

“THERE’S NO BOYS’ AND GIRLS’ [SPORTS], THEY SHARE”: YOUNG GIRLS’
EXPERIENCES WITH TEAM SPORTS

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by

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Master of Arts

In Early Childhood Studies

Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

Research has identified many benefits of participating in team sports. These examinations have discovered that girls are less likely to participate in team sports than boys. This study examines the reasons why girls do or do not participate in team sports. In this qualitative study, girls aged 6 to 9 were interviewed about their experiences that have either led them to participate in team sports or not participate in team sports. Through this study it was discovered that the family and peer group play a major role in influencing team sports participation in young girls. I found that the interviewed girls believe that boys are more successful in team sports, that sports skills are gendered and there are many ways to improve team sports participation for other young girls. Through the identification of factors which encourage or discourage participation in team sports, practitioners will be better informed on how they may support girls in participating in team sports.

Keywords: girl; sport; team sport; gender

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Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study is to discover the factors that encourage or discourage girls aged six to nine to participate in team sports. Discovering the factors that both encourage and discourage girls to participate in team sports will help to develop a more inclusive, gender neutral practice for recruiting participants for team sports. The goal of my study is to give girls a voice and to use the collected data to inform teachers, parents and coaches of ways to encourage young girls to participate in sports. By understanding the factors that discourage or encourage girls to participate in team sports, educators will be informed of how to improve current pedagogical practices.

Participating in team sports is often believed to assist children in developing social, emotional and physical skills (Alfano, Klesges, Murray, Beech, McClanahan, 2002; Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009; Zarrett, Fay, Li, Carrano, Phelps, & Lerner, 2009). This study will explore participation of young girls in team sports such as football, volleyball, soccer, baseball, basketball, and hockey for multiple reasons. First, girls are typically less likely to participate in team sports than boys. This phenomenon was observed in Slutzky & Simpkins' (2009) study with children where the number of boys that participated in team sports was significantly higher than the number of girls while the number of boys and girls that participated in individual sports was approximately equal (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Another reason for focusing on team sports is because researchers have described team sports as a good way to promote self-esteem, team work, health, physical strength and endurance (Alfano, et al., 2002; Davidson, Earnest & Birch, 2002; Azzarito, Solmon & Harrison, 2006), but team sports have been typically a more common activity of choice for boys than girls (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The feminist theory provides the main framework for this study while queer theory is used for additional insight. The work of feminism and queer theory has worked to develop a new explanation and definition of gender and gender roles. The research in this study links to the existing theories of how socially constructed gender identities have influenced young girls' participation in team sports. Its main goal is to explore preexisting theories through understanding young girls' perspectives on sport and gender.

The value of the feminist perspective is that it provides a framework for understanding how gender is socially constructed. Queer theory is used as a lens to challenge traditional views of identity based on binary divisions of gender. In study, both perspectives are used to answer the question of how girls in a particular group have been encouraged or discouraged to participate in team sports in effort to understand how gender identity has influenced their reasons for participating or not participating.

This study argues that historically sport has become masculinized which has led to the social exclusion of female participants. The study also takes the perspective that all children are capable of experiencing and excelling in team sports. I believe that steps must be taken to analyze the effects previous generations of masculinized sports have created on current sport. Through analyzing and discovering the effects of masculinized sports, educators and practitioners can work towards creating an environment where all children can experience the benefits of participating in team sports.

Feminism has been used in the past as a lens for analyzing sport participation. Common feminist principles believe that women should have the "rights to all the benefits and privileges

of social life equally with men” (Thompson, 2002, p. 106). The values of feminism in sport “means that girls and women have the right to choose to participate in sport and physical activity without constraint, prejudice or coercion, to expect their participation to be respected and taken seriously, and to be as equally valued and rewarded as sportsmen” (Thompson, 2002, p. 106).

Feminist theory is a guide for this research because it is a “theory [that] acknowledges the marginalization and oppressed status of women in society (and sport) and how dominant paradigms of power influence and constrain individuals” (Hall, 1996; hooks, 1984; Whaley, 2001 as cited by Roper, E, 2009). This study argues that all girls deserve the right to freely participate in team sports and that their participation should be valued equally to that of their male counterparts.

Queer theory has been used to destabilize and challenge the norm (Young & White, 2007). “Queer theory examines the way that social institutions operate within a binary of normal and/or ‘natural versus abnormal and/or ‘other’” (Young & White, 2007, p. 12). This study examines the influences of classifying normal versus abnormal gender roles related to team sports, and how young girls classify normal versus abnormal female behaviours. Queer theory is relevant to this study because “the construction of children’s gendered identities cannot be fully understood without acknowledging how the dominant discourses of femininity and masculinity are heteronormalised in their everyday lives, including through their educational experiences” (Robinson, 2005, p. 1). For instance, scholars like Butler (1990), have argued that gender is preformed and socially constructed. She also argues that females have been socialized to perform their gender, based on the male binary opposite. Butler’s theory will be used to examine young girls’ perceptions of females in sports.

Within this study queer theory will also be used to understand how previous perspectives of what it means to be female and other gender identity norms can be challenged. The study also uses queer theory to deconstruct and analyse traditional ideas of gender identity so that we can work towards social change where children do not feel constrained by traditional gender identities. In other words, queer theory is relevant to this research topic because it helps us to deconstruct gender norms and move beyond gender binaries in order to address the issue of girls' lack of participation in sports and develop long-lasting solutions.

Literature Review

Current research on the participation of young girls in team sports explains both that there are many benefits of participating in team sports and that girls are under-represented in team sports. The following research will address several topics with regards to young girls and their participation in team sports. The reasons for and against participating in team sports, perspective of physical education teachers, perspective of young girls, socialization, gender and sports, and sports as a masculine activity will all be examined.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the current research on young girls and team sports in order to develop an understanding of the issues related to their participation and why such sports are deemed important to young females. Team sports were chosen as a focal point for multiple reasons. First, participating in team sports is often believed to assist children in developing social, emotional and physical skills. Second, girls are typically less likely to participate in team sports than boys. For instance, in a study with children aged five to twelve, the number of boys that participated in team sports was significantly higher than the number of girls while the amount of boys and girls that participated in individual sports was approximately equal (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Another reason for the selection of team sports is because researchers have described such sports as a good way to promote self-esteem, team work, health, physical strength and endurance (Alfano, et al., 2002; Azzarito, Solmon & Harrison, 2002; Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris, 2007; Davidson, et al., 2002; Gore, Farrell, & Gordon, 2001; Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009; as cited in Zarrett, et al., 2009). The following review organizes relevant research in the field according to five dominant themes: 1) outcomes of participating in team sports 2) factors influencing participation in team sports 3) socialization 4) sport and gender, and 5) sport as a masculine activity.

Outcomes of participation in team sports

One of the major themes in the research literature focuses on the many positive outcomes achieved by children participating in team sports. These are mainly physical, emotional and social benefits. Physical health can be supported through participation in team sports because they provide children with regular intensive exercise (Alfano, et al., 2002). Physical activity, which can be experienced through participating in team sports, has been promoted as an effective strategy to prevent or reduce the risk of children becoming overweight (Davidson, et al., 2002).

The growing epidemic of obesity appears to be more common in women than men and “regular physical activity during childhood is inversely related to adult obesity” (Alfano, et al., 2002, p. 86). “Past sport participation was significantly related to current BMI such that higher levels of past sport participation corresponded to lower levels of BMI” (Alfano, et al., 2002, p. 86). Recent Statistics Canada reports on fitness amongst Canadian adults add credibility to these assertions. For example, a report released in January 2010 declared that the number one indicator of health risk in Canada as “waist circumference” or “abdominal obesity,” both the results of obesity (Statistics Canada: *Health Reports*, 2010). From this research it can be concluded that in order to reduce the rate of obesity in women we must encourage young girls to participate in team sports and that participation in sports is beneficial to one’s overall physical health (Alfano, et al., 2002).

Several studies have cited benefits that go beyond physical well being. Research on the potential outcomes of participating in team sports concluded that participation in sports is “associated with psychological well-being, positive social development, and higher academic and occupational achievement through young adulthood” (as cited in Zarrett, et al., 2009, p. 368).

See also: Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001; Brunelle, Danish, & Forneris,, 2007; Gore, Farrell, & Gordon, 2001). Psychological well being can be boosted through increased self-esteem. Slutzky & Simpkins' (2009) longitudinal study results showed that the increased amount of time spent playing team sports related to better feelings about personal sport abilities, which resulted in increased self-esteem. Team sports require cooperation and socialization with peers which support social development. Higher academic achievement could relate to the quick and creative thinking skills children practice while playing sports or increased self-esteem which reportedly has a positive impact on a child's academic achievement.

While there are many positive benefits of children participating in team sports, research literature has also reasoned that we must also look into the negative results of sport participation to develop a clear understanding of how sports can influence child development. Competition and aggressive behaviours are often associated with team sports. Although competition and aggression can be considered negative characteristics they are not always negative. For example, Roth and Basow (2004) believe that girls who participate in typically 'aggressive' sports are better able to physically protect and defend themselves.

Another possible issue with participation in sports is that children may develop negative feelings about their abilities or bodies due to exposure to sports. Children who participate in sports may initially have negative feelings about their abilities but with practice they will develop a better self-concept based on their abilities than if they did not participate at all (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009). Girls who participate in aesthetic sports, or cosmetic fitness (Coakley and Donnelly, 2009), such as dance, gymnastics, cheerleading, baton twirling, swimming, aerobics and figure skating, reported having less positive perspectives of their weight than children who did not participate in sports or participate in non-aesthetic sports (Davidson, et al., 2002). One

possible explanation of this phenomenon is that girls' participation in cosmetic fitness has been shown to correlate with lower self-concept as a result of bodies adhering to stricter social pressures regarding appropriate appearance. Since cosmetic fitness has been shown to be related to lower self-esteem this study focuses on team instead of embracing all forms of fitness.

Factors influencing participation in team sports

In previous studies it has been noted that there is an uneven representation of girls and boys within many sports. Welk (1999) identified five factors of physical activity for children: personal, biological, psychological, social, and environmental (as cited in Crossman, 2008). A Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2000) study of children aged 5-12 found that boys preferred:

to play golf, snowboard, or skateboard and engage in the team sports of soccer, football, hockey, and basketball. Girls on the other hand, [were] more likely to participate in social dancing, skating, gymnastics, ballet, or other dance classes and engage in play activities on swings, slides, and teeter-totters (as cited in Crossman, 2008, p. 124).

In general terms girls tend to show preference to different activities than boys and each groups' participation was based on traditional gendered practices.

The cost of participating in organized team sports may influence the likelihood of children participating. Nixon and Frey (1996 as cited in Crossman, 2008) stated that social background and status are influential factors which predict participation in sports. Statistics Canada (1998 and 2005) also reports that children from higher income homes are more likely to participate in sports than children from lower income families. In addition, parental working status and marital status also appear to have a role in determining whether children will

participate in sports. According to Clark's (2009) study of Canadian children's participation in sports, children of dual-income families are more likely to participate in sports than single income families. Children of families where the mother worked part-time out of the home and the father worked full time out of the home were reported to be more likely than children of two parents who both work full time outside of the home to participate in sports (Clark, 2009).

According to Statistics Canada (2005) 75% of children from two parent homes participated in sports. The correlation between working and marital status may be explained by the connection between working and marital status with the amount of time and money families have to contribute to participation in sports. The amount of time parents have for leisure activities and income appears to influence the likelihood of children participating in team sports.

Lack of time and resources for participating in team sports prevent many children from participating in team sports (Cooky & McDonald, 2005). Team sports can be very expensive for a family as the cost of equipment, registration fees and transportation fees all limit the ability for children to participate in some team sports. Children also need a method of traveling to and from practices and games. According to Cooky & McDonald (2005) children who are able to participate in team sports must have time, parents able to transport them to practices and games, as well as monetary resources.

According to Coakley and Donnelly (2009) the perspective of the parents and the family structure has a main role in determining whether the child will participate in team sports. In many families both parents work outside of the home so in order to have more adult supervised time parents enroll children in organized adult supervised activities. According to Coakley and Donnelly (2009) the meaning of a good parent has changed to include being more accountable to where their children are and what they are doing at all times (also see: Crossman, 2008, p. 125).

Organized team sports provide parents with the adult supervision many parents are looking for. Parents who hold the view that sports play a positive role in their child's development are more likely to enroll their child in team sports. "Perhaps the single biggest factor for an increase in sport participation for children is the realization among the public that many children are leading inactive, unhealthy lifestyles and that something needs to be done" (Crossman, 2008, p. 125).

Research done on middle school and high school females has examined their feelings towards participating in sports (Azzarito, Solmon and Harrison, 2006; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Constantinou, Manson & Silverman, 2009). According to Azzarito, et al.'s (2006) research on girls in physical education, one female student reportedly felt uncomfortable participating in sports because she was unpopular. Although her statement cannot be generalized to explain all girls' lack of participation in sports it could be identified as one reason for withdrawal from sports. Another possible explanation for the lack of female participation in sports provided in the study revolved around the perception among females that boys are more active and engaged in sports than girls. Another girl said that boys are naturally or biologically better skilled in sports than girls (Azzarito, et al., 2006). As Azzarito, Solomon and Harrison (2006) argue, if a girl believes that boys are naturally more skilled than girls, and that girls are naturally less capable of playing sports than boys, a girl would be less likely to want to play sports, because she believes her skills will always be inferior to those of her male counterpart.

Another reported reason for girls not wanting to participate in sports is the behaviour that their male peers exhibit towards them (Constantinou, et al., 2009). In Constantinou, et al.'s (2009) study, girls reported feeling uncomfortable because boys played in an overly competitive manner and took sports too seriously. Trivialization of girls' participation in team sports was also acknowledged; girls reported that boys belittled them and were disrespectful of their abilities

(Constantinou, et al., 2009). Such open discouragement from others often prevents girls from wanting to participate in team sports (Clark, et al., 2007). Negative, sexist comments can also be discouraging for girls as they may receive mixed messages. For example, when a boy throws poorly he is often told he plays like a girl, yet in the reverse, when a girl plays well, she can be referred to as playing like a boy (Clark & Paechter, 2007).

In multiple studies, girls perceived males as being more competitive and aggressive than females (Azzarito, et al., 2006; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Constantinou, et al., 2009). Girls also perceived boys to be better athletes (Azzarito, et al., 2006; Constantinou, et al., 2009) and in one study girls stated that teams are unfair when one team has more boys on it than the other team (Constantinou, et al., 2009). In the research girls often had a strong perception that sex directly influenced a person's ability to perform in team sports (Azzarito, et al., 2006; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Constantinou, et al., 2009). Girls also stated that safety was a large concern for them and discouraged them from playing certain sports where they could hurt themselves or others (Constantinou, et al., 2009).

Socialization

Sex and gender appear to directly influence participation in team sports. Gender is described as socially constructed; therefore, the view of what it is to be a man or a woman should change as a given society's roles change but unfortunately the process of change is long (Constantinou, et al., 2009). Gender socialization begins in infancy and continues throughout one's life.

Stereotypical gender roles in the early years are exemplified in Seavey, Katz, & Rosenberg Zalk's 1975 study *Baby X* which examined how adults socialize male and female

infants. The study showed that gender plays a significant role in the treatment of male and female babies. In the study both male and female adults were given the experience of taking care of a female baby. While taking care of the female baby the adults were gentle and provided the children with stereotypical female toys. While the adults took care of the male baby the adults exhibited rougher behaviours and provided the child with stereotypical male toys. The *Baby X* study shows the influence of sex of a child on their socialization. A more recent study by Dowling (2000) looked at a similar situation where parents reacted differently to infants based on the infant's gender (see: Roth & Bascow, 2004 for discussion). When a group of parents were placed in a room with their infants and a pile of pillows the parents were more likely to encourage the boys to climb over the pillows while they were more likely to pick the girls up and carry them over the pillows (Roth & Bascow, 2004).

Butler (1990) provides insight on how sex and gender influence social identity. As mentioned earlier, according to Butler gender is socially constructed based on binary opposition. Butler (1995) argues that femininity is developed through rejecting masculinity which results in females aspiring to create difference between themselves and males. Thus girls are expected to exaggerate the disparity between themselves and boys. Girls are likely to take on characteristics that boys do not possess. Stereotypically masculinity is associated with competition, individuality and aggression (Clark & Paechter, 2007). According to Butler's (1990) theory, if boys are considered aggressive and competitive, girls would be expected to behave in the opposite manner, which would lead to the development of non-competitive, gentle and mild nature behaviours. Possessing a non-competitive, gentle and mild nature is at odds with the characteristics expected in many team sports such as competitiveness and aggression (Clark & Paechter, 2007). If adult women are following this model of building difference between

themselves and men, then young girls who are more likely to imitate and model their behaviours from adult women will also create this divide by developing their femininity in opposition of men (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961).

In interviews with female high school students, girls aged 14 to 18 generally disagreed with the notion that sports are divided into gender typed roles (Azzarito, et al., 2006). Although they disagreed with the proposition that sports are gender specific many participated in sports that have traditionally been deemed acceptable for females including swimming, rollerblading and cheerleading (Azzarito, et al., 2006). Sports that were considered acceptable for females were those that allowed women to: participate while maintaining proper posture, and play gracefully but not break a sweat during participation (Lenskyj, 1982 as cited in Young & White, 2007). It appears that their belief in gender equality in sports did not match their actions. An explanation for that lack of congruence between their words and actions could be that mentally they know they are capable but societal norms influence their desire to participate.

Stereotypically femininity has been associated with kindness, cooperation, sharing, and humility while masculinity is analogous to competition, individuality, and aggression (Clark & Paechter, 2007). Females are not only provided feminine personality characteristics and traits but they are also perceived as physically weaker than men (Roth, et al., 2004). If women are perceived to be weaker and slower than men, then it would only be logical to perceive that their abilities are inferior to those of men. Although females may perceive themselves as weaker than their male counterparts, research has found that in reality, this is not necessarily the case. In a study done by Dowling in 2000, nine year old boys and girls “performed equally well in an anaerobic pedaling activity, but girls consistently perceived themselves to have performed worse than did their male peers” (as cited in Roth, et al., 2004, p. 249). In their study they also

discovered that women could leg press more weight than their male competitors per kilogram of lean body mass (Roth, et al., 2004).

Team sports are often seen as gender specific activities and from the current research in the area of perception of gender roles in sports, both physical education teachers and female students perceive boys as naturally more inclined to sports and better at sports than girls (Azzarito, et al., 2006; Constantinou, et al., 2009). Although many teachers and girls reported that boys were biologically more inclined and better at sports, it was generally stated that boys and girls had equal rights and opportunities to participate in sports (Azzarito, et al., 2006). The girls in this study also recognized that there are stereotypical gendered sports. For example, one young female respondent recognized that football is usually considered a sport for boys because it is a contact sport and therefore dangerous for girls (Azzarito, et al., 2006).

To better understand how children are being socialized in the school setting it is also important to look at the perspective of physical education teachers. In a qualitative case study of physical education teachers and middle school female students, teachers reported having equal expectations of female and male participation in the classroom (Constantinou, et al., 2009). The perspective of the female students also supported the view that teachers expected girls to participate and do their best similar to the expectations the teachers had for the male students (Constantinou, et al., 2009).

Through interviews, observations and document analysis the perspective of Norwegian physical education teachers have been analyzed with regards to their opinions of gender equality (Dowling, 2006). Dowling's (2006) case studies demonstrated that the students in physical education teacher training courses lacked an interest in gender equality and equity. The opinions

analyzed in the case studies, however, do not provide a complete view of all teacher training programs, but highlight the issues that may be present in other teacher training programs including those currently practiced in Canada.

Communication from coaches reflected a different perspective from teachers. Although many teachers stated that they had similar expectations of girls and boys in regard to their ability to play sports, coaches' words often reflected a different perspective. While observing a coach at a school soccer match, Clark and Paechter (2007, p. 264) observed the coach teasing a group of boys saying "Aw, you're easy. Our girls could take you!" In Dowling's (2006) qualitative study on physical education, sexist joke-telling on the part of Norwegian teachers was a normal occurrence in teacher training courses. Dewar (1987), Flintoff (1994), Brown & Rich (2002) and Wright (2002) have identified that international physical education teacher training courses regularly create "unequal learning opportunities for their students on the basis of gender" (as cited in Dowling, 2006, p. 248).

When teaching children physical education there are many different strategies teachers reported using in order to teach girls and boys in the classroom. Some teaching strategies included, ignoring gender differences to treat children of both genders the same, encouraging boys to enter typically 'female sports' and encouraging girls to enter typically 'male sports,' or designing programs that were meant to help students respect differences (Dowling, 2006). These strategies appear to work in the effort to combat the issue of less girls participating in sports than boys and create an equal and fair environment for both boys and girls but they are simply ignoring the issue. By ignoring gender differences in effort to treat all children equally, teachers are not providing students with the opportunity to participate in a diverse range of sports and are ignoring opportunities to further ensure gender equity in sports participation.

Sport and gender

In order to understand the participation of young girls in team sport we must examine how sport has been linked and influenced by gender in the past and present. One way to illustrate the influence that gender has on sport can be observed in how leagues and events are organized. In most team sports when children reach a certain age they are divided into two categories based on gender; male or female.

Historically, gender has influenced participation in sports and which sports are acceptable for an individual to participate in. During the 1970s Canadian male youth were encouraged to play sports as way of building a healthy lifestyle (Howel, 2001 as cited by Young & White, 2007). At the same time, female youth were discouraged from participating in many sports because it was said that the wrong kind of sport could damage their ability to bare children (Lenskyj, 1982 as cited by Young & White, 2007). Historically women were discouraged to participate in many sports such as “football, rugby, cricket, and boxing” (Young & White, 2007, p. 5). Women were, however, allowed to participate in “sports such as horseback riding, croquet, lawn tennis, skating, and golf” (Lenskyj, 1982 as cited by Young & White, 2007). Rather than allowing women to participate in sports with men, the goal of women’s sports was to keep them separate from men’s sports (Young & White, 2007).

An alternative approach to separating sports according to gender is proposed in Cooky and McDonald’s (2005) study on young basketball players. The basketball league in their study divided teams according to gender. The other suggests that teams could be separated based on weight, height, skill level or ability, but instead the league chooses the use of gender as a classifying characteristic. As mentioned previously, Dowling’s (2000) study of nine year old

boys and girls' similar anaerobic performance provides one example of why the division of sports based on gender is not a valid form of separation.

When interviewing girls aged eleven to fourteen, Cooky and McDonald (2005) also reported on participants' thoughts and experiences with regards to their participation in basketball. Interviews with high school female basketball players revealed that trying hard and persistence were important aspects of the athleticism (Cooky & McDonald, 2005). It was also noted that in this league's game rules were modified to allow girls the opportunity to have higher scoring games that were equivalent to those of the boys. The creation of the modifications appeared to be a reminder that boys are typically more successful at sports than girls and that in order to compare, sports played by girls needed to be modified (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 166).

Sport as a Masculine Activity

Sports often require stereotypical female characteristics such as cooperation and grace and male characteristics such as competitiveness and aggression (Clark & Paechter, 2007). Some sports are so strongly related to masculinity that poor playing is referred to as playing like a girl (Clark & Paechter, 2007), while playing well is considered playing like a boy (Roth, et al., 2004). For instance, in an ethnographic study of girls playing soccer in England it was discovered that some girls hid their interest in football (North American soccer) so that they could fit in with the societal expectations of what it means to be feminine (Clark & Paechter, 2007). The study's authors observed that when girls decided to participate in football games, they were more likely to choose defensive positions where they could immediately pass the ball upon receiving it (Clark & Paechter, 2007). Some female participants in the same study believed that girls avoided offensive positions and holding onto the ball because they are less skilled, but

the authors discovered that even skilled players were reluctant to take on those roles. Clark & Paechter, (2007, p. 268) concluded that the lack of initiative to take offensive roles can be linked to gender roles and expectations, “since holding onto the ball requires a self-possessed belief in one’s right to the ball, and desire to take it.”

The above literature review has determined that there are many benefits to young girls’ participation in sports and that many factors influence participation in team sports. From infancy girls are being socialized to develop ‘female’ characteristics which are in opposition to the typical characteristics required to play team sports^a. Through girls’ families, schools, and communities they are socialized to take on particular roles which influence their comfort and likelihood of participating in team sports.

Methodology

Major Research Questions

The main question that guides the research in this study is: What factors influence girls aged 6-9 to participate in team sports? Secondary questions that influence the research in this study include: What are young females perspectives on participating in team sports? How does gender influence participation in team sports? What methods can teachers, parents and coaches use to encourage young girls to participate in sports? By understanding the factors that discourage or encourage girls to participate in team sports, from the perspective of young girls, educators will be informed of what they are doing right, and what needs to be improved.

Methods and procedures

In July 2010, I began conducting semi-structured interviews with girls aged six to nine at a childcare centre in Don Mills, Ontario. The interviews explore girls' personal experiences and perspectives of their participation in team sports like hockey, soccer, baseball, lacrosse, football and rugby. This is a small scale study which was completed in four months. The findings of this study can not be generalized to all Canadian girls but can be used to provide examples of specific situations which are present within Toronto.

This study uses a qualitative approach to give the participants a voice to share their own opinions and experiences. A qualitative approach suits this research design well because it enables the researcher to explore the meaning individuals attribute to the social issue of participation in team sports (Creswell, 2009) through an inductive approach (Mertler, 2006). The semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the personal experiences of the girls' participation in team sports.

Recruiting participants

I recruited the participants through a childcare centre's school age program. The childcare centre selected was chosen because it provides services to families of different socio-economic statuses through subsidized and full fee care. The childcare centre also has a diverse linguistic and cultural population which is reflective of children from Toronto. The selection of students within the centre was based on the parent's and children's willingness and availability to participate in the study. Girls were selected to represent a diversity of experiences with participating in team sports.

In order to recruit participants, permission was provided by the centre's supervisor, and letters were sent home to parents and children requesting their participation. Consent and assent forms were provided to the families to inform them of all details regarding the study (See Appendix 2 and 3). In order to proceed with the study I waited for full consent and assent from the parents and children because "all potential research participants have the right to give or deny informed consent" (Hill, 2005 as cited by Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 53). The parents and children were provided the opportunity to participate in the study and there were no negative implications if they chose not to participate. No children or parents were forced to participate in this study and all participants were provided the opportunity to remove themselves from the study at any time.

Recruiting participants proved to be quite difficult based on the parents and children's schedules and willingness. Many parents and children were willing but could not participate because of vacations and other events reducing their availability. Since this was a short term study occurring in the summer months many families had previously planned holidays so they were unable to schedule interview times.

Participants

The four participants selected for this study were aged six to nine. All four girls attended the same childcare centre and school. The four girls reflected diverse cultural backgrounds. Two of the girls interviewed were currently participating in team sports and two had never participated in team sports. The two girls that participated in team sports both played multiple sports outside of the school setting. None of the girls played on school sports teams.

Conducting research with children

When working with children many accommodations are necessary. To provide children with a comfortable and safe interview environment, parents were invited to accompany the child during the interview. Prior to the interviews, I talked casually with the children about their interests and their summer to build a rapport. I explained the study and their choice to participate in child appropriate terms. In accordance with Dockette and Perry's (2007) recommended strategy, I discussed any questions the children had about the study and provided "time for children to think about the research and to consult with others" (Dockette & Perry, 2007, p. 55) before proceeding with the study. I also explained that we would be using an audio recorder to record our conversation. I gave the children an opportunity to play with the recorder and record their own voice and play it back so that they would become familiar with using an audio recorder. As Penn (2008) advocates, within the study children are valued as capable people whose thoughts, experiences and perspectives should be elicited and valued. Children's opinions were elicited, complying with their right as stated in the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that their voices would be heard in team sports participation that affect them.

Interviews

I chose to use individual interviews because Punch's (2002) study stated that some children preferred individual over group interviews because they allowed for privacy and confidentiality (see: Hill, 2005). Prior to beginning the interviews I had a small group discussion with the girls to explain and answer any questions about the study. Trust was developed between the participant and the interviewer by explaining to the child that the conversation is a safe place for the child. Each child was given the opportunity to speak to the interviewer with a parent present or alone.

Data collection and analysis

In order to collect data I used one twenty minute semi-structured interview based on an interview guide, for each child (see Appendix 4). In an attempt to build a rapport with the girls I interviewed, I used causal conversation and ice-breaker questions in order to create an approachable and comfortable environment. I asked follow-up questions to clarify participants' responses to questions on the interview guide. To provide the children with a convenient and familiar setting, the interviews took place within the childcare centre. I audio recorded and took written notes of the children's responses. The interview guide, prompts, and further questions were used to clarify and ensure that the full perspective of the girls are expressed within the data.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me the opportunity to engage children in a natural conversation about their feelings and experiences with team sports. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to be flexible and follow the responses of the children in order to further explore their feelings and perspectives. Through the use of interviews I was able to clarify my questions and the responses of the children. Since the children I worked with are young I

selected an oral interview instead of a written survey so that the children were not limited in their responses based on their writing abilities.

Written and audio recordings of each interview were transcribed and each interview's written account was paired with its audio transcription. In order to analyze the data collected I used transcribed copies of all interviews to identify themes and meta-themes within the interviews through coding.

The data collected within this study will enhance the current research by providing the perspective of young girls on team sports. The participants will benefit by being provided a safe venue for them to express their perspectives and voice their concerns. The data collected will be used to inform teachers of current successful practice and ways to encourage the participation of young girls in team sports.

Findings

The findings of this study present a one-time perspective of children's experiences related to team sport participation. With time their experiences and perspectives may change. The small number of children interviewed allowed for detailed results but limited the ability to generalize to the larger population. There were some limitations to the interview setting. For example, children may have left out information that they believed adults would not like to hear.

After interviewing four girls about their experiences and perspectives of team sports, the results reveal that the girls have multiple reasons for not playing team sports. Their perspectives reflect varying degrees and forms of encouragement and discouragement. Through the interviews children reflected and commented on their thoughts about mixed gender sports teams, methods of improving team sports, adult and peer influences on sports. Participants also commented on how their skills influenced their willingness to play team sports.

Reasons for playing team sports

Children said they played team sports for a variety of reasons including building friendships, the fun, excitement, competition and a way to show off their skills. Participant 1 explained that she played team sports, "Cause I get trophies and I like trophies." Another girl answered,

Because I think it is exciting and um it's like I get to show how fast I can run and fast I can skate. Cause sometimes I even skate faster than my dad. Cause my dad wanted me to get into hockey because I always bend down when I skate and then I just really go fast. Pretty fast... Yeah it's really fun (Participant 2).

The same child described what she likes about playing team sports,

I get to work with other people. Not just by myself. Because sometimes being by yourself is like...you announce your own thing like "oh she got the goal!" You're the goalie and you're the player so it's kinda feeling lonely. But when you play with a team you're kinda like 'hey I know people are playing with me so I can pass the ball' or when you shoot, you can pass the ball to someone who is near the net and they can shoot. Or if I'm too far from the net I can pass it to them because they are closer to the net than me... Yeah working together and meeting new people. 'Cause yeah, being on a team makes you have more friendship than by yourself (Participant 2).

This child explained that she liked working as a team and building friendships through team sports.

Encouragement and discouragement

Methods of encouragement were represented in varying forms and from multiple sources. From the four children interviewed two children reported support and encouragement from family members, one child reported receiving encouragement from friends and one reported no encouragement at all. Encouragement was provided through parents watching and cheering for their child while she was playing a sport. Parents also introduced the children to the team sports and asked them to try it. Another method was directly telling the child that she is good at sports.

Discouragement from others was a reported problem within this study. One of the girls stated that her friends say that sports are for boys. She reported feeling unsure of her identity based on the responses from her friends. She even stated that sometimes she feels like she is a boy because of her friend's comments about sports. She said, that her friends say "'you shouldn't play sports they are boyish' ... It makes me think that I'm a boy" (Participant 1).

In this study, methods of discouragement also took the form of negative events. One girl reported feeling discouraged from playing sports when she was injured while playing or when she saw other people getting injured while playing. “Sometimes when I get hurt. Like if I sprain my ankle or something I don’t really want to play because I’m too scared that I’m going to sprain it again” (Participant 2). The same child reported feeling discouraged from playing sports when she made a mistake because she felt embarrassed and afraid that she would make another mistake.

And also if I like, if I try to kick the ball and I fall over it, It kinda makes me shy. It makes me like embarrassed so I don’t really want to kick the ball anymore. I go ‘you do it’ and I to my team mates. Cause I like fall back sometimes...Cause sometimes if I make a mistake everyone like looks at me and not, and turns their head and goes what? What just happened? And I go ‘ooooh” [shows embarrassed expression] It’s just some of them go ‘ooh’.

Another girl said that she did not want to play sports because friends had told her that she was not good at sports and that they did not want to play with her. The girls said “some people when I went to play with them, sometimes when they don’t want to play with me they say ‘you shouldn’t play, I’m better than you””(Participant 4). Negative comments from others and experiences were a common factor in discouraging young girls from playing sports.

The children perceived that adults have a major role in encouraging them to participate in team sports. One girl stated that when adults play sports with the children it would make her want to play sports more “They could play with you...Sometimes kids can be like ‘I have nobody to play with’ so they could play with you” (Participant 1). Another girl stated that having

her parents around to watch her when she is playing sports makes her feel safe and comfortable which led to her wanting to participate in sports more.

I feel more safe if they watch me, cause I don't want, I don't want, some coaches I just meet and I don't really know. So I don't want to be with someone I don't really know 'cause I feel more safe if I'm with my mom or my dad. 'Cause they are my parents and I know them well (Participant 2).

One child stated that her parents are encouraging by introducing her to the idea of trying new sports and cheering them on while she was playing.

Friends also influenced young girls' participation in team sports. The words the friends said influenced the child's feeling about herself and whether she should be playing sports. Friends appeared to influence the *likelihood* of children playing sports. Children that participated in team sports mentioned friends of theirs that also play sports while children who did not participate in team sports did not mention friends of theirs that play team sports. When explaining why she does not play sports one child said "I don't play that much because um, when schools over I don't have that many friends to play with". In summary, friends both encouraged and discouraged girls' participation in team sports.

The girls stated that skill level both had the ability to encourage and discourage participation in team sports. Some girls said they did not want to play team sports because they are not good at them or that other people tell them that they are not good at team sports. Some girls reported that they like to play team sports because they like to show others their athletic ability. The girls' peers suggest that the girls should try playing a new sport because the friends think that the girls would be good at the team sport. Other girls said that their peers discouraged

them from participating in team sports because the peers believe that the girls do not have the skills required to succeed.

Adult expectations

Children believed trying your best and practicing are the most important attributes that adults expect from them while participating in team sports.

They expect you to charge, don't be afraid of the ball, and charge at it, and if it's away from you, don't just stand out there and be scared of it. Just go into the crowd and get it out of their team player and try to get the net and kick it as hard you can. And if you miss it. Try again and keep trying. So, that's what they expect (Participant 2).

Another child described practice as the major expectation adults have of children.

"It's just if you think everyone is good. Then you can be good. Like you see everyone being good and then you are like oh I'm good too. You need to practice... they just say keep practicing. So I do and it gets funner". (Participant 1)

The perception children had of the expectations of adults appeared to provide the children with a safe place where they could try their best. Since the children perceived that adults feel that effort is more important than skill, the children were provided freedom to try their best regardless of their skills and abilities.

Males improve success

The girls had differing opinions of whether boys and girls should play sports together. One of the girls said she did not want to play sports on an all girls team because she thought the girls would loose and she preferred to play on a team with both boys and girls so her team would win. She said that she likes to play on teams with boys because “it’s more funner. Cause girls would loose” (Participant 1). Another girl said she preferred to play on an all girls team because she perceives that playing sports with girls is less dangerous than playing with boys. The girl said she plays “in a girl’s league only. I don’t want to face boys because they are too rough” (Participant 2). This child continued to explain her feelings about playing team sports with boys.

I: Did you ever play with boys and girls?

C: No I’ve never played in a mix team.

I: So would you ever play in a mix team?

C: No.

I: Why not?

C: They hog the ball.

I: Oh really?

C: Yes. I play with my cousin all the time and he makes me go in net all the time.

He’s like ‘go in net!’ and then I have to kinda catch his slap shot thing.....And it

hurts. ