of the time their team possessed the ball, it was in their hands and they were unwilling to share, except with each other. During that particular outburst by the audience, the coach said nothing to the boys. When they eventually lost the ball to the other team, the buzz continued among the spectators with comments suggesting they did this a lot—my notes supported this contention. The crowd also complained that the coach frequently allowed this to happen.

Neither of the two "ball hogs" were part of my research project, so I could not ask them why they would not share more. Parker (2005) urges researchers to resist the desire to try to read minds for motivation. Their behaviour might be perceived as an act of resistance toward the parents yelling at them. The problem with assessing it as say, a bold attempt to resist adult domination is that these boys almost always handled the ball for their team. Sometimes they were better about passing the ball, but the most skilled boy

was the point guard, meaning that when he was in the game, he always brought the ball up the court; he also made most of the shooting attempts. The other boy took on this role when the best player had to sit out the two required periods. They only ever really seemed to pass the ball in an attempt to get in better position and then they waited for the return pass so they could attempt to score. Not only did other teams readily deal with them—pushing them to the outside of the shooting area, causing them to take many low percentage shots—their teammates were left out of the action. Teresa and Chris were on the same team as the ball hogs described above.

> *Chris: They should pass the ball to other people. If someone's open. Like all the people aren't really being picked up on defence, cuz they're not so great or whatever. The person goes over to help someone else and they're* [less skilled players] *left wide open and then no one would pass to that person.*
> *Bonita: And you're doing all that work to get open and does it make any difference.*
> *Chris: Not really.*
> *Bonita: You coulda just stood at the other end.*
> *Chris: Stood in the corner*

Teresa became so frustrated about this, and other things her coach did and did not do, she quit playing before the season was done, completely missing the playoffs. As Teresa explained it, she and the two other girls on the team rarely got passes.

> *We would just stand there and they wouldn't pass the ball to us. I could have stood there and not done anything and nobody would have passed the ball, cuz I'm standing right there. I could call their name and say, "Hey, pass it to me, I'm wide open, look, nobody's covering me" and then the other team would get the ball. But I didn't do that cuz I wanted to try to get the ball. But they didn't really pass it to anybody. That bugged me so much.*

Betty stated that she had a lot more opportunity to be involved in the action on her school team. It was an all-girl team and she was more comfortable on that team. There her skill level was relatively higher, meaning she had more chances to actually handle the ball and she had even scored a basket—something she did not do in the YMCA league.

None of the participants thought they were their team's most skilled players. Several were new to the league and the sport in its organized form. Only Allen had been playing for several years and he was the most skilled of the group. The newer players did not seem to mind that they were not great at basketball, though they are well aware of what it meant to others—particularly the more skilled players. Teresa explained her abilities on the court.

> *I'm not really that good at basketball. I'm pretty good at passing and sometimes getting the ball farther down the court and getting open—like being the extra man. Cuz I'm not very good at shooting baskets at all. Like last year I got one basket and that was the final game of the season. And countless other times I've tried and just can't hit the basket. But I'm really helpful at being the kinda like an extra man. Nobody else is open, "Oh, pick me, pick me, I'm open". Cuz nobody else on the team really picks me. But, oh well.*

However, her shooting had improved because she scored several baskets this year. It was a bright spot in her season, providing her a way of taking back a small part of her participation.

> *I felt really good when I got them cuz I almost never get a basket. I feel really good about myself and I think, "Yes, I can do this! Now if I just do it the exact same way, I'll get more." So I try a little harder.*

MJ attributed the fact that he did not handle the ball much to his lesser skill and experience with the game.

> *It was my first year and everybody else, they had played before, so they got the ball more than me and they were better than me.*

Even players who had a great deal of opportunity to handle the ball agreed that some players had more than their fair share of time handling the ball. I asked Reba if she thought coaches should do more to make sure the ball gets passed to everyone on the team.

> *At the Y, yeah I guess... I think everyone should get the ball. Betty was open so many times and I was actually pointing at her, to pass it to her and they just didn't cuz they were expecting her to miss and everyone thought she was so awful cuz she couldn't get a basket. The other girl won the free throw contest, but no one knew that cuz she didn't get that many in practice but she has a good shot and if people would have passed to her, she would have got a lot of baskets.*

Teresa agreed that the unwillingness of the best players to share the ball might be traced back to the coach.

> *It wasn't really a big surprise that we ended up losing a lot of our games cuz they wouldn't pass. And the coach would talk about passing, but during the scrimmage, he wouldn't say, "Pass the ball!" or anything. He just let 'em do whatever they wanted.*

Other teams did pass a lot to all the players, though they certainly still had dominant players who handled the ball more. The value of this reality was not lost on one of the players on the championship team.

> *Oh, I'm so glad about that. Yes, we had a guy on our team last year and another guy and they constantly just passed to each other. It was hard for them to pass to us I guess. Like I did get passed to but not as much as this year. I am a lot happier about that. (Lisa)*

While Reba, Teresa and Lisa agreed that the coach could do much to set the tone regarding passing and involving all the players in the action, several other participants attributed the unwillingness to pass to the individual players.

> [The four best players] *mostly got the baskets; me* [and two weaker players] *didn't really get any baskets. But I don't think that was coach, I think that was the rest of the team. (MJ)*

I suggested to MJ that the coach could step in and say everybody has to touch the ball in the game, to which he admitted with a sigh.

> *There were one or two games I didn't get it at all.*

MJ's response was interesting because he seemed reluctant to admit that there was anything he did not like about his coach and his experience.[32] Generally he expressed much enthusiasm and enjoyment of his participation. I would also emphasize that there is a distinction to be acknowledged between scoring baskets and passing the ball. Some players with less skill could get passed the ball many times in a game and still never score. My point simply is that the ball could be more evenly distributed among the team members and there would still be dominant scorers but at least all the players would have opportunities. It should also be mentioned that generally, MJ's team was much better at getting all the players involved in the play than many other teams.

Repeatedly the participants stated, explicitly and implicitly, that they wanted to be involved in the action. They did not want to just stand back and watch others. Nor did they just want to be active, for example, just running up and down the court. They wanted to be seriously involved in the action. The more skilled participants like Allen, regularly had contact with the ball and had plenty of opportunities to pass, shoot, and score baskets, something for which he was glad. But the less skilled players were not so fortunate. When I asked Bob what he did not like about his season, his answer was a bit slow and reluctant, perhaps because he expressed much satisfaction with his season otherwise.

I wish my team members coulda passed me the ball a bit more.

Betty was also disappointed on this matter.

> *Bonita: It was my impression you were open a lot, but never got passes. Did this bother you?*
> Betty: Yes, not the fact that their ability is better so they can go score. But I didn't get to be a part of that. It kinda bugged me.

[32] It was not my intention to get him or any other participants to say anything bad about their experiences, I was simply wondering if it mattered to the players that they might not handle the ball much.

In fact, Betty worked hard at getting open for a pass, always with her arms in the air. But over the season the loss of hope became evident as her arms started to drop more often. She also seemed to need to adjust her pony tail more often. Or perhaps she simply allowed herself the time to make sure her hair was out of her eyes, she certainly had the free time. Bob described a teammate who tended to get passes but never gave them; he would ignore teammates that were always open and try to score himself.

> I guess he doesn't think that they'll make it in. He thinks he'll make it in, which is a great attitude I just wish he could pass more to his teammates and me.

Most players showed up to most of the practices and appreciated them one way or another. That is, they liked practices because of the chance to learn and practice skills and strategies. Some also liked the less stressful atmosphere, compared to games, and liked the opportunity to laugh and socialize with teammates. What they all liked best about their season was playing basketball, whether it was in scrimmages or the actual games.

> They were fun. It wasn't always practicing. There were [scrimmages] sometimes. (MJ)

> *Bonita: What was good about your season?*
> *Cheryl: Scrimmaging at practices.*
> *Bonita: Did you enjoy practices?*
> *Cheryl: Yeah, but I like games better.*

> *I enjoyed the games a lot because you're playing but for practices we kinda did the same thing.... No one sat there and did nothing, like there was no bench warmers. So you all got to play. (Betty)*

For Chris practices were good simply because he was actually able to do something.

> *At the practices I got more of a chance to have the ball. Because there was like no one there.*[33]

At the games more of the players were there and only two or three players did most of the shooting and passing.

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[33] Of the six teams I observed, his team always had the fewest players at practices.

This triad of themes, size, skill, and action turned out to be absolutely pivotal to these children's experience. The level of involvement in the action was directly related to the player's skill and/or size. That is the smaller or less skilled players tended to have the least involvement in action. Quite simply, the largest and most skilled players, particularly the boys, had the greatest involvement in the action. All but three of the participants in this research expressed some level of disappointment with the quantity and/or quality of their involvement in the action on the basketball court. While some tried to be philosophical about it, for others their response leaned more toward alienation from their participation. For example, MJ, Reba, and Bob focused on defence because their coaches asked them to do so. They accepted it at the time, being good team players, but they were not necessarily happy with it and when asked about it, they acknowledged as much. However, they did not necessarily connect it to a desire for more from the game. That is, they seemed to accept the situation as necessary or unchangeable, hence the rationalizations.

According to the *Coaches Manual,* coaches should, "Respect and foster the uniqueness of each child. Place the emphasis in all activities on active involvement with a **CHILD FIRST** [original emphasis] philosophy" (p. 7). Many of the participants' experiences would seem to contradict this particular emphasis, unless of course, games do not count as "activities". Important here was why these participants were not allowed or able to participate more fully. Allen hinted at the rationale during the focus group. I had asked the boys about how playing time should be divided up on teams. That is, should the better players be on the court more than the others?

> *The only time the best players should be playing over the other players, like maybe if it's like the championship 8th period tie game or something like that. Then the*

> *other players would understand. But if you're like the worst team in the league and it's the 8th period and you're gonna lose no matter what, everybody should be playing equal. (Allen)*

Of course, winning was important in more than just the championship game. Despite the new emphasis in children's sport that strongly urges coaches and organizers to de-emphasize winning and instead focus on the quality of participation (Engh, 1999; Fair play, 1994; Thompson, 2003), clearly winning remains important.

5.5 Sportspersonship and fair play

There is certainly more to the children's adult-organized sport discourse than just winning. The themes of sportspersonship and fair play, and fairness also came up in our discussions. Sportspersonship, as reflected through concepts such as respect, fairness, and niceness, was not a small detail for these children. It was also emphasized in the league's registration pamphlet. At various points in the interviews and discussions they all said it was important to the league, both explicitly and implicitly. For Teresa, the league's emphasis on sportspersonship was a big part of why she actually likes participating in it so much. Lisa explained her desire to be a good sport.

> *I try and keep positive, try not to get mad about losing. But sometimes when people are in your face and like, "Don't push me," kinda gets a wee bit annoying. So I try to play fair, but sometimes there's the aggressive side and the other word, the non-positive there.*

I asked Reba about why she applauded opponents when they made a good play. She explained that she likes "seeing good basketball". Though she did recognize that it was not really something she should do in terms of supporting her own team.

> *It was like really good stuff, but bad for us. But I just like to see good basketball and it's cool when people do things that are amazing.*

Of all the participants, Reba was actually the one that was most emphatic about the role of sportspersonship in sport.

> *I'm not mean with opponents, like I don't see them as an enemy and that I shouldn't be nice to them... I don't really see it as good or bad, I just clap because* [the play was] *cool.*

The participants were also insistent that the adults around them needed to be more sportsperson-like during games. I had asked them if they noticed coaches' behaviour and if they ever felt like it was too much.

> *It's annoying cuz they're older than us and if we shouldn't get mad, then they shouldn't get mad about it. It's just a game (Reba).*

> *Allen: One of the coaches, when I was scorekeeping at the Y, his team lost and he got really angry and ran out. He was really angry and got two technicals.*
> *Bonita: What did you think of it?*
> *Allen: They just make themselves look bad.*

Cheryl stated she saw some unsportsperson-like behaviour by coaches, (e.g., getting upset about calls, waving their arms around) and she attributed it to them being "sore losers". Bob also noticed that it seemed to be connected with losing.

> *Some of the people in the league said 'that's the wrong call, blah, blah, blah'. And I'm like, "What the heck? Get over it!"*

Little Shaq was unimpressed as well at times, and repeated the much used but readily forgotten line.

> *It's just a game, right.*

As one of the smallest players in the league Little Shaq wanted people held more fully responsible for their rough play.

> *I think the fouls should be different. Maybe you push somebody really hard, do something bad to them maybe you should get kicked out for the year or something. Just because* [he pauses], *do you really want them to do that again and again every game?*

Interestingly it is something that Reba agrees with, even though she expressed earlier that she felt she was called on fouls too often because of her size.

> *If you're a player, they should make you sign this thing that you should be respectful to people and be serious at practice... Like when people aren't respectful to the refs, they should do something about it not just say "Okay foul". Cuz they'll do it again, "Oh, it's just one foul."*

In the group discussions I asked the participants specifically about sportspersonship to obtain a stronger sense of its importance to them. I did not ask them for a definition, rather I sought examples of what they thought would be poor sportspersonship. Interestingly both groups went immediately to the more obvious examples, including displays of anger. They seemed to be reflecting the childhood discourse theme that children are wild and in need of limits set by adults. They were concerned that if there was not a strong emphasis on sportspersonship people would be mean to each other or get angry with others.

> *MJ: If somebody was getting mad at someone and telling them they suck, it might make the other person feel bad and they might not wanna try out for sports again.*
> *Little Shaq: And discriminating, just because they can't do something.*

They also included, yelling at coaches or referees, behaving angrily (e.g., slamming the ball to the ground), and perhaps most emphatically they saw intrusions on the game by spectators as counter to sportspersonship. All the players had attended a Brock varsity basketball game and were both surprised and unimpressed by the fans that made very loud noise when the visiting team called a time-out. That they said was clearly not sportsperson-like behaviour and they did not want it in their league. However, a couple of the boys indicated that strains of that did exist in the Y league.

> *Bob: Remember that one game Allen when that dad was yelling through the entire game.*

> *Allen: Yeah, you'd be shooting free throws* [and the dad was saying] *12345678, 12345678.*

The children sometimes found themselves at odds with the whole sportspersonship discourse because it can interfere with their effort to compete and win. During the focus groups the girls talked about some of the tips different people have given them on playing basketball. Here they offer a clear example how competition and winning can readily trump the sportspersonship.

> *Lisa: My uncle told me just to poke the people's eyes when you're getting the rebound.*
> *Reba: My sister said to elbow people.*
> *Bonita: What do you think of that; would you start doing it?*
> *Reba: Yes.*
> *Lisa: Yeah.*
> *Bonita: In the Y league or later, or are you already doing it?*
> *Reba: I'm already doin' it.*

Teresa explained how she tried to be competitive, but not be seen as crossing the line into being unsportspersonlike.

> *I try to take up as much space as I can to block other people getting the ball. But try not to get a foul at the same time. Try to make look "oopsy-daisy". Like "oops, didn't see you there". I kind of stand there move around a little bit and sometimes accidentally and sometimes on purpose but accidentally I'll bump into somebody and I'm like "I'm sorry"... I'll apologize and everything, cuz I don't like running into people cuz it's mean* [she laughs]. *But I try to get in the way so they can't get the ball. (Teresa)*

The discourse of childhood, for example, respect for elders also clearly connects with sportspersonship in terms of niceness and respect.

> *I watch if I make any... if I get too frustrated. I wouldn't wanna end up acting like* [a teammate] *maybe and then have people, like have everyone thinking, "Oh, she has a bad attitude" That's why, I know I make facial expressions when I'm on the court*[34]*, I can't help those ones, but I don't wanna have a really bad attitude cuz then I'll have all these people thinking that I'm a bratty person. (Reba)*

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[34] I had mentioned to her that I noticed she expressed her frustration this way sometimes, though I also emphasized that I did not see it as a negative.

Children are expected to respect their elders and this creates problems when parents contradict the coach. I asked Lisa about comments from spectators.

> *Lisa: Yeah, like* [a teammate's] *dad told me and him to switch, and I listened to him. And I told my dad afterward and my dad's like, "Well, why did you listen to him"?*
> *Bonita: Because he's an adult.*
> *Lisa: Yeah, and I respect people but I guess my dad didn't want me to. Like what's the difference from switching from here to here?*

5.5.1 Fairness?

As Fine (1987) has suggested, sportspersonship is most commonly associated with winning and losing, that is, how the players behave in those moments. Certainly sportspersonship, by its very nature, should always be relevant on the playing and practice court. However, at times there was a clear disconnect about what really should be a requisite part of fair play or sportspersonship—basic fairness, particularly from the coaches toward all their players. In the manual, teaching fair play is emphasized. It states that teaching this aspect of the game is just as important as teaching the physical skills, in part because for many children it may be the difference between liking and not like their sport participation.

> Integrity, fairness and respect are the principles of fair play. Since children learn best by seeing and doing, sport offers an excellent opportunity to teach fair play in a way that is both effective and fun. *If children see all members of the program receive a turn, they will learn to treat people equally and fairly* [emphasis added] (*Coaches Manual,* p. 35)

The discourse was there and even if no one read the manual, fair play is part of the general sport discourse. At times the participants noticed a distinct lack of fairness, for example, when coaches played favourites. In part, it was the reality that the better players generally got more playing time, especially in close games and/or important

games. But, they were also bothered by the coaches' emphasis on certain players in other ways.

> *He'd tell his son to do everything. His son led everything, cuz he was on the team. And that kind of annoyed, cuz he treated his son better than everybody else on the team. (Teresa)*

Speaking of the same coach, Chris said that he generally like his coach but he felt left out.

> *He was using like all the people who'd been on the team last year and the year before that. And like all the plays, he was always yelling at them if they did one thing wrong. But he never included all the new people on the team.*

Even Allen, who quite liked his coach and certainly had his share of playing time, was not happy with his coach's focus. The coach's son was also on his team.

> *No matter what, it was always about* [his son].

Not all the participants felt their coach played favourites, but they did sometimes notice it in other coaches. Speaking of Allen's coach, Lisa said,

> *There was one coach,* [his son] *played constantly. But he pushed his team really hard and his son played a lot. I don't think that's great, because your kid is good you play him all the time. I don't think it's fair.*

In spite of many examples of poor sportspersonship or unfairness by some coaches, there were also some noteworthy examples by coaches in a more positive direction. A couple coaches actually stressed passing the ball around among the team rather than simply feeding the ball to one or two players. During one game they two best players of one team were keeping the ball to themselves and not passing it to their teammates. The coach shouted to the most skilled player. "Hey, you guys wanna sit?" The player asked what he did wrong. The coach responded, "Pass the ball around."

Bob's coach went to great lengths one game to help him score a basket. By half time the team was down by 20 points against a very good team. Several times while Bob's team was on defence his coach called him back and told him to wait by the opponent's basket. Bob was confused but listened. What the coach was doing was setting Bob up for a long pass. If he could get one he would have an open shot at a basket. While Bob did receive two passes this way, neither resulted in a basket; one pass got away from him (he was not used to such long hard passes) and with the second pass his shot missed the basket. What might have been an attempt to help this player score a basket might also have simply been confusing and even embarrassing for Bob considering the missed "easy" opportunities; though later Bob did read it as a positive occurrence.

Another coach, normally mild-mannered, became somewhat upset because the referees were not making a particular foul call. He repeated his complaint several times out loud. He was not actually being rude in how he said; he just said it too often. Eventually he was given a technical foul for his complaints. Immediately he asked for a time-out and called his team over to explain that the foul was his fault not theirs and he then apologized to the players.

Because of the special role the on-court officials play in sport and the verbal abuse to which they are frequently subjected,[35] I was interested in the children's perception of their fairness as well. Most of the participants found the referees to be quite good.

> *They're fair and they know people on the teams but they're not really relatives or anything, so they don't favour other players and they're fair, they're not mean. (Reba)*

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[35] Even in this league parents and coaches regularly questioned the referees calls, lack of calls, or perceived bias or ability, though it was less evident than I have seen elsewhere.

Some players noticed a rather unsportperson-like attitude toward the referees among coaches and parents.

> *It's not* [the referee's] *fault that they called the wrong thing and they don't know what they just did wrong. The refs should be able to make what they want, call what they think, not what the coaches saw. If the coaches wanna be refs, then be refs! Don't be a coach. I don't think it's fair. (Lisa)*

> *I notice the parents that call things on the ref like, "Oh ref, what's the matter with you?" But I dunno. (Reba)*

Reba also complained that her coach sometimes took his frustration out on the officials.

> *He kinda got mad when we were losing and he got mad at the refs, but he was just getting mad because he was looking for something wrong, but the refs didn't do anything.*

The participants also found the referees to be very helpful as they frequently took the time to explain the rules to the children. For example, they explained fouls and how they could be avoided, which was much appreciated by newer players.

> *If you did something wrong they'd just tell... like they didn't call you for it. (Betty)*

> *I thought that was neat, cuz sometimes when I got a foul I didn't really know what it was, so they explained it to me. (MJ)*

And even those with more experience were happy for the help.

> *I like that. It feels a bit embarrassing sometimes, like the other teammates on your team know exactly what they're doing and you're like, "Yeah, okay, I know this, go away". But it's good after a while cuz you learn from what you did. (Lisa)*

> *They'll remind you, "Stand behind this line, don't forget to move forward a little bit cuz then you'll give them room." I like refs cuz they'll give you a little warning and then they'll give you a foul if you do it again (Teresa).*

However, some of the players noticed a tightening of the calls as they entered the playoffs and this created problems for the players still trying to understand the game.

> *They were pretty much fair but for a couple games they weren't. For most of the season they were fair, but towards the playoffs [she shakes her head] (Betty).*

Little Shaq also noticed a change in the playoffs of particular concern were the lane violations.[36] At one of the final practices before the playoffs the league organizer, who was also a referee, was approached by one of the parents who complained that the referees were not calling lane violations. He suggested it was not fair that such fouls were not being called. The parent stated it was too important not to call these fouls in the playoffs. I do not know if his suggestion had any real impact, but discursively it was significant. His point could be interpreted as, winning matters more in the playoffs, thus the importance of calling these fouls becomes important in a way it was not during the season.

5.6 Gender expectations

The discourse that asserts male superiority in sport is still prevalent and seems to have guided the beliefs and behaviour of some of the girls and boys. I was interested in how gender affected the children's experience on the court. I specifically asked about it, but even when I did not, it came up, at least from some of the girls and they were defensive about it. The boys had to be asked about it directly. All of the participants said they liked having girls and boys on their teams, though with further discussion certain discomforts became evident.

Betty, a beginner player, initially said she liked having boys on her team, but eventually she acknowledged that she liked her all-girl school team better because there her teammates actually passed her the ball. In the mixed league, she basically never touched the ball during games except by accident or dint of a favourable bounce.

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[36] This occurs when the player shooting a free throw steps over the line before the ball hits the basket. I did not keep track of fouls that were called, so it is not impossible for me to say if there was a change in the officiating.

> *Well, at school I'm a lot more competitive because they're all girls and it's a lot different. I'm more comfortable playing for school.*

Both Lisa and Reba also played on their school basketball team and they preferred their YMCA team. However, they did have concerns about what they saw in their future if they kept playing basketball with the boys in this league.

> *I've watched some of the games* [at the next age level] *and I'm hoping that I won't play at the Y when I'm that old... Cuz I was watching them play and the girls didn't get to do anything there cuz it's playing against a whole bunch of big tall high school people. I was watching and the girls didn't get to do anything at all. They got to just pass it to people so they could shoot. (Reba)*

> *I don't know if they get more competitive when they get older. Cuz I was watching Cheryl's brother's team and the guys kinda only really passed to the guys. And the girls just kinda only looked for girls. I think that's what happens when you get older. Right now I like playing with just boys and girls when I get older I'll probably only wanna be with girls. (Lisa)*

I asked all the participants directly "Do you think people have expectations of you because of your gender?"

> *Mm, I don't know. Maybe, well <u>obviously</u> no one expects us to be as good, like me to be as good as* [her best male teammates] *or something like that. I don't really notice if it's a boy or a girl, I just don't notice those things. (Reba)*

Based on the structure of their answers, a couple of the girls appear to have interpreted my question as "Do people have lower expectations of you because you are a girl?"

> *I dunno some boys can be like that. I don't think my team was. I tried to show I'm a good player. I think the rest of the girls on our team were very good and so we showed that in the first practice, "we're good and you can pass to us". Some people, I dunno, I guess some guys notice in practices, "Hey, they're not very good, we can't pass to them". (Lisa)*

> *No not really. No I don't think that applies cuz Jean is one of the better players and she's a girl, so it doesn't matter. It's your ability, not your gender. (Betty)*

The rest of the girls and the boys said they did not really think people had expectations. I also directly asked all the participants how they felt about girls and boys playing on the

same team and if they had heard any kind of comments on the matter. All expressed at least some level of acceptance of mixed teams, but some also expressed certain reservations. Some of the boys hinted at potential problems. I asked Bob if he was okay with playing on the same team as girls.

> *I'm friends with the girls. I'm friends with all the girls. Some of the guys may not be, you know. (Bob)*

What is unsaid is as telling as what is said. For Bob the gender issue was so obvious, he knew he did not have to explain it to me what he meant; he knew I would know. Just as for Reba, Lisa, and Betty it was obvious that girls would be perceived as less skilled on the court. Consider Allen's conditional acceptance of playing with girls. Initially he said it was fine to have mixed teams, when I probed further, asking if anything at all bothered him about playing in a mixed-gender league.

> *Allen: No, most of the girls on my team were good, so it doesn't bother me.*
> *Bonita: Would you continue to play in mixed leagues in the future? Or just a boys' team?*
> *Allen: It depends on the situation. If it was a Y ball team I wouldn't care, I'd play on either but if it was a competitive team where you had a boys and girls team, I'd go on the boys team. It wouldn't really matter.*

Laced within his acceptance of girls on his team is the idea that girls usually are not as good at basketball as boys and really he is only okay with girls on his team because they were good players.

Chris was more explicit about his discomfort with having girls on his team, but his reason was the opposite of Allen's. That is, it was the skilled girls that caused problems for Chris.

> *Well, in some ways I think it's okay, because um, like, no offence to girls, but sometimes they're not the best of players. Sometimes they are, but they're not the best. And then it makes me feel like, "Okay, good I'm not the worst player on the team". But then also, like* [long pause], *they're really bad and it's like "C'mon,*

> *you can do better than that". And it should just be all boys or whatever. And girls are probably thinking the exact same way, only for girls.*

When I asked him to describe his own skill level, he initially said he *sucked.* In saying that girls are "not the best players" Chris sets up boys as being the best players, as if that is the natural reality of basketball. One problem is that he has already said that he is not very good at basketball, meaning he would not be a "best player". He also uses the word "sometimes", meaning that he cannot always assume that the girls will not be less skilled than him. His statement suggests that he could simply look at his teammates, without having seen them play and know that he is not the worst player on the team and also, who is not the best player on the team. His sense of his own ability is dependent of the belief, or perhaps his hope, that girls are not good basketball players. The contradictions Chris expressed reflect his dilemma. The prevalent gender discourse states that boys are better inherently better athletes than girls. Despite the advances for girls in terms of participation opportunities in the past two or three decades, sport is still a male terrain (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). From one direction he hears the sport discourse of equality (Pirinen, 2002) that says girls have the same right play sport as him. From another direction, he is reminded, by the masculinity and sport discourses, that boys are better than girls or at least they should be. Clearly this creates a struggle for Chris. I asked him what happens when there are girls that play better than him.

> *Then I feel like it's so embarrassing because usually boys are better than girls and it's kind of embarrassing cuz that usually doesn't happen.*

More of the best players in this league are boys, though it should also be remembered that more of the players are boys. The issue is not whether the boys are more skilled than the girls; rather it is a twofold problem. One, *best* is defined within

parameters that generally favour boys, that is, what is valued in sport is what boys have been traditionally pushed toward and of which they tend to be more capable. Two, the prevalent discourse continues to present gender differences as the natural state, that is, boys are just better athletes than girls and discourse plays no role in it. This reality continues to diminish girls' experiences; expectations expressed through discourse matter.

One way that females are diminished in sport is through language for example, by the use of male generics (Segrave, McDowell, & King, 2006). This simply means that the girls are overlooked in the language of basketball. The parent who calls out to the team, "Keep those arms up. You can do it boys," and after a brief pause, she or he remembers to add with a chuckle, "And girls". When the coaches yell out to their team, "Man up." "Cover your man." "Where's your man?" Certainly, these terms are remnants of team sport when it was a male preserve, but the fact that no one thinks to create and use new terms makes it clear it does not matter.

How girls and boys use their bodies is socially constructed (Young, 1990). Historically, girls have been not been pushed toward sport and physical play the way boys have; for example, where boys might be given a ball to play with, girls receive dolls (Hargreaves, 1994). Boys' peer groups place more value on physicality than girls' peer groups (Chase & Dummer, 1992), so it should be hardly surprising when girls are less likely to live up to the dictums that inspire greater levels of skill.

Girls who are good at or interested in sport and in other ways break with clichéd notions of femaleness are marked as tomboys or abnormal. The girls are in the league and encouraged to play yet, as Chris and Allen suggested, the acceptance of the girls was

conditional. It is acceptable to play with the girls if they are good—a condition they do not extend to boys. Even the girls made it clear that they were not expected to be good and it created defensiveness among some of them. As Betty summed up nicely when stating that lower expectations of girls are not justified,

> *Reba is one of the better players and she's a girl so it doesn't matter. It's your ability, not your gender.*

It is a nice sentiment but hardly reflects the discursive reality, as if one very talented girl could wipe out the deficit that girls are apparently born with.

An alternative reading of the dominant discourse, that says girls just are not as good at sports as boys, might be that girls are resisting this discourse. They are there to play on their terms, rather than necessarily to compete or win; though as Reba indicates, certainly some are interested in winning. This might also be said of any of the players that do not measure up in terms of size, skill, or competitiveness. Their very presence on the court is an act of resistance; one that is regularly disciplined and punished. The coach corrects their efforts, reminding them where to be and what to do whether they want it or not. The more skilled players thwart their involvement in the action by becoming ball hogs—whether for the sake of winning or simply for their own desire to handle the ball as much as possible. If they do not keep the ball away from these inadequately skilled players, how will the team win the game? Passing the ball to someone who struggles to score baskets is a wasted pass.

All the boys in the league are vulnerable to this intersection of discourses as it creates yet another pressure on them to perform. But it also seemed to be something that is not supposed to be acknowledged, lest it contravene the discourse of gender equality.

When I asked Chris about whether anyone says there are things girls or boys should not do.

> *Chris: I've heard that girls shouldn't play basketball at all cuz they suck or whatever.*
> *Bonita: Who says stuff like that, parents or teammates?*
> *Chris: Teammates. Parents would never say that.*

The masculine priority to perform also created problems for girls in several ways. A girl would be assumed to be less skilled and therefore may be less likely to be fully invited into the action via passes. As well, if a girl was more talented than the boys she is vulnerable to marginalization, as Shakib and Dunbar (2002) often found to be the case in their basketball study. Perhaps it is not surprising then that the girls sometimes become defensive about what people expect of their basketball abilities. Even Reba, the most skilled of the female participants, though only in her second year of basketball, is very sensitive on the subject.

> *I don't wanna be a girl that can't play at all. I don't wanna be the person the just catches the ball and doesn't know what to do with it and just has to pass it off to a boy so he can get a basket. I'd like to be one of the girls that can actually get some. At the school team, I don't really worry about it, cuz I'm like the best player on the team.*

The girls also seem to go along with the notion that boys are inherently better basketball players. Reba and Lisa complained that their school teammates were not very skilled and that they were too rough.

> *Try having all girls on your team and a girl coach. I don't know, I just think it's a lot better having guys on your team cuz they all the time know what they're doing. And some of the girls on my team played last year and that's all they played. So they don't know that much. They don't know how to set picks. I guess guys know how to do that stuff, so it's better. (Lisa)*

> *At my school, there's not a lot of skill on my team, but at the Y there's more skill so you actually get to be challenged and play more... I don't really like playing with all girls, cuz this is the first time I've been on a girls' team—like only girls*

and we've actually played games instead of one big tournament. And I don't really like it as much as playing at the Y. I felt that I didn't wanna go to the games, and at the Y I couldn't wait cuz it's actually basketball, not whatever we were playing at school. (Reba)

In the focus groups I asked the participants if they wanted the league to be divided by gender. Both the girls and the boys did not like the idea but for different reasons. Several girls saw all-girls' teams as a negative whereas the boys saw mixed teams as a positive.

Reba: Keep it the way it is.
Lisa: Yeah.
Bonita: Why?
Reba: Cuz girls are mean [laughter from all] *and boys are calm.*
Bonita: So you're mean?
Several answer in unison: Yes.
Bonita: So boys calm girls down?
Reba: Well, if it's just girls' basketball, there's a lot of scratching and pushing and when there's boys playing, it's calmer and not as painful.

Bob: I think the mixed teams are pretty good. I mean, some of the girls are really good at the game.
Allen: And if you had a girls' league and a boys' league there'd be not enough teams. There'd be like 4 teams and you'd have to play everybody like 3 times and it'd get boring after a while. And if you get 4th you don't feel as bad.
Bonita: So you prefer the big league.
Allen and MJ: Yeah.

It should be noted though that a couple of the girls expressed discomfort with the ratio of girls to boys—girls were outnumbered 2 to 1.

What I would say, cuz on each team there's only 3 girls, I don't think that's fair, cuz you playing with 6 guys and 3 girls. (Betty)

I think there are more girls in the league this year, and I was really happy to see that there were a lot of girls there but there was still a lot of boys. And I'm not too upset with the boys, cuz boys like sports and basketball and hockey and football, but I would like to see more girls in the league and not as many boys [she laughs]. (Teresa)

5.6.1 Masculinity

For boys, the pressure of the intersection of sport and gender discourse can also be weighty. Chris struggled with what it meant to be a boy trying to be masculine enough in the presence of girls that were more skilled than him. If skill is equated with masculinity, then clearly he has a problem. Bob was also at odds with the masculinity that is compulsory in sport. During one of the games, his mother explained that he was just not very aggressive and that he struggled with his participation in sport. Though Bob has stated he enjoyed his basketball participation, it was not his idea to play.

> *Bob: My father simply adores hockey. I hate it. He's like, "Aw, you'll love it when you're older".*
> *Bonita: Why are you involved in basketball, your parents just signed you up?*
> *Bob: Yeah, pretty much. Same thing for baseball.*
> *Bonita: Not your idea.*
> *Bob: No, I never planned to join sports, except for bowling. That was the only one I wanted to join, all my friends did.*
> *Bonita: Are you still going to try other sports?*
> *Bob: My mom wants me to join baseball again. After I got hit in the eye and the ribs, I don't really wanna go back.*

In the initial interview with Allen I asked him why he played sports and one of the reasons he offered was that he liked the physical activity. So I asked him why he did not choose something like dance. He looked at me incredulously and quietly shrieked,

> *Cuz boys don't dance!*

Allen's response speaks to a discursive line that is still drawn between activities that are acceptable for either girls or boys. Dancing apparently would be a challenge to his maleness or masculinity. The need for strength and masculinity among the boys was also expressed on the court.

I was busy writing something in my notes so I missed what caused the following events, but it is the reaction that is most relevant anyway. The gym fell mostly silent

causing me to look up. There were just quiet murmurs pierced by a 10 year-old boy crying loudly and writhing in pain on the floor, his hands covering his groin. Clearly he had been hit in the genitals, whether by the ball or another's body part was unclear. After several moments the referee helped him to his feet and he walked alone to the bench where he continued to cry for the next ten minutes. His coach, also his father, turned to him from the sideline and asked, "Are you okay?" The boy did not answer, he remained crumpled on the floor beside the bench and continued crying. Next to me sat another coach; quietly he said, "You gotta bend him over". No one but me could hear him. He shifted as if to get up then thought better of it and simply repeated, "You gotta bend him over".

It was not unusual to see injuries of various sorts in this league. Children frequently experienced minor injuries, though none were of an apparently serious enough nature that the children had to be given treatment other than a little attention from the referees and coaches. The players would eventually be helped from the floor and escorted back to the players' bench to the applause of the crowd. Then usually the coach would talk to the injured player which would be followed by conversations with teammates, perhaps comparing stories of similar wounds. It was standard treatment that everyone received, except Fred. The referee did not ask him where it hurt because it was obvious. He also did not try to soothe Fred or suggest what he might do he simply helped him up and let him make his own way to the bench. There was no applause and no conversation with the coach or teammates on the bench; he was left alone to deal with his pain. Apparently no one could tell him what to do, he needed to figure out how to "man up" all on his own.

For the boys, masculine discourse necessitated particular behaviour and attitudes on the basketball court. "The prime historical argument to explain why young males have been typically encouraged to play sport, rests on the assumption that participation will produce healthy, virile, hard working, rule following, competitive, courageous and moral men" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 94). The boys running about in the YMCA gym may have known nothing of the history of sport, but certainly its discourse was inscribed on their bodies and their experience. Fred crying and in pain, left to *man up* all on his own. Bob working hard, awkwardly trying his best to participate in a sport he had no interest in joining. MJ admitting his disappointment that he did not get many passes and rationalizing it because he is a beginner; that it was a reasonable choice by his more skilled teammates. Chris struggling with embarrassment over the fact that girls on his team and in the league are better, much better, than him at basketball, sometimes for no other reason than because they are much larger than him—the physiological realties of his age rendered irrelevant. He might have been happy for more talented boys on his team because they could bring his team closer to winning. The fact that talented girls could also do the same would be ironically discomfiting for him.

5.6.2 Tomboys

I originally raised the issue of tomboyism with the girls because I was also asking questions about whether their parents supported their continuation in sport. With the influx of girls into sport in the last two decades that attitude may have shifted. In previous decades, parents may have expressed concerns if girls wanted to continue participating in sport, especially the more traditionally masculine ones. I was trying to determine if that might have changed. All the girls suggested that their parents were fine with their

participation and would be fine if they continued in it, though they might have limits about the types of sports they found acceptable. I then wondered how they were perceived as girls playing sport. One of the prevalent concepts associated with girls who play sport is tomboyism. Several of the children were aware expectations or limits that are sometimes put on both girls and boys in sport. For girls there can be a concern for their fragility or perhaps more implicitly, the gender appropriateness of a particular sport.

> *My mom still doesn't know I play football with the boys at school. (Teresa)*
>
> *I got into football this summer. Only I can catch it very well, I don't know the rest of the game. But I really wanna play and my parents won't let me, cuz they think I'd be like, "Aw, I broke a nail with it"... I think they kinda think that I'd get hurt like very easily, but I'm a lot bigger than other people, so I don't really think so. (Lisa)*

For Teresa, when asked what her mother might think of her playing football, she stated that she had no idea, though the simple fact that she has chosen not to tell her is suggestive that she would expect disapproval. As for Lisa, she was frustrated that she was not allowed the opportunity to simply try football.

Because of the gender assumptions that still circulate through children's sport, girls who are more skilled or aggressive may have to be explained to fit the discourse. The easiest way is through the label of tomboy. Such girls inhabit a unique space, not a boy, but different from other girls. I asked the girls if they have ever been called a tomboy.

> *Reba: Yes.*
> *Cheryl: No.*
> *Teresa: Yes.*
> *Betty: No.*
> *Lisa: My sister was, but I just liked pink things and pretty things.*
> *Bonita: Why do you think you got called a tomboy?*
> *Teresa: Because I went and played football with the boys* [others laugh].

Teresa stated her answer slowly with a hint of sarcasm—as if the reason should be obvious.
Reba: I was a boy.[37]
Lisa: Yeah. (She has known Reba for several years.)
Teresa: I was wearing jeans. I don't very often wear skirts or dresses? [she laughs] *I'm not sure why.*
Bonita: And what about you? Cuz you were a boy?
Reba: Yeah, pretty much.
Bonita: You don't see yourself that way anymore?
Reba: No, not really. I hope not. [Lisa laughs]. No, I don't know why I was so boyey.
Bonita: Cuz you were doing stuff you liked to do?
Reba: [No answer]
Lisa: My sister plays with bugs and goes to bug camp.
Bonita: So is it bad to be a tomboy?
Cheryl: No.
Lisa: I don't think so.
Teresa: No.
Again Reba does not offer an answer.
Bonita: Do you think they're trying to insult you when they say that?
Teresa: Maybe.
Reba: A little bit I guess.

For these girls, it seemed to be a combination of what a girl does and how she presents herself that determined her status as being fully a girl or being a tomboy. Previously Lisa had described herself as being much like Reba in terms of interests, size, and age, but she apparently was protected from the tomboy label because of her affinity for pretty and pink. Teresa was clearly a bit mystified by the label even though she had a sense of what it was about. Unlike Reba, Teresa did not seem overly bothered by the label. During the focus group and the individual interview Teresa spoke proudly of being accepted by the boys on the football field for her willingness and skill. Contrarily, Reba seemed uncomfortable with the matter, perhaps in part because she was trying to get away from being a boy.

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[37] Unbelievably I did not ask her what she meant by this. As well, after I completed the focus group I realized that I should not have raised this issue in this circumstance. It should have be a question limited to the individual interview. I suspect I knew this at the time and that is ultimately why I did not follow up on her answer.

On the surface the concept of tomboy seems to challenge the gender binary as a new category of possibility is created for girls. However, I argue it is a temporary possibility filled with awkwardness and risk. After puberty, with a greater awareness of sexuality, "the once endearing 'tomboy' label turns into the degrading label of 'dyke'" (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). "Either label is likely to cause the target to re-examine [her] behaviour and to censor/police [herself] so as to avoid a repeated occurrence" (Clarke, 1998, Sporting Manifestations, ¶ 1).

5.6.3 Niceness, aggression, and physicality

Being nice was significant to several of the players. Reflecting sportspersonship they are generally polite and respectful with each other, though that was interpreted through the allowances of the game and the need to compete. For example, on the street leaning on somebody or intimidating her or him physically may not be considered nice, but in basketball it is part of the game. As long as the children did not get carried away, they could still be considered nice in this context and niceness did seem to be an important quality to the participants, especially the girls.[38] They described it as a good quality in sport and offered it as a reason for liking the others involved in their sport experience, such as teammates, coaches and even the referees.

> *The one ref, he doesn't seem very nice. He doesn't smile very much and I think you need to smile to make things happy. (Lisa)*

Perhaps what is most interesting is the desire by several of the girls to be perceived as nice, or not mean, by those involved in their sport experience, perhaps including myself.

> *I wanted to be a good player and the nice player, cuz almost all the good players are so cocky and they're just mean but I think I'm one of the good girl players* [she

[38] I counted the number of times the words nice (when used as a synonym for *not mean*) and mean were used; the girls used the terms ten times more often. During my coding I had noticed there seemed to be a large discrepancy in the use of these terms, unlike others, so out of curiosity I counted them.

> says shyly] *and I didn't wanna be a mean girl player. It would be nice if I was nice too* [she laughs]... *I like a player that's good* [skilled] *and not mean and cocky. (Reba)*

I asked Reba about an occasion where her coach complimented her in front of the rest of the team, describing her as the team's best defender which her teammates applauded. He was using her as an example to explain how they could defend better. She did not like it because it was not nice for other players.

> *When they all clap it's annoying cuz it probably hurts other people's feelings, cuz I wouldn't like it if I had someone on my team that we had to clap for cuz they were better than us.*

The gender discourse around niceness is associated with girls more than boys. Girls are expected to be nice and therefore value it, even on the playing field where it tends not to be considered useful or valued (Clark & Paechter, 2007, Lenskyj, 1986).

Niceness could also be regarded in contrast to aggressiveness, a trait generally associated with and expected of boys in sport (Hargreaves, 1990). All the girls but Betty could be described as being at least occasionally aggressive[39] on the court, that is they were willing to be physical and go after the ball and insert themselves into the action. Interestingly Reba and Lisa both were inclined to ascribe aggressiveness to girls rather than boys.

> *Girls can get really aggressive. I mean so can guys, but they'll just look at you and like, "What's your problem?" I smacked this guy once and he just said, "What's your problem?"*

Among the boys, not only is niceness not expected, it would probably be derided except, perhaps, by women. At a practice, Allen was running up the court when he lightly

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[39] Aggressive could have many connotations. I am using it as a contrast to being passive, for example, standing back and waiting for the ball to come to them.

bumped a girl. She fell and he stopped to offer his hand to help her up. The woman next to me on the bench, (he later told me it was his teacher), said "Aw Allen, that's nice".

Niceness is a quality very much associated with girls. There are a several ways to read the emphasis on niceness. First, it is reflective of the gender discourse, specifically the element of femininity that requires girls to be nice or not mean. This clashes with a sport discourse that insists on qualities such as roughness or aggressiveness. The emphasis on niceness could be an effort to lessen the weight of these. That is, by focusing on niceness and wanting people to perceive them as nice, the girls might be deflecting potential negative judgments resulting from the surveillance of not just their behaviour as athletes but also as girls. For example, being nice might help deflect accusations of being a tomboy. As well, the girls may simply be resisting the sport discourse that emphasizes roughness or aggressiveness. The point of this was not to try to read the girls' minds, but rather consider ways they may use to juggle seemingly incompatible discourses.

Basketball involves a lot bumping, pushing, leaning, elbowing, grabbing, wrestling for the ball, and being knocked to the ground. Jammed fingers, twisted joints, and bruises are fairly commonplace. I wondered how the participants viewed the physical nature of the game and what role gender played in this aspect of the game. I asked each if they liked the physicality of basketball and all said they did except Little Shaq. He was the smallest participant

> *Bonita: Do you like the physicality?*
> *Little Shaq: Not really, cuz they might have the weight advantage too. I'm not the heaviest person. I wouldn't be able to do the same things they did to me and I'd probably be on the ground.*
> *Bonita: Do you dislike it?*
> *Little Shaq: Well, sometimes when you're up against somebody who's really rough, but other times its fine.*
> *Bonita: What if it was a league full of people your size?*

Little Shaq: Still, some people are gonna be rougher than others too.

I asked all the boys if they had treated the girls differently than the boys in terms of physicality. Little Shaq made no distinctions based on gender, for him size was much more relevant. Chris and MJ also said they did not make special allowances for girls. As for Allen, I had watched him fighting a similar-sized girl for a jump ball one day and it seemed to me he let go of the ball, meaning she ended up with possession. When I asked him about it he stated that he did not remember the incident and could not really say for sure if he had ever eased up when going directly against a girl. However Bob stated he definitely took it easy on the girls.

> *I try to be a lot more gentle with girls, you know. I think all the guys try to be a bit more gentle. Girls don't get like "Aw, that was awesome", out of falling onto the floor. I don't think girls like that like guys do (Bob).*

Bob's assumption here is that girls do not like falling whereas boys do, but based on my observations this is not necessarily true, at least not for all the girls. The participants most often down on the floor were Reba and Allen. They usually ended up there fighting for a jump ball or trying to keep a ball in play. Interestingly they were also the most competitive participants and apparently the most willing to sacrifice their bodies for the game. The players least likely to be found on the floor were Bob and Betty. Bob stated that he had considered playing football at school but declined for fear that he would be "dog-piled". In contrast Teresa played football with the boys at school and Lisa wanted to play in a league.

> *When I play football, I'll fall down and get up and laugh. (Teresa)*

> *I like other sports too, but I like to get in and be tall and get in people's way. I don't like little sports where you stand there and hit things with badminton racquets. It's a good break but it gets boring after a while. Standing there for like two hours just hitting things. (Lisa)*

I like the jump balls, they're fun. (Cheryl)

Most of the girls in the league were as big as or bigger than Bob so if he truly maintained such an approach with the girls, he would likely be the one left lying on the floor. It seemed more likely to me that he was expressing the discourse that insists that girls are more fragile than boys and that boys should not hit girls.

5.7 Support, intrusion, and the gaze

One thing all the children seemed to have in common was the desire for support and they wanted it from all the adults involved in their sport experience. The coaches played a significant role in whether the children had an enjoyable season and one of the easiest ways the coach could make a player feel good about her or his participation was by offering encouragement. What Lisa liked best about her coach was her ability to approach him.

> *I wouldn't be embarrassed to ask a question or do something that I wasn't supposed to do. I can ask for help if I need something and that helps me a lot more, become a better player.*
>
> *He would try to be supportive and he would have fun drills, but they also teach you how to play the game. (Chris)*
>
> [My coaches were] *encouraging and they always had a tip on how to do something better. (Little Shaq)*
>
> *Bonita: So what makes a good coach?*
> *Allen: Encouraging.*
> *Bob: Yes, very encouraging.*
> *Allen: If you're not great at something and somebody else is good at that maybe they could get the other person to help you or they could help you themselves to make you better. Instead of just focusing on one kid who's already good.*
> *MJ: One that's not really serious, that sometimes jokes around. Has fun at practices*

Even when a coach seemed to be critical or prone to singling out players, it was still seen as being acceptable in the right circumstances. Bob described his coach as awesome, even though on occasion he stopped practice to tell Bob, in front of the team, what he was doing wrong. However, he was also very encouraging and pointed to what he was doing correctly and that was crucial for Bob. Even though he was new to basketball, he was made to feel welcome on the team, even if he was not as involved in the action as he might have liked. MJ felt similarly about being told what he was doing wrong in front of the entire team. I asked him if he ever felt centred out.

Not really cuz he did it to almost the entire team.

MJ's coach also constantly told the players what they did well and gave them opportunities and the knowledge to try new skills and strategies. He encouraged them to contribute to the practice by bringing ideas for games or drills they could do. His players felt comfortable in speaking their mind. One of MJ's teammates was having difficulty understanding a drill they were working on and kept making the wrong move. Suddenly she stopped the drill and announced that she now understood. She made everyone go back to their starting positions and told them to start again. The coach simply smiled. On another occasion, the coach told MJ he was doing something wrong. It left MJ frustrated enough to reply simply,

No, I don't see what's wrong with that. I think I did a good job.

The coach just smiled. Though certainly the coach was in control, he made room for the children's desires and interests. When the coaches were oblivious to the children's interest or circumstances, the participants noticed and it mattered. Teresa described the first time she experienced shortness of breath at a practice.

> *I went over to* [my mom] *and sat there for the rest of the practice and the coach didn't even come over and ask me what was wrong. I just walked off the court and he didn't even say anything, didn't even blink. Didn't care or something.*

Later, at a game, her coach was again oblivious to what she was experiencing when she had another problem with shortness of breath and he tried to tell her she had to play.

> *Teresa: He insisted that I had to play, but I couldn't.*
> *Bonita: Did you try to explain what was going on?*
> *Teresa: I said, "I can barely breathe". "Well, you try your best". I'm like, "I can't, I can't run, I can't breathe," and that's when I went over to my dad and cried a little.*

For a couple of the players, it also mattered whether their teammates supported them, or not. Lisa was on the winning team and what she liked best about it was how the players supported each other.

> *We all told each other we did a good job.* [One teammate] *was very shy but sometimes she just came right out and told me I did a good job. It was very encouraging.*

Chris had the opposite experience. He was infrequently involved in the play, apparently because his teammates did not think he was good enough. However, he was occasionally allowed to do throw-ins. On one such occasion he forgot about doing it and his teammate yelled at him, turning a moment of opportunity for involvement to one where he wondered if he even belonged on the team.

> *It felt discouraging, like they didn't want me on the team.*

None of the children minded the parental presence at games and they quite liked the supportive words and applause. I asked the children how they felt about their parents watching their games and if it was ever problematic.

> *I like it. Yeah, someone to cheer for me. Yeah, it's nice when they cheer for you, yeah. I don't mind the parents. I don't ever really notice any of the parents there, except for when I look at my mom after I made a shot or something like that. (Reba)*

> *My parents really don't understand the game, so they can't really get into it. My grandpa gets the most into it cuz he watches a lot of basketball. They just mainly cheer me on though. (Allen)*

Chris was only one to express a resistive ambiguity about parents as spectators to his sport experience.

> *It's nice to see them actually coming to the games cuz a lot of parents don't come to see their own children play. But then also, you wanna be able to do the things that you do as a kid and having your parents around there feels uncomfortable.*

During the focus group, I asked the participants what they wanted from their parents.

> *Teresa: I want them to be quiet.*
> *Lisa:* [The talking] *doesn't annoy me that much but sometimes they go a little far.*
> *Reba: Her mom even like coaches me when I'm playing.*
> *Lisa: Yes, she does* [laughing].
> *Cheryl: I like them to just sit there and not comment about the win or loss at the end of the game.*

On occasion, the parental involvement would go beyond support or watching. During games and practices some parents would tell their children what to do during and sometimes it directly contradicted what the coach had told them, leaving them confused.

> *My dad, actually I'm glad he's not here. He actually gets in the way a lot cuz he'll be like, "Come on, pass the ball!" But I'll be like, "I'm doing what the coach told me to do, shut up!"(Teresa)*

> *If they're screaming and telling their kids what to do during a game, it's kinda distracting. (Betty)*

As well, parental involvement could become simply an intrusion on the children's participation. Adults, who yelled at their kids, whether positively or negatively, were distracting for most of the participants, perhaps in part because it also included judgment.

> *I remember a game where this one guy was yelling throughout the entire game and I was like just gonna scream, "Shut up!" Even though they won, he was still yelling at his kid, "You gotta do that rebound, those passes". He shoulda been happy that at least they won. (Bob)*

My mom is a little too involved in practices, cuz she talks to my coach when he's coaching me and it's so embarrassing. (Reba)

Interestingly, when they are in the middle of action, the players just blocked out most of the auditory interference. It was mostly during the lulls in play, for example, during free throws or throw-ins, that the chattering crowd was even heard.

I block it out. I don't hear a thing. (Bob)

I don't think I even heard it. I don't really hear a lot of people on the sidelines. I'm just concentrating on the game. (Chris)

The comments from parents that the participants found most bothersome were the ones after the game.

It kinda bugs me. Like games we did really really good and we won. We like smushed 'em. I ask my mom, "Did you like the game"? And she says, "Yeah, but you guys were really sloppy". So?! (MJ)

Your dad is good to have as a coach, cuz then you get to have him lecture you in the car about things to do. (Lisa, speaking sarcastically.)

I don't like it when parents will just review the whole game and talk to you about what you did wrong on the ride home. (Teresa)

But sometimes the players clearly heard what was being said and they have internalized the judgemental adult gaze. Lisa had watched the older age-group games and had an idea what to expect.

I think that once I get into the older league, I think there's gonna be a lot more comments about what people do and how people do things. I'm kinda nervous about that, now that I think about it. Cuz I really don't want to do something wrong and have someone else's parent say, "Hey, what's your problem?"

A significant part of Lisa's complaint was that parents did not really understand what the players were experiencing, making their comments and advice even less helpful.

Like they don't how hard it is to be running up and down, up and down, up and down. They just like to talk, what they think would be better. You try and come run.

I suggested to her that the parents should play a game so their children could watch, and judge.

Yes! And I can yell at her from the sidelines what she's doing wrong.

As long as the adults are there to watch the children, they will also provide judgment, even if they say nothing. Much of the judgment is already internalized by this age; however, the discipline is aided if they are there to reinforce the correct training. There was little opportunity for children to be free of adult observation in a game or practice situation. While the participants generally said they did not care that parents and others were watching them, several acknowledged moments when they were acutely aware of being watched and judged. They even explained how it could affect their behaviour.

> *I don't really care if people are watching me, it's not like I get nervous. Cuz who cares what some people's parents think about me I don't even notice. They never do, but if a parent makes a comment I'll stop doing what they said. I dunno. Nothing bad really happens, so it doesn't really matter to me. (Reba)*

Despite her stated disinterest in a stranger's opinion, Reba clearly reflected the impact of the adult gaze on her *hypothetical* behaviour. She also explained why she does not like covering the best players in part it was about how people will perceive her.

> *I don't like having to guard the better people. I had to guard* [a very good player] *and he's so much better than me that they have to get two more people* [to help] *and that makes me look like I'm not as good.*

Lisa described the pressure of shooting free throws. For those moments the gym was very quiet and she became aware of being watched.

> *All these eyes are watching you. "Get it in, get it in".*

Other participants agreed about the pressure of the gaze on free throws.

> *I like them cuz it gives you a second to rest, but I don't like the pressure. Especially at the end of the game, with a close game, and you're at the line, you have to hit your free throws. (Allen)*
>
> *It was my first time, I was a bit nervous. It's like everyone's looking at me, waiting for me to move. (Bob, describing his first free throw)*
>
> *Well, I did free throws here last year, just for school, but having everyone watching. It kinda makes me nervous. (Betty)*

But for the most part, the children stated they are largely oblivious to the presence of the spectators while they are playing.

> *You don't notice it when you're playing (Cheryl).*

Most of the time the participants were also oblivious to my existence at games and practices. But on occasion they noticed me though they stated it had little or no impact.

> *One time* [my watching affected her], *cuz I really didn't know what you were taking notes about. After a while my mom would be like, "Watch the ball!", so I'd have to watch the ball (Lisa).+756 8*

5.8 Correct training and docile bodies

The most frequent way the coaches attempted to correct the players' skills was by telling them what to do. In practices they explained the techniques, drills, and strategies. With each drill he told them what they are doing right and what needs to be changed, though it was mostly the latter. Children liked scrimmaging during practices. It was a time during practices when they were freed from the repetition of drills and were able to play basketball. It was their reward for behaving well throughout the rest of practice and doing as they were asked. In fact, on numerous occasions I heard coaches warn that there would be no scrimmage unless they paid more attention or did as they were told during drills. Presumably this is why scrimmages always took place at the end of practices; a modestly successful carrot tied to the stick of disciplinary power. The children would

often put more effort into the drills, but generally kept up the talking and laughing that inspired the threats. Rewards are generally more effective than punishments in the disciplinary process (Markula & Pringle, 2006). However, despite the opportunity to actually play basketball through scrimmages, they were still subjected to correct training. All the coaches, to varying extents, took the opportunity to correct the children's strategies and occasionally their techniques. They called out to players, telling them to move the ball differently or better. Sometimes they would even stop the scrimmage and call attention to what was wrong, perhaps physically moving a player to a better location or telling her or him how to correct the body's position.

Such instructions generally continued during games as well, though strictly from the sidelines. All of the coaches had something to say, though in varying amounts. Some coaches said little simply allowing the children to play as they had been instructed at the beginning or during breaks in play. Other coaches talked almost non-stop, almost like a television play-by-play announcer.

Get your arms up!
Get in there for the rebound!
Everybody man up![40]
Who are you covering?
Cover your man!
She's gonna pass it. Look for the pass. There's the pass!
Out of the key, Bob!
Where's your man? Who are you covering MJ?
Pass the ball.
Allen, forget stealing just play good defence.
Get back on defence.
Plant yourself Allen.
Get the ball to Joey.
Reba, you're reaching around.

[40] This version of *man up* is different from the one used previously. Here it means to cover your "man" on defence.

Some coaches seemed unwilling to leave the children's play to chance, to allow them to take what they had learned and simply try to apply it on their own. It could be argued that it helped the children play a complicated game better. In fact several of the children said it was helpful.

> *I don't mind it cuz I know that he's a good coach and he knows what's best for the team. (Allen)*

> *I like coaches that actually say things on the sidelines and help you do things, and he didn't really do that. He said things to me but not to the whole team, like a coach that will actually tell you plays. (Reba)*

Clearly most of the children saw value in correct training; it helped them to learn skills and strategies—meaning that this disciplinary technology was positively productive for them. However, often it was also just intrusive and occasionally counter-productive.

> *Sometimes* [it is] *helpful. But they keep talking like, "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon." It's like, "Shut up already" like it's kind of annoying. (Chris)*

> *It gets annoying. I know it's kinda helpful, but it's mostly annoying; it's like a parent yelling from the sidelines. (Bob)*

> *I think that would just get in the way after a while.* [My coach told] *us what to do in the beginning, like if I constantly throw the ball in. After each period, he told us what to do. Most coaches just tell their kids what to do when they're on. I don't really know but I don't think it would be best to be telling them. Why couldn't you tell us in the beginning? (Lisa)*

The problem with the constant guidance from the sidelines is that it assumes their docility and can intrude on the children's own creativity. It interferes with their desire to play the game their own way, right or wrong.

> *Well, sometimes it's helpful, but not really. Cuz sometimes I'll be trying to do something and then he'll tell me to do something else and I'll have this little thing mapped out in my mind, "If he goes here then I can go here and I can get a basket" and he tells me to go stand somewhere else and then that goes all kaplooey. (Teresa)*

The children liked their opportunities to learn, though a couple suggested that what they learned was inadequate because the were not getting the skills and understanding they wanted—they wanted more of the correct training.

> *I think the coaches should, I dunno if all coaches do this but every coach I've had there just like, "Okay it doesn't matter, just have fun when you're playing the game". And I think they should teach you more, like plays and when you're on the side, not just do who's in and who's out, actually tell you what to do when you're playing and not just expect you to know. Cuz there are people that know what to do in that situation, but some other people don't know what to do. Like I didn't know what to do a lot of the time when I was being guarded by a whole bunch of people and I didn't know how to get the ball somewhere. And the coach could tell you how to do that. (Reba)*

> *He'd put us in one spot we'd have the box that I only knew what to do in one spot. I didn't know what to do in other spots. "Do this, do this, you should do this". He had to tell him something during the lesson part of the* [practice] *and then during the scrimmage he'd do something wrong and the coach wouldn't even correct him on it. He wouldn't give us any pointers or anything and he'd just play along like he was some kid again. That really bugged me, cuz he wouldn't teach us anything. Like he'd teach us a little bit, but he wouldn't really explain anything, because I only knew what to do in one spot. (Teresa)*

> *Bonita: What's good about practices?*
> *Cheryl: Learning things and practicing*

> *Bonita: What did you like best about your coach?*
> *MJ: He was a good coach, he explained stuff well, we had fun when we did practices cuz it wasn't just, "Take the ball, shoot it a hundred times, do 20 suicides..."*

> *Bonita: So what makes a good coach?*
> *Bob: I think it's a coach who's fair, that treats everyone with respect, finds their strength and weaknesses—telling them what they can improve on and what they're really good at.*

Sometimes the children docilely reflected the rationalizations coaches offered to explain their limited participation. I asked Bob if he compared his abilities with his teammates and did he worry about being good enough. It was his first year and he often struggled to stay involved in the play.

> *At first I thought that but then I realized the coach said that "you shouldn't pass to Bob too much cuz he's the underdog". Or something like that, I don't know, I forget. "Only pass to him if you need to". Yeah, you know that sorta thing. Cuz he needs me defending. Since I'm like one of the best defenseman. You know, he needs to keep me defending.*

It should be emphasized that all players in basketball play both offence and defence, though certainly some have greater skills in one aspect and some players focus more on one, but having a defensive focus does not preclude a player from taking a pass while the team is on offence. Unless perhaps the coach or the teammates see such passes as potentially hurting their offensive opportunities. Earlier, Bob had complained about not handling the ball much, but he managed to reframe it as something positive. This way he has no reason to resist his coach's choices and emphases.

5.9 Resistance and creativity

There were moments where the children seemed to reassert their own desires on the basketball court. They refused the correct training and control, and the discourses that told them to be seen and not heard or to respect their elders. Though more often they accepted the adult control and discipline as docile bodies do, occasionally they simply, denying the dominant discourse often with just small moves that did not draw too much disapproval. It allowed them to conform to adult expectations in the most obvious ways and yet they simultaneously pursued their own interest and desires—in small ways making their sport experience their own. The following provides a few examples of their creativity and resistance.

Listening to his coach, Allen generally played "good defence". He was one of the more skilled players on his team; however, the coach's son was the offensive star of the team. In his final playoff game Allen played spectacularly, he was easily the best player

on the court. With a couple periods remaining, his team was down by 14 points and their top scorer had given up; Allen basically took over. He stole the ball numerous times, made athletic jumps and dives so his team could maintain possession of the ball, and scored some beautiful baskets to pull his team closer; though it was not quite enough. When I asked him about his performance, he downplayed it.

> *Allen: Well, we we're down and we needed to score so...*
> *Bonita: You gotta steal?*
> *Allen: And their best player wasn't on the floor, so I knew that I could get back on defence cuz he's not on the floor. So I just tried.*

In performing the way did, he broke his coach's rules. He did not play "good defence"; instead he took chances and was successful in a way that his coach had discouraged in previous games. When he threw himself into the game on his terms and used the skills that he had developed through many hours of practicing with friends, away from the adult coaching and control, he became the star of the floor, doing things he had never done during this season.

Chris and Teresa started their final interview by saying they were happy with their season; eventually they told me they were largely unhappy with their basketball season. They did not want to tell me bad things about their coach, especially Chris, and they frequently couched their complaints in compliments such as, "He's a nice guy" or "He was very enthusiastic". In as sense, they had to put aside their need to respect him as an adult in order to tell me their truth.

Other times it was a matter of standing up to teammates.

> *Last year I was the only girl on the team. And there was one guy who passed it to someone who was completely covered while I'm standing just to the right of him and he passes to somebody and the person in front of him grabs it. I started to yell at him. "Why didn't you pass me the ball, I was right there?" And he's like,*

> *"Well, okay, I didn't see you" and I'm like "I was right there! How could you not seem me, I'm the only girl!" I was just screaming at him. (Teresa)*

Both Teresa and Reba refused the expectations for girls in sport. They kept doing as they wished, in spite of the labels. Reba explained the joy she took in challenging people's assumptions about what she, as a girl, can and will do on the basketball court.

> *That's why I like knocking people down, cuz people go* (she gasps and covers her mouth). *It's cool! I like doing things that they don't expect, cuz boys usually do it, cuz boys are better than girls in basketball usually. But if they expect low things of girls. I guess their expectations are motivating, because you want to do things so you look like you can play as well as any boy. Or that you're not just one of the girls that can't play and just passes and does their hair when they're playing.*

A couple of the girls also refused to worry about how they compared with others players in the league in terms of their abilities and skills. They were comfortable with not being the best players.

> *I don't compare myself cuz there's different skills and stuff. (Betty)*

> *I really couldn't care less. If they got a basket and they're really fast I'd say, "Oh, look he can get baskets, oh look, he's really fast". Okay, so? Good for him. I'm sorta fast I can get some baskets... I'm pretty good at science and I hope to get something there. And I'm pretty good at photography, so I hope to get something there. (Teresa)*

Little Shaq in particular resisted my assumptions, correcting me when I misunderstood his points or when I was thinking too narrowly.

> *Bonita: Why did you decide to participate in my research?*
> *Little Shaq: Something to do. Why not?*
> *Bonita: Did the pizza and gift certificates make a difference?*
> *Little Shaq: Why not do it?*

As well, Little Shaq, in his first year of basketball, had only played in the schoolyard before this, and he struggled to make his shots and defend against his opponents, but every week he showed up at practices with new tricks to show his teammates. His mother explained to me that he had been learning from his friend at school. In this way, he was

able to stay involved in his own way and become more skilled, even if these skills were not appreciated on the court.

Even Bob, who was playing in this league mostly because his parents wanted him to play, managed to keep his experience of basketball fairly personal and did not seem to care that he was not like many of the other boys. He knew little about the game and was not entranced with professional basketball in the way that some of his fellow-participants were. Several of the boys, particularly the most skilled, donned jerseys or wore the accessories of their favourite players in the National Basketball Association (NBA). They seemed to be trying to look like *real* basketball players. During the boys' focus group, Allen related a story about former NBA basketball player Wilt Chamberlain. None of the boys knew who that was so Allen explained. Then someone mentioned a current NBA player, and only Bob indicated he did not know who he was.

Shaq? He's a basketball player too?

The others were incredulous that he did not know who Shaquille O'Neal was—one of the most famous NBA players of the past couple decades. Bob shrugged his shoulders and said simply,

I don't watch basketball. I have more fun playing it.

All the players found ways to block out the adult intrusion on their playing time. MJ went one step further when he explained how his uncle could be particularly obnoxious and interfering in the things he said. MJ stated that he was not afraid of his uncle and his way of dealing with him when he said too much during games, was to simply turn around and tell him to shut up. As mentioned previously, Teresa tried to find her own way around the court, in spite of her coach's guidance or her teammates' wishes.

On one occasion, when she finally got hold of the ball, by way of a rebound and she was determined to have her shot, but she was surrounded by opposing players. She pushed up while her opponents pushed down. The better choice would be to try and pass—get it to someone else who had a better shot. That would have been good offence. She refused. It was a missed basket, but it was *her* missed basket. When I related this observation to her, Teresa's face lit up, she smiled and pointed at me.

Yes, that's it!

She was thrilled that I understood what she was trying to do on the court.

Some of the above examples of resistance and creativity along with data from other sections also offer evidence of counter-discourse. For example, the girls and boys who did not submit completely to their gender-appropriate behaviour; Teresa laughing at the tomboy label, refusing to see it as the insult it often is; Reba gleefully knocking people down; Bob not knowing what he is *supposed* to know about sport and not caring. Little Shaq and Betty questioning the apparent importance of fouls once the playoffs began. Teresa and Chris voicing their disapproval of their team's overemphasis on winning. At the discursive fault lines, these children questioned the dominant discourse and offered their own interpretation of how sport or gender or children might be.

"The dominant discourse of adults may define a prescribed behavior pattern associated with a set of material objects, but children may or may not use them in the manner envisioned by adults" (Kamp, 2006, p. 119). As much as the coaches, referees, and parents might wish to control the behaviour of the players, certainly they do not always succeed. Susan Bordo (1993) critiques those that would overvalue resistance and its creative possibilities saying that, "they neglect to ask themselves what is actually

going on in the culture around them" (p. 295). She agrees that where there is power there is also resistance, but points out that, "for Foucault this was a statement of social dynamics, not a formula for reading texts" (p. 295). Thus, it is appropriate to appreciate resistive actions, but also to be wary of romanticizing or overemphasizing them. Rather she suggests we need to determine what impact they have, and this we can only know by examining the situations. The idea is to "focus on changes in power relations and the discursive formation of sport rather than resistance to or transformation of power" (Markula & Pringle, 2006, p. 148). For this the value in examining the acts of resistance was not so much their impact but rather, the information they yielded. The children offered clear indications of what they liked and did not like via their acts of resistance and creativity. These moments provided those paying attention a sense of what the children valued in their sport experience. They also offered the opportunity to see their attempts to alter the power relations. When Teresa finally grabbed the ball and refused to pass it away, no matter how slight her chances of scoring a basket, and then proceeded to make her unsuccessful shot, her frustration became abundantly clear. Her coach and her more-skilled teammates were not concerned that half the team was not really playing basketball during the games. The acts of resistance were sometimes indicative of discursive clashes. For example, Reba explaining how on the court she liked to do what is not expected of her as a girl, or Allen playing wonderfully after dropping the constraining need for good defence. Perhaps most importantly, some of the acts of resistance pointed directly at what might be the best suggestions the children had to offer for improving the league. Chris suggested he might not play in this league next year, he likes soccer better and he's considering going to an indoor soccer league instead. There he will be able to

fully participate. Little Shaq worked hard at learning new skills and tricks he could bring to practices. He was not able to shoot much or score baskets during games, so he brought creativity to the court in his own way.

5.10 Improving the league

One of the main items I wanted to be able to draw from this research was suggestions that I could offer to this league specifically, but also more generally ideas that others involved in children's sport might consider when they organize, coach, or research in this area. I asked each participant for suggestions in the individual interviews and again collectively in the focus groups. I prefaced my research by saying that this was one of my goals. I told them it was their opportunity to say directly what they wanted done differently.

MJ, Cheryl, Chris, and Teresa had no explicit suggestions to offer, though the rest of the participants had a few. Reba requested that the officials be more balanced in assessing fouls, suggesting that smaller players were getting away with committing fouls. She also wanted coaches and players to be more serious about practices in particular. She even suggested that players should sign an agreement to be respectful and serious at practice and if they did not, perhaps they should not be able to play in the next game.

Allen explained that,

> *A couple years ago we had a raffle, everybody's name got put in and you could win basketball tickets to the Raptors, signed Chris Bosch jersey, cool stuff like that.*

He suggested that perhaps the league could do something similar. He also said that the league organizer was considering having an "all-star weekend" (skills contest). Another interesting suggestion was that there should be a three-point line. Because the court is

smaller than regulation, adjustments have been made to some of the basics, including the three-point line being eliminated.

In my conversation with Lisa, she complained about the parents watching games and not understanding what the children go through. From there we came up with the idea of some of the parents participating in their own game or several games. She agreed that it might give them a better sense of what is required to play basketball. It would also give the children a chance to make comments to the parents while they're playing. She also suggested that all the referees should smile more.

Bob wanted a small rule change and suggested that they should be allowed five seconds in the key rather than just three. Though he was laughing when he made the suggestion he was expressing how complicated and challenging basketball can be for a beginner. Little Shaq wanted longer shifts and perhaps even longer games and ask for tougher penalties for fouls—perhaps to increase his opportunity to be involved in the action. Betty did not like the fact the boys significantly outnumbered the girls. I suggested to her that could be tough to address, unless the league simply put a limit on the number of boys signing up. She agreed that might not be fair. She then agreed that a possible solution might be for the league organizers to work harder to get more girls to play.

5.8 Conclusion

The main themes located within the larger discourses weave an interesting picture of these children's experience of adult-organized basketball. The *triad,* sportspersonship, gender expectations, the gaze, the correct training; all these themes lead back to a common source and what seems to be the most dominant theme of all—winning. Despite

the discursive de-emphasis on winning and the fact that most of the children do not put all that much emphasis on winning, it is still there like a beacon, drawing so many aspects of the children's sport experience toward it. Winning still seems to be the priority that dominates children's sport and the power relations among the children and everyone they encounter in their sport experience. It even inspires much of the resistive behaviour, both positively and negatively. That is, Teresa quit because of her team's over-emphasis on winning. Whereas Allen allowed himself to play magnificently because of his desire to win his last playoff game.

Chapter 6—Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

This particular league appeared to be fairly progressive compared to some leagues. For example, the referees took time to explain rules to the children and were often flexible about calling fouls. The general tone of the spectators was more relaxed and less abusive than in many leagues I have observed. The people involved in the league were friendly and the league organizer welcomed my presence and project for the potential feedback I could provide. As well, the coaches did not often become visibly upset with the referees. There were rules that assured all the participants the chance to play in every game. Finally, there was a significant emphasis on respect and fun. However, in some ways this research documents the failure of an adult-organized recreational league sport to fulfill the interests and desires of some of its participants in very important ways. In this league the various discourses of sport, gender, and childhood were used to consolidate the pre-eminence of the power and performance model of sport. These discourses, working through disciplinary technologies, privileged sport as a largely male endeavour that valued skilled and physically dominant players. It also validated adult control over children's experiences in sport, sometimes at the expense of children's creativity and genuine opportunities to participate in the game of basketball. Ultimately, it placed winning ahead of full participation for all players that reflected their interests.

The reason for examining power relations in children's sport was not to be able to identify the dominating groups but rather to consider the effects of discourse and how they are used in this context (Pringle, 2005). The objective was not to label one group bad

and another good, but rather to see how discourse works, particularly on the children and how it can affect their experiences in sport.

6.2 Winning—power and performance

A key component of the power and performance version of sport is the focus on competition and winning. Most of the participants enjoyed winning, though they were not particularly disappointed when they did not win; however, its importance became discursively evident. The desire to win limited the possibilities of several of the children from being full participants in the league. Most of the participants went along with the emphasis on winning, even to the point of accepting their own exclusion from the action, clearly reflecting the impact of discourse, correct training, and the panoptic gaze. They were differentiated, hierarchized, and homogenized; in short, they were normalized (Foucault, 1995). They had become docile bodies, forgoing their own interests and desires in order to follow the wishes of the coach, parents or teammates, playing the game as it was supposed to be played. This was hardly surprising because team sport in the power and performance framework requires these occurrences. Normalization creates players that put the team first, who put aside their own interests and work for the team. It created gaps and distinctions between those who had more playing time and the more important roles on the team and those who did not. All of it was justified through the hierarchy of skill and size. Some of the children actually explained how it was important that they could not be more involved in the action and in the way they wanted—aping the words of their coaches or reiterating the sport discourse.

6.3 The size, skill, and action triad

Size and skill were inextricably linked with the participants' involvement in action. Taller, more skilled players were able to dominate, and children who lacked size and skill could be "justifiably" overlooked and denied full participation because they hindered winning. The YMCA literature reflected the participation discourse, promising skill learning, fun, values, and the opportunity to play, "There are no benchwarmers in our league." Involvement in the action was something all the participants craved but only some were rewarded. In spite of this, all but one kept trying, refusing to quit. This willingness to keep going was discursively urged; it did not seem to matter to the children that they were not full participants in this league. At least they did not seem to believe it could be otherwise.

6.4 What is fairness?

The discursive emphasis on sportspersonship and fair play rang somewhat hollow in this league. If the league was genuinely concerned with fairness and respect, why were these attitudes not fully extended to the children in all aspects of their participation? Why were the coaches penalized for yelling at or complaining about a referee during a game, but there was no penalty for yelling at or complaining about children? Why was it acceptable for coaches to consistently dole out unequal playing time and allow the more skilled and bigger players more opportunity for action? These examples of unfairness existed and the participants unequivocally recognized them. I am arguing that the power and performance model of sport subsumes the part of discourse that calls for fairness and respect.

6.5 Gender expectations and limitations

Girls and boys both "can experience the constraining and enabling features of the sport experience" (Maguire et al., 2002, p. 204). A gender-mixed league does not necessarily disrupt the dominant gender discourse of sport in terms of masculine superiority. Boys are still the normal in sport. The more palatable aspects of equality in sport have been accepted but the patriarchal standards remain (Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). It is fine for girls to play sport as long as boys are better. As Chris indicated, parents would never say out loud that girls should not be playing basketball; however, the message that boys are, or should be, better at basketball than girls still comes through.

The power/performance model insists that a particular skill set be considered important, specifically those more frequently more fully developed by boys. In this basketball league dribbling and shooting were the most valued skills. For many of the more talented girls in the league their skills seemed to be less developed. That is, while they were as athletic (running, diving for balls, and jumping) and talented as the boys, most did not have the same level of honing that comes from many more hours of practice. Sport is still more optional for girls. Parents have traditionally placed greater value on boys' physical ability, which results in greater encouragement in this direction for boys than girls (Brustad, 1997). Imagine parents worrying about their daughters not growing up to be womanly or feminine because they did not practice or play basketball enough. Generally, still less is expected of them as several participants readily pointed out.

To a significant extent, the gender discourse and sport discourse still created conflict for girls. When they were strong, talented, and skilled girls still seem to be positioned as being insufficiently normalized, at least in terms of gender discourse. Girls

who embrace their physicality, who are willing to use their bodies, in ways similar to how boys are encouraged to use theirs, are still positioned as different, somehow abnormal (Thorne, 1994).

Sport is well suited to both the production and reinforcement of the ideals of masculinity, with its emphasis on skill and force. However, it is not automatically conferred through participation rather it is something that must earned through physical and emotional struggle (Connell, 1987). Bob was certainly an example of this struggle. He tried to make the best of the situation, but he expressed very clearly that he did not really want to be there and implied that he was there in part due to his parents' desire to help him on the road to manhood. Masculinity is not a simple concept, nor a singular experience (Pringle, 2005). The boys had discursive conflicts to deal with, in particular there was the battle between old and new gender discourses regarding girls' place on the playing field. This relatively new gender discourse insists that girls and boys are equal and therefore both should be allowed to play sport. The other, much older, discourse constantly reminds boys that sport has traditionally been a male preserve and that girls are not their equals, therefore, they need to be better than the girls. Clearly the boys were aware of this conflict, though there seemed to be an unwillingness to discuss it, perhaps reflecting their difficulty with the overlapping old and new discourses.

6.6 *Discipline and discourse*

The coaches and parents were attempting to guide the behaviour of the children (Markula & Pringle, 2006) based on the knowledge provided by the discourses of sport, gender, and childhood. Correct training implies a particular way of doing something, that is, there is a specific way to play basketball. Facilitating this were the various discourses

that provided a rough picture of what the children should be like on the basketball court. The children then had to sort through the contradictions and gaps in the various discourses to make sense of them all with help from continuous corrective instructions from coaches, parents, referees, and even complete strangers.

The children explicitly expressed their internalization of the panoptic gaze and the supporting discourse. It was evident in different ways, from their nervousness at the free-throw line to explaining how they might change their behaviour based on something a spectator might say to the unpleasant fear that some girls might be better than some boys at basketball. The gaze and constant commentary reinforced the correct training, produced *better* players. The discourse of sport necessitated a particular type of performance that involved working hard, competing well, being respectful, having fun, never quitting, and winning if at all possible.

A problem for the participants was that correct training meant that some coaches put limits on what the children could learn. The coaches' choices often seemed to reflect the desire to create a winning team. They tended to choose a role for each child rather than asking her or him for input. It was not enough to simply play basketball; it had to be played the correct way. In the end, the children were more disciplined, though not necessarily more satisfied.

6.7 Control

Some of the constant input from adults could be read as support, something the children were happy for. It helped them learn new skills and strategies or feel good about what they were doing. But a lot of it was just an intrusion on their participation, especially when they were actually playing basketball. The adults could have just given

children the basic information about how to play basketball, or even more radically, just given them a basketball and left them alone to try it and figure it out for themselves. The children participating in this league were never without an adult presence during practices and games. During practices and even games there was near-constant intervention from coaches or parents. The coaches were in charge of the correct training and parents assisted. The only control the children seemed to have during their participation in this league rested in their willingness to resist the homogenization and normalization.

Children are quite capable or organizing their own sport and in ways that satisfy their interests and desires (Coakley, 1983). It maximizes action and involvement, and friendship takes priority over competition. Without the assistance of adults children are fully capable of making organizational and strategic decisions; therefore why must adults do all, or any, of the organizing while children are limited to simply playing? Why are children not perceived as capable of deciding and organizing their own sport experiences? I am suggesting that an integral part of this is the view of children as incomplete adults, which means that they are perceived as incompetent and in need adult guidance (Kurth-Schai, 1988). Because of this incompetence, theirs was a subjugated knowledge. "A whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault, 1980d, p. 82). It should be clarified that it was not just adult knowledge that was more valued, but also that of sport science. As Tinning (1997) points out, the knowledges of sport sciences are key components of the discourse of power and performance sport. *This league reflected basketball that was valued by adults.*

6.8 Alienation

"[Sport] can liberate and oppress, inspire and disillusion, encourage and alienate, and be a source of satisfaction and achievement as well as of disappointment and failure" (Tinning, 1997, p. 105). By taking away children's creativity and control, many children may become alienated from their own participation in sport suggesting it was no longer play for them. Drawing from Marx, Henricks (2006) argued that remaining actively creative and engaged is crucial in work and play; alienation occurs when people's creativity is hampered and they lose control of their product. For the children, this was their participation, their passing, dribbling, shooting, jumping, running, socializing, and more. Virtually all of this was guided and judged by the coaches, referees, and spectators. Teresa's decision to quit playing basketball seemed emblematic of alienation from her participation. It was the ultimate resistance to the domination of her coach and teammates. Several other participants also expressed at least some degree of alienation connected to their involvement in this league. No sport league can satisfy everyone's desires and interests; however, I am suggesting that this league, like many others, has failed these children on a very basic level. *They signed up to play basketball and many of them simply were not able to do that!*

6.9 Play and participation

The participants' disappointment inspires questions for all those involved in children's sport. The first question this league's organizers might ask is just what sport model is the basis for this league? In spite of its own discourse, it seems to lean more to the power and performance version of sport which clearly moves it further from children's interests. This league is presented as fair and inclusive—everyone will play,

but the spirit of such discourse was lost. In so many games I watched players, not just the participants in this study, who never actually touched the ball. They simply ran up and down the court, looking for their *man*, working hard to get into position, arms up waiting for a pass. But so often it never came. It was not just that the less skilled players did not get passes; they also tended to cover similar size and/or skilled opponents, who were also less likely to get passes, thus diminishing the likelihood even more that they would touch the ball.

Sport is inherently a form of play (Feezell, 2004); something spontaneous that is done for pleasure whether by children or adults. In play participants experience joy and fun. Huizinga (1950) described play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (p. 13). As well,

> Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary' life. (Huizinga, 1950, p. 28)

Considering the role of adult control, the panoptic gaze, and correct training in this league, words like free, voluntary, and fun seem somewhat misplaced when used to describe this example of children's sport. Do control and discipline, when imposed by those not actually playing, leave adequate room for fun and pleasure? With the insertion of such a comprehensive external discipline and control, the problem is that children's sport often looks very much like *ordinary life*.

6.10 Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to better understand children's experience of recreational adult-organized children's basketball. I wanted to know how children's sport

operated—what was expected of them and how they dealt with these expectations. I wanted to know how adults treated the players and how the children responded to it. I wanted to know what worked for them and what did not. I wanted to examine the various discourses that the children used to describe and explain their experiences, particularly in terms of competition/winning and expectations or limitations based on their gender as they play alongside each other. I also sought ways in which the children resisted discursive domination in an effort to make their participation more reflective of their own desires and interests. Finally, I looked to the participants for suggestions about how their league could be improved.

During the past several decades there has been much research into children's sport based on the concerns initially raised in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The resulting research led to a variety of changes in children's sport. This research project extends the previous research significantly because it examined the impact some of those changes with much needed depth. This research provided answers I sought regarding children's participation in adult-organized recreational sport.

Gender does matter when girls and boys are playing alongside each other. It was clearly a significant issue for girls and boys, sometimes creating defensiveness for both. Outwardly the girls were not treated significantly differently than boys, but larger discursive realities created insecurities among most of the girls. For the boys, the masculine priority demanded specific abilities from them, something several could live up to—not now and perhaps never. But, the children frequently challenged the prevalent discourses and resisted their correct training or surveillance in many ways. Refusing to

believe all of the dominant discourse, disobeying coaches' order and playing amazing basketball, refusing to play basketball on other's term, or dropping out of basketball.

For the most part the children described their sport experience positively. They liked a lot of what happened in their season: fun, socializing, learning new skills, scoring baskets, all of which were foretold in the previous research (Seefeldt, Ewing & Walk as cited in Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). At the same time, most expressed a degree of dissatisfaction in terms of actually playing basketball which ranged from modest disappointment to complete frustration and alienation. This is too important to overlook because they signed up to *play* basketball; therefore, that would seem to be the most crucial component of their participation. The same old problem still exists. There is still a lack of actual *playing time* for many of the children. It just looked different because the children were on the court and going through the motions.

What was truly most important about the children's experiences was not what they most quickly and directly identified, rather it was often what they tried to avoid or seemed reluctant to discuss. This may be a function of discourse, that is, if it is the patina that holds together our reality, it can be uncomfortable to disrupt it.

Ultimately, the children's descriptions coincided with what I observed on the basketball court. Eventually they acknowledged when they were disappointed or bothered, though in a few cases, their acknowledgement of their disappointments was reluctant. However, I did not have to dig deep or push for these answers; I simply remained patient and asked more questions. This is methodologically reassuring as it emphasizes the value of using multiple data collection techniques.

Discourse was reflected in innumerable choices, actions, and explanations of the participants: MJ focusing on defence for the team's sake; Bob happily quoting his coach, explaining that he was an underdog and therefore the team should limit passes to him; Danny playing good defence instead of stealing the all; Lisa doing what someone else's father said to do, because he was an adult; Reba working hard to prove she was a good player, for a girl. So often the explanations insulted them, went against there own best interest, or created uncomfortable contradictions for them to live with.

6.11 More suggestions

When asked directly for suggestions to improve the league, the children offered minor changes. However, looking closely other suggestions became evident. These suggestions come from two main sources. First, the children's own expression of what they clearly did not find satisfying about their participation and the solutions to which they hinted. Though the children did not necessarily make explicit these suggestions for ways to improve the league, such possibilities were gleaned from their expressed frustrations and disappointments. As well, I have taken what they have said and what I observed and put it through the Foucauldian filter to elaborate several more suggestions.

- Create a genuine opportunity for players to express what they want from their participation in sport, both at the beginning of the season and throughout their participation.
- Create a climate where all skills and sizes are genuinely welcome and valued in the league and differences in abilities and interests are respected.
- Insist that coaches find ways to create opportunities for all children to be involved in the action as equitably as possible. The objective need not be to

turn every player into a great basketball player—quite the contrary. The idea is to give more people what they want from their experience, not just a select few.

- Hold a discussion session with the coaches and go over the significant points in the *Coaches Manual* regarding such elements as having a "child first" approach and fair play.
- Allow for flexibility on the court. Do not put limits on what positions the children can play. Childhood sport should offer the opportunity for children to experiment, try new things, and see what they are capable of and what their bodies can do.
- Cultivate the attitude that sees competition as striving with other participants rather than a fighting against them.
- The organizers of this league are considering splitting this league based on gender. What they might consider instead is splitting it based on interest, for example, competitive and recreational divisions. That is, the children that want to play on a team that is more interested in winning than fair participation can have what they want. Other children that are beginners or those that simply want the opportunity to play basketball on their terms can avoid the win-oriented competitive league.[41]

6.12 Enlightened sport

When I started this project I though that the basketball court as a panoptic space was the most significant disciplinary technique in children's sport. I still think it is

[41] I recognize that this creates another clear binaric division, but in a sense this division already exists and causes much disappointment. Also, a recreational division need not simply ape the competitive division but with less skill. It could be an opportunity to try a very different approach to sport.

important, but in this case, correct training seems to be of greater significance. The reason I say this is that correct training makes the foundation rigid and imposes a particularly understanding of what is important on the individuals that are they to play. Their creativity and desires immediately acquire limits as soon as they join a team.

While social relations cannot exist outside power, Foucault (1980f) emphasizes that this does not mean that we are helpless to address domination in our social relations. Foucault's critical attitude and ethos of self-care could be useful in creating opportunities in children's sport and could be expressed in a variety ways. Child-athletes, with the encouragement of adults, could experiment and push themselves to find out what they are capable of and what body can do, rather than simply submitting to the discipline and needs of a team. Coaches might structure the team in a way that minimizes divisions between players, making them feel equally valued. They might also help the children reframe their difficult or conflicting experiences rather than simply overlooking them (Hanold, 2007), (e.g. girls and boys that struggle with the intersection of the sport and gender discourses). The league organizers might eliminate the hierarchization of the teams and aid coaches in creating ways to eliminate it within the teams. They might also invite the children to be part of the decision-making processes. Finally, parents might leave the children alone during their participation, simply letting them play without comments or criticism or as Chris hinted, simply stay away—thereby eliminating or greatly diminishing the power of the panoptic space.

The difficulty with such attempts at improvement in this or any other league is that it can be so hard to implement. Alternatives to traditional sport tend to inspire much resistance (Green, 2001), but they do exist. An outdoor soccer league in Scarborough

organizers keeps no score or standings. They play games rather than using repetitive drills (Gordon, 2008, ¶ 6). The organizer described it as a development league that is about playing and not winning. *On the Move* (Fenton et al., 2000) invites girls to choose what they want to do in terms of physical activity, allowing for the possibility of traditional sports or something completely different. What these programs point to is that there are alternatives that work. Sport does not have to *simply* be a place of discipline and control for children.

6.13 Limitations

There is some imbalance in the voices of the participants; clearly some children are heard from more frequently than others. Initially I attributed this to the fact that some children were more verbose than others. Where some children offered answers that were several sentences or even paragraphs long, other children simply replied in a few words. As well, some children were thoughtful and interested in discussing this topic, while others were not. I tried to make the interviews more like a conversation with all of the children; it worked better with some than others. Trying to coax the children into longer answers might simply have been insensitive or even coercive. It is possible they gave exactly the answers they wanted to give; they participated in the interviews as much as they wanted to, so I must simply take the data as it is. I did not use less of a particular participant's data for any reason other than because the quantity or insight was not there. A paragraph-long answer provides more data and useful quotes than "not really" or "I don't think so". Though terseness and brevity also provided insight at times and I tried to include that where possible.

I am acutely aware of the real and symbolic impact on my findings. I have done essentially what I am critiquing some of the coaches for doing. Some of the participants were able to participate more than others in the research, because they were more skilled or willing to work at the discussion, they were more involved in the project. To address this weakness I would simply make a few points. I do not think this diminishes the value of my findings, though certainly fuller participation from all the participants would have enhanced the data. As a beginning researcher I see this is a very useful opportunity for learning. In future I can certainly keep this in mind and potentially look for new ways for people to participate in my research in ways that more fully match their abilities or interests. Finally, some people just have more to say than others, particularly in some contexts and on some topics.

Another methodological limitation was that none of the most highly skilled players in the league offered to participate in this research project. It would have useful and interesting to gain their perspective, particularly on the matters of fairness and involvement in the action. It would have been very helpful and interesting to garner their understanding of the size, skill, action triad. I tried to gain their interest, but none came forward.

As well, I was unaware that the league was part of the SNYB pilot project until well into the season; therefore, I had not prepared to investigate that component of the league more fully. For example, I might have interviewed coaches to find out how it affected or did not affect their coaching. However, there was nothing in the *Coaches Manual* that differed significantly from the prevalent discourse surrounding children's sport, particularly in terms of fair play and sportspersonship. However, the league

organizer seemed to take much of that aspect quite seriously as it showed in the way he operated both as a referee and what he emphasized as an organizer.

In terms of my suggestions for the league, one significant limitation is my obligation to those who have allowed me to do this research project, most particularly the participants. I told the children I would listen to them and pass on their suggestions. I did not say that I would encourage the dismantling of the league to make it something completely different. I told them that together we would come up with ways to improve the league. Therefore, to a great extent my suggestions must be contained within the parameters of maintaining the league largely as it is. The problem with that is that, as Foucault (1980e) has suggested, dominative power has a tendency to constantly reconstitute itself. As we alter the power relations, prevalent discourses and technologies are adapted to reassert the domination. To that end, while the suggestions I offered might create more opportunity for some of the children much in need of it, ultimately they reinforce the status quo of children's sport. That is, its disciplinary nature remains and the panoptic site of confinement remains intact. In a sense, both become even more legitimized because now the organizers, coaches, and parents are more "enlightened" in that they are paying closer attention to what the children want from their sport experience

A second major limitation in terms of my suggestions, and certainly my ethnographic efforts, is the narrowness of my understanding and experience of sport and physical activity. That is, my imagination, till now, was limited to what sport actually is rather than what it can be. I was raised in the child sport model as it basically exists today. The same model dictated the way I was trained as a coach and most certainly it was reinforced in my most recent undergraduate education. Until this project I had not

been able to think outside the parameters of what is classified as sport (at least the organized variety), this in spite of the fact that it has always been an uncomfortable and conflicted place for me to be—both as a coach and a participant.

6.14 Future research

I cannot generalize my findings to all children's experience of adult-organized sport or even to all such leagues, though I would be surprised to find dramatically different results in similarly organized leagues. Similar research in other recreational team sport settings might provide useful insight. It would also be interesting to see if any of these findings would apply to individual recreational sports.

Future research might also include seeking out other alternatives that exist and examining children's experience of them; what role would disciplinary power play in those sport models. Another possibility would be to experiment with creating new sport alternatives with children, re-imagining sport by working with children and creating space for their control and input into the organization of new possibilities.

Coakley (2006) points to a significant way many children have resisted adult domination of their sport experience. They have created and participate in alternative sports such as rollerblading, skateboarding, and extreme Frisbee. He points out that many of these newer activities are not rule-bound and are frequently non-competitive. Instead, they allow children to express creativity and spontaneity through their bodies. "To the surprise of many adults, young people in these action sports have developed skills without coaches, physical educators, and parents telling them how to do things correctly" (p. 9). As Coakley (2001) has suggested, we can look to hybrid versions of sport, that incorporates the best qualities of child-organized sport and adult-organized children's

sport. In such sports, children could have control and would be able to explore there own interests and capabilities, while adults could provide space, opportunity, and solicited advice.

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Appendix I

Ethics approval

Date: Wed, 18 Apr 2007 15:46:09 -0400 [18/04/07 03:46:09 PM EDT]
From: Research Ethics Board <reb@brocku.ca>
To: bonita.gracey@brocku.ca, phil.sullivan@brocku.ca
Cc: mowen@brocku.ca, linda rose-krasnor <rebchair@brocku.ca>
Subject: REB 06-267 GRACEY – Approved

DATE: April 18, 2007

FROM: Julie Stevens, Vice Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Philip Sullivan, PEKN
Bonita Gracey

FILE: 06-267 GRACEY

TITLE: Children's experience of adult-organized recreational youth basketball

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified; however, please ensure participant materials reflect the changes you have made. The League executive letter and the letter to the coaches still mention a $50.00 gift certificate.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of April 18, 2007 to September 15, 2007 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.**

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form ***Continuing Review/Final Report*** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

JS/bb

Brenda Brewster, Research Ethics Assistant
Office of Research Ethics, MC D250A
Brock University
Office of Research Services
500 Glenridge Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
phone: (905)688-5550, ext. 3035 fax: (905)688-0748
email: reb@brocku.ca

Appendix II

Letter to League

Dear YMCA,

The following letter is to inform you of a study I wish to conduct in your league and to ask your permission to allow me to seek participants for this study. The title for this study is: **Children's experience of adult-organized recreational youth basketball.**

My name is Bonita Gracey and I am a graduate student at Brock University in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan, an associate professor in the Physical Education and Kinesiology Department. My research interests pertain to children's experience of sport as participants. My focus is in this area because I feel that if we can better understand how children experience playing basketball we can maximize their enjoyment and they will more likely reap the many benefits of participating in sport.

I am looking for 10 to 16 participants aged 10 – 13 years; girls and boys registered for this season in recreational basketball and who will play on co-ed teams. The research will have four phases: beginning of season individual interviews (15- 20 minutes), during season observations, end of season individual interviews (30 – 45 minutes), and post-season focus groups (45 – 60 minutes). The interviews and focus group discussions will be audio-recorded. During some practices and games I will observe the participants in action on the field; I will sit on the sidelines, watch, and discretely take written notes. After the season the children will be asked to participate in one of two focus groups where they will be invited to discuss the season and come up with suggestions for the future. In all, the time required of the required of each participant should be no more than 2 - 3 hours. As a thank you for their participation, I will provide a pizza party for the participants at the end of the project. This will also be when the focus group will take place. As well, each participant will receive a $10 gift card or certificate for a local business of their choice.

The questions in the interviews will deal with what the children are expecting and hoping from their basketball season, then they will inquire about how much they enjoyed their participation and what might be done to improve their experience. All participants will have to complete a consent form. As well, written permission will be required from a parent or guardian of each participant. The participants' identity will be kept confidential in the data and final presentations. The identity of the league and any individuals referred to in the course of the research will also be kept also be kept confidential. However, under Canadian law if someone knows of or suspects that a child is being abused, that person has a *legal obligation* to report the known or suspected abuse. Therefore, if I should become aware of any possible abuse involving any child participant during the unfolding of my research, I would therefore be obliged to break the relevant agreement of confidentiality and report the potential abuse to the appropriate authorities.

Participation in the research project will be strictly voluntary and if any child changes her or his mind about participating at any point during the project, she or he can withdraw without penalty.

This study has been reviewed and has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (File 06-267). **If you have any questions about this request or are potentially interested in allowing this project to take place within your league, please contact me at 905-346-1793 or bonita.gracey@brocku.ca.**

If you have concerns about this research you may also contact Dr. Philip Sullivan 905-688-5550, ext. 4787 at Brock University. If you wish to talk to someone not involved in this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550, ext. 3035.

Sincerely,

Bonita Gracey
Graduate student in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University

Appendix III

Letter to the coaches

Dear Coach

The following letter is to inform you of a study I have been given permission by your league to conduct in your league. I am asking your permission to allow me to seek participants from your team. The title of this study is: **Children's experience of adult-organized recreational youth basketball.**

My name is Bonita Gracey and I am a graduate student at Brock University in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan, an associate professor in the Physical Education and Kinesiology Department. My research interests pertain to children's experience as sport participants. My focus is in this area because I feel that if we can better understand how children experience playing basketball we can maximize their enjoyment and they will more likely reap the many benefits of participating in sport.

I am looking for 2 participants from your team, a girl and a boy. The research will have four phases: beginning of season individual interviews (15- 20 minutes), during season observations, end of season individual interviews (30 – 45 minutes), and post-season focus groups (45 – 60 minutes). The interviews and focus groups will occur away from the field in a private location. During some practices and games I will observe the participants in action on the field; I will sit on the sidelines, watch, and discretely take written notes. *I will not intrude on the children's participation in any way.*

The questions in the interviews will deal with what the children are expecting and hoping from their basketball season, then they will inquire about how much they enjoyed their participation and what might be done to improve their experience. After the season the children will be asked to participate in a focus group where they will be invited to discuss the season and come up with suggestions for the future. As a thank you for their participation, I will provide a pizza party for the participants at the end of the project. As well, each participant will receive a $10 gift card or certificate for a local business of their choice.

No work would be required of you or anyone from the league. I would simply ask that I could attend an early practice or team meeting in order to present information about my research project to the players and any parents/guardians in attendance.

All participants will have to complete a consent form. As well, written permission will be required from a parent or guardian of each participant. The participants' identity will be kept confidential as will the identity of the league and any individuals referred to in the course of the research. However, under Canadian law if someone knows of or suspects that a child is being abused, that person has a *legal obligation* to report the known or suspected abuse. Therefore, if I should become aware of any possible abuse involving any child participant during the unfolding of my research, I would therefore be obliged to break the relevant agreement of confidentiality and report the potential abuse to the appropriate authorities.

This study has been reviewed and has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (File 06-267). **If you have any questions about this request or are potentially interested in allowing this project to take place within your league, please contact me at 905-346-1793 or bonita.gracey@brocku.ca.**

If you have concerns about this research you may also contact Dr. Philip Sullivan 905-688-5550, ext. 4787 at Brock University. If you wish to talk to someone not involved in this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550, ext. 3035.

Sincerely,

Bonita Gracey
Graduate student in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University

Appendix IV

Letter to the parents

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

The following letter is to inform you of a study I wish to conduct in your child's league and to ask you to consider her or his participation in this project. The title of this study is: **Children's experience of adult-organized recreational youth basketball.**

My name is Bonita Gracey and I am a graduate student at Brock University in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences. I am working under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan, an associate professor in the Physical Education and Kinesiology Department. My research interests pertain to children's experience as sport participants. My focus is in this area because I feel that if we can better understand how children experience playing basketball we can maximize their enjoyment and they will more likely reap the many benefits of participating in sport.

The purpose of my research to find out what children think of their participation in a recreational basketball league, with a goal of coming up with ways to improve children's experience of organized sport. I will try to pass this information on to coaches, organizers and other researchers through sport or coaching conferences or academic journals. I am looking for 10 to 16 participants aged 10 – 13 years. The research will have four phases: beginning of season individual interview (15- 20 minutes), during season observations, end of season individual interviews (30 – 45 minutes), and post-season focus groups (45 – 60 minutes). The interviews and focus group discussions will be audio-recorded. During the season I will attend some games and practices and observe the participants in action on the field. I will sit on the sidelines, watch, and discretely take written notes. After the season the children will be asked to participate in one of two focus groups where they will be invited to discuss the season and come up with suggestions for the future. In all, the time required of the required of your child should be no more than 2 - 3 hours. As a thank you for your child's participation, I will provide a pizza party for the participants at the end of the project; this will occur immediately following the focus group. If your child withdraws from the project early she/he is still welcome to attend the pizza party. If your child participates in all three components of the research, she/he will also receive a $10 gift certificate that can be used at a local business of their choosing.

The questions in the interviews will deal with what the children are expecting and hoping from their basketball season, then they will inquire about how much they enjoyed their participation and what might be done to improve their experience. Your child's identity will be kept confidential in the data and final presentations. Your child will have to complete a consent form and written permission will be required from you as well. Please be advised that under Canadian law if someone knows of or suspects that a child is being abused, that person has a *legal obligation* to report the known or suspected abuse. Therefore, if I should become aware of any possible abuse involving your child during the unfolding of my research, I would therefore be obliged to break her/his agreement of confidentiality and report the potential abuse to the appropriate authorities.

Participation in the research project will be strictly voluntary and if your child changes her or his mind about participating at any point during the project, she or he can withdraw without penalty.

This study has been reviewed and has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Board of Brock University (File 06-267). **If you have any questions about this research or your child is interested in participating please contact me at 905-346-1793 or bonita.gracey@brocku.ca.** .

If you have concerns about this research you may also contact Dr. Philip Sullivan 905-688-5550, ext. 4787 at Brock University. If you wish to talk to someone not involved in this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550, ext. 3035.

Sincerely,

Bonita Gracey
Graduate student in the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University

Appendix V

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

BROCK UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES

TITLE: Children's experience of adult-organized recreational youth basketball
Principal Investigator: ***Bonita Gracey, under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan, Brock University***

✘ The purpose of this research to examine what children think of their participation in a recreational basketball league, with a goal of coming up with ways to improve children's experience of organized sport.
✘ This information will be passed on to coaches, organizers and other researchers through sport or coaching conferences or academic journals
✘ During this study, your child will be asked to participate in 3 interviews. One will take place at the beginning of the season (20 – 30 minutes). The second will occur just after the season ends (30 – 45 minutes). The final one will be a focus group interview at the end of season (45 - 60 minutes)
✘ During the season, the researcher will also attend several games and practices in order to make observations of the participants on the playing field.
✘ During the three interviews an audio-recorder will be used to tape the conversations. Once the tapes have been transcribed they will be destroyed. During the observations written notes will be taken about what has been observed and said. Only the researcher will view the raw transcripts and field notes. For educational purposes, the researcher's faculty advisors may also view the transcripts and notes, but only after the personal details have been changed so that your child cannot be recognized.
✘ During the focus group interview, a research assistant will be there to ask questions designed by the researcher. This person is assisting the process so that the researcher can keep notes and better guide the direction of the questions. This assistant will sign an agreement of confidentiality before the start of the focus groups
✘ Under Canadian law if someone knows of or suspects that a child is being abused, that person has a *legal obligation* to report the known or suspected abuse. Therefore, if the researcher should become aware of any possible abuse involving your child during the unfolding of my research, she would be obliged to break any agreement of confidentiality and report it to the appropriate authorities.
✘ All your child's personal information will be kept strictly confidential. She/he will be given a pseudonym and details will be altered so that your child cannot be connected with her/his answers. The data will be stored in a locked in a safe and will be shredded two years after the completion of the study.
✘ Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. She/he can refuse to ask any question and may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.
✘ Each child that participates in at least one interview will be invited to a pizza party for the participants and the end of the season.
✘ Each child that participates in all three components of the research will receive a $10 gift certificate that can be used at a local business of their choosing.
✘ This study has been reviewed and received ethical clearance by the Brock Research Ethics Board (File 06-267).
✘ If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may contact Bonita Gracey at 905-346-1793 / email: bonita.gracey@brocku.ca or Dr. Philip Sullivan at 905-688-5550 ext. 4787/ email: phil.sullivan@brocku.ca OR the Research Ethics Officer, ext. 3035
✘ If requested, feedback about the use of the data collected will be sent to you during the spring of 2008.
✘ Thank you for your help! Please keep this portion of the consent form and complete the bottom portion and return to the researcher.

Child's Name: ***Phone Number:*** _____.

- ❑ I have read and understood all the relevant information pertaining to this study
- ❑ I give permission for my child to participate in the Brock University study conducted by Bonita Gracey, under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan.
- ❑ I do NOT give permission for my child to participate in the Brock University study conducted by Bonita Gracey, under the supervision of Dr. Philip Sullivan.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____ ***Date:*** _____.

Signature of Researcher: _____ ***Date:*** _____.

✖ Do you wish to receive a summary of the results from this study? ☐ ***Yes*** ☐ ***No***

Appendix VI

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Name:_____.

- ❑ I am willing to take part in this study.
- ❑ I understand that the purpose of this research is to find out what I think about my participation in recreational basketball.
- ❑ I understand the goal of this research is to find ways to improve organized sport and pass this information on to coaches and league organizers.
- ❑ I understand that my name will be kept private and some information about will be changed so that no one can recognize that it's me.
- ❑ I understand that if the researcher learns about any abuse I may be experiencing, she will have to report it to proper authorities.
- ❑ I understand this means I am being asked to take part in several things: An interview at the beginning of the season, another interview at the end of the season, and a group interview in September where a few more questions will be asked.
    - o Here's a sample of some of the questions that will be asked: Have you played organized sport before? What do you hope will happen during your season? Did you enjoy playing basketball this season? What did you not like about your basketball season? What would you change about the basketball league if you could?
- ❑ I understand that during the focus group interview, a research assistant will also be there. She or he will be there to ask questions so that the researcher she can take notes. This assistant will sign an agreement saying that she/he will keep anything I say private.
- ❑ I understand that anything I say or that others say during the focus group is to be kept private.
- ❑ I understand that all the interviews will be tape-recorded.
- ❑ I understand that I will be watched during some of my practices and games and the researcher will take notes about what is happening.
- ❑ I understand that at any point during the season, I can stop participating in this research project if it is no longer something that I want to do.
- ❑ I understand that I do not have to answer any questions I do not like.
- ❑ I understand that if I quit the project early I can still attend the pizza party at the end of the project
- ❑ I understand that if I complete the entire project I will receive a gift certificate worth $10 that I can use at a local business of my choosing.
- ❑ Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____
- ❑ Signature of Researcher: _____Date: _____.

Appendix VII

Key ethical issues in research with children and sample questions to ask oneself as provided in Hill, 2005, (p. 66), which he based on Alderson (1995).

Topic	**Sample questions**
Research purpose	Is the research in children's best interest?
Privacy/confidentiality	What are the costs/risks for children—doing or not doing the research? What are the potential benefits?
Inclusion/exclusion	Who is included/excludes? Why? What efforts are made to include disadvantaged groups?
Funding	Are funds tainted? Are resources sufficient? In what circumstances should children be recompensed?
Involvement/accountability	To what extent can children or carers contribute to the research aim or design? What safeguards and checks are in place?
Information	Are the aims and implications clearly explained? Is written documentation available in other languages?
Consent	How well are rights to refuse cooperation explained and respected? Are informal pressures used? What is the correct balance of parental and child consent?
Dissemination	Do participants know about and comment on the findings? How wide is the audience for the research—academics, public, research participants.
Impact on children	How does the research affect children through its impact on thinking, policy and practice? Are children's own perspectives accurately conveyed?

Appendix VIII

First question guide

1. How old are you?
2. Have you ever played in a basketball league before? Which one?
3. Have you ever played in other sport leagues? What kind?
4. Do you like playing in sport leagues? What makes it something you like to do?
5. Why did you sign up for basketball this year?
6. What do you hope to do during this season? What do you expect from your coach and teammates?
7. What do you think makes basketball a fun game to play?
8. How do you feel about winning? Does it matter to you if your team wins a lot? How do you feel about playing on the same team as girls/boys?

Appendix IX

Second interview: Basic question guide

1. Did you enjoy your basketball season?
2. What was good about it?
3. What did you not like about it?
4. Do you think you will play in this league next year? Other leagues?
5. How would you describe you skill/ability level?
6. How would you describe your style as a player?
7. Did you like your coach?
8. What did you like best about your coach? Least?
9. Some coaches constantly tell the players what to do during games—what do you think of that?
10. Do you think your coach played favourites? How do you feel about that?
11. How do you feel about winning? Losing?
12. Did it matter to you where your team finished in the playoffs?
13. How do you feel about the team medal/trophy you received?
14. Did you enjoy your teammates? What did you like/not like about them?
15. So how do you generally feel about girls and boys playing on the same team?
16. Do you like it and would you continue to play in mixed leagues in the future?
17. Do you think others have expectations about you because you are a girl/boy? Does this bother you?
18. Did anyone make any comments about you being a girl?
19. How did you feel about all the parents and others watching the game? Do you find it distracting or nice?
20. Do you hear things that spectators say about you or others when you play?
21. How do they feel about compliments/criticism from coaches or parents?
22. There doesn't tend to be conversation on the benches—do you and your teammates often talk to each other during games?
23. Did you attend all your practices?
24. Did you enjoy practices? Why?
25. Did you like how your coach ran the practices? Could he run them differently?
26. What do you think of parents' involvement in practices? Do you think parents are ever too involved in practices?
27. How do you feel about free throws—the pressure?
28. How do you feel about injuries? Have you been injured; do you worry about them?
29. Do you have siblings? Do they play sport? Do your parents play sport?
30. Do you play any pick up sport, just with friends? e.g. do you just shoot baskets or practice dribbling?
31. How do you feel about being watched during the game?
32. How do you feel about your participation in this research?
33. What suggestions might you give to the league organizer to improve the league?

Appendix X

Focus group question guide

Participation

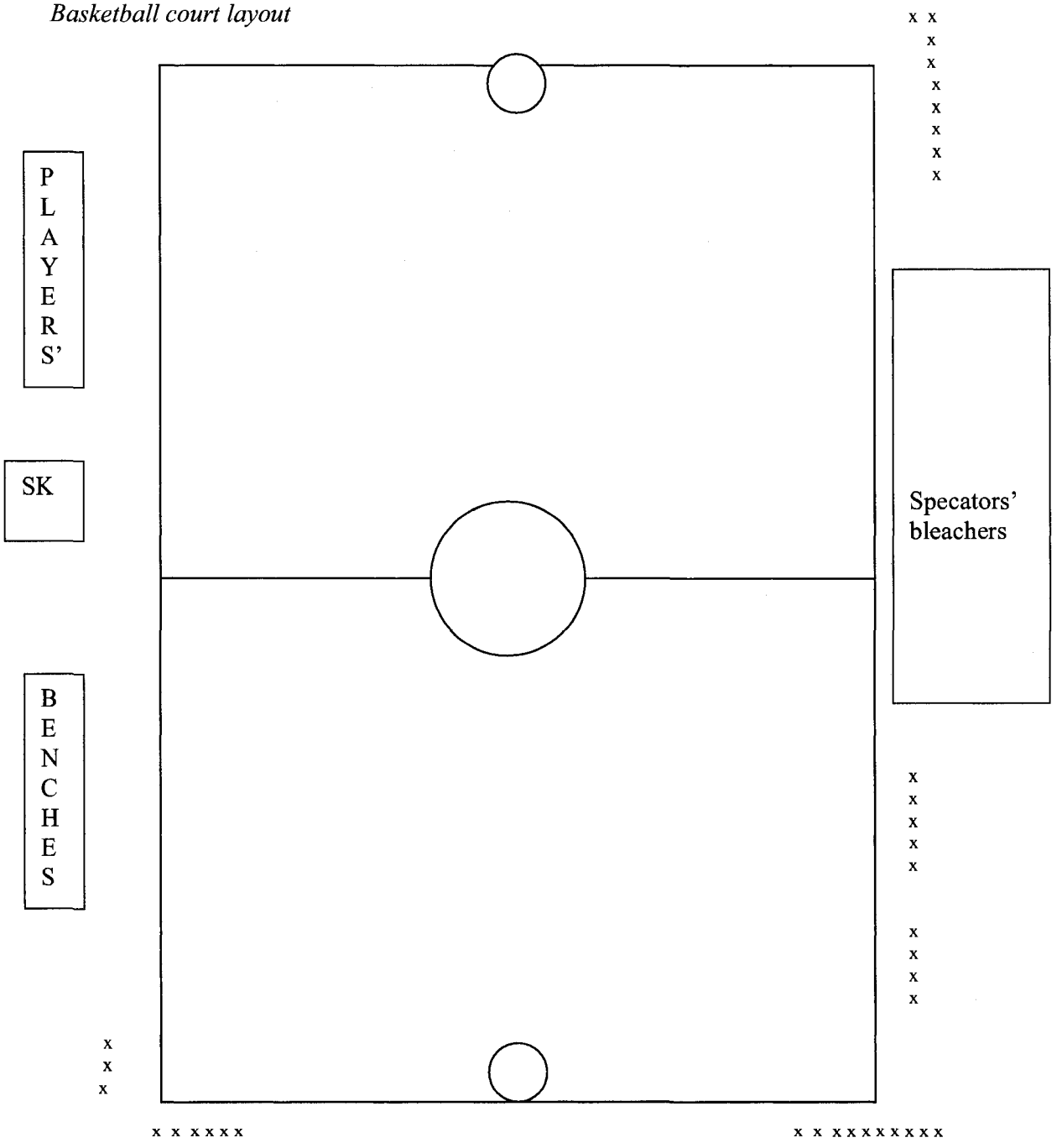
1. If the league organizer gave you the option of playing in a girls' only league or mixed, which would you choose?
2. Should there be a rule about each player getting to play at least half of the game?
3. Is sportspersonship important? Not just for players, but everybody.
    a. Should parents have to sign an agreement?
4. Do you think girls and boys have the same opportunities as in sport?

Expectations

1. What do you want from the refs?
2. What did you think of the scorekeeping?
3. What makes a good coach? Bad coach?
4. What makes a good game?
5. What's a better game, one that's close or one that's a blowout win?
6. What makes a good team?
7. What do you want from your parents—in terms of your sport participation?
8. Do you have any more suggestions you might offer to the league organizer?

Appendix XI

Basketball court layout



X = spectators—sitting in chairs or standing

SK = scorekeepers table

Appendix XII

Player profiles

Bob—11 years old

Has played baseball one year, first time playing in this league. His favourite sport is bowling. He is tall (around 5' 6") and very slim. Fairly low skill, capable of basics. He moves around a lot during games, but not always sure where he should go and rarely inserts himself into the play. He is very open and thoughtful in his responses.

Little Shaq—12 years old

Has played indoor and outdoor soccer 4 – 5 years. It is his first year in this basketball league and has played intramural basketball at school. He is short (under 5') and slim. He is fairly low skill, though with the help of a friend has learned several "trick" skills. He is always very active on the court and trying to be involved in play. He has some contact with the ball every game, though he struggles to do much with it. He is a bit reserved and very thoughtful and witty in his responses.

Chris—11 years old

It is his 2nd year in this league. He also plays indoor and outdoor soccer, the latter since age of 3. He also played hockey for 2 years and baseball for 1 year. He is fairly short (around 5') and slim. His skill level is moderate. He can do the basics fairly well, but struggles against his size. Moves around the court a lot trying to be involved in the play, but does not handle the ball much. Though in a couple games his coach had him make several throw-ins.

Reba—12 years old

It is her 2nd year in the league and also plays on her on her school team. She is tall (5'10") and her is skill level is fairly high. She scores baskets most games and is very strong defensively. She plays with much intensity and takes the game very seriously. She handles the ball a great deal during games, especially on rebounds, though she usually passes to others who do most of the scoring. She is very soft-spoken and readily elaborated on any question asked.

Cheryl—11 years old

It is her 2nd year in this league. She also plays indoor and outdoor soccer. She is average height (around 5'4") and a bit stocky. Her skill level is moderate she handles every game, but not a lot. She always moves around the floor to get open or cover her opponent but rarely gets into the middle of the action. She is a bit shy and rarely ever expanded on any questions I asked her. Her father is the coach of her team.

Allen—13 years old

Has played basketball at school and in this league for 5 years. He also plays football and volleyball at school and indoor and outdoor soccer. He is short (5' or less) and very slim. His skill level is fairly high. He is a very good dribbler and shooter and handles ball quite a bit during games. He always works very hard during games and is capable of some very exceptional plays. He is a bit shy and very soft-spoken.

Teresa—12 years old

Has been in this league 3 years and has tried school volleyball. Has also played indoor soccer at Y for 2 years and has been taking golf lessons for 2 years. She is average height (5'4") and stocky. Her skill level is moderate. She can do the basics and occasionally scores baskets. Though she does move around the floor a lot during games and regularly inserts herself in the play, she rarely handles the ball during games. She is very outgoing and talkative.

Betty—12 years old

It is her 1st year playing basketball, also on her school team. Also plays indoor and outdoor soccer for several years. Plays flag football, volleyball, and baseball on school teams. She is average height (around 5'4") and slim. Her skill level is quite low. She can do the basics but rarely touches the ball during games. She also never really inserts herself into the play. She is rather shy, expands on her responses but only when prodded.

Lisa—12 years old

This is her 2nd year in this league and is also on her school team. She also plays indoor and outdoor soccer. She is tall (around 5'10) and stocky. He skill level is fairly high. She does the basics well usually gets at least one basket each game. She moves around a lot during games, gets a fair amount of passes and ball contact. She regularly inserts herself into the play, especially for rebounds. She is talkative and readily expands on her responses. Her father is the assistant coach for her team.

MJ—12 years old

This is his first year in this league. He has also played baseball and soccer one year. He is average height (around 5'6) and stocky. He was quite unfamiliar with the game when he started, so is fairly low skilled. He does not get in the play too much because he does not always know where to go. He does not handle the ball a lot but when does he is very poised with it—always protects the ball and looks around for a good pass and then makes it. He rarely shot the ball. He is open and talkative.

Appendix XIII

Registration form[42]

YMCA Basketball

Basketball is a YMCA game. It was invented by Dr. James Naismith, a Canadian, at the YMCA International Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, back in 1891. The YMCA Youth Basketball Program was started in 1975 to provide a positive approach to youth basketball. This year we will be partnering with the Steve Nash Youth Basketball Program to offer a high quality program to our coaches and players.

Our Program promises to:

- Teach skills, fun and values.
- Allow each player fair play time – There are no benchwarmers in our league!
- To teach basketball skills through weekly practices
- To develop co-operation fair play through the Y core value of Respect
- Lots of fun for your children

Registration Due: September 23, 2007

Cost:
$70.00/player
Includes – personal practice ball, team t-shirt
Banquet, awards

Division I – Grade 3-5 Division II – Grades 6-8 Division III – Grades 9-11

****

Registration Form

Name - _____ Birthdate - _____/_____/_____ (M/D/Y)

Male/Female (circle one) Grade - _____ Shirt Size:

_____

School - _____ Height: _____

ADDRESS: Street - _____ City - _____

Postal Code - _____ Home Phone – (____) _____ - _____

1st Parent - _____ 2nd Parent - _____

Emergency Contact & Number - _____

_____

Skill Level – ___ Beginner ____ Intermediate ____ Experienced

Special Request - _____

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42 The first page of this form was left out as it indicates which league it is and it was only the second page that contains the relevant information to which I alluded.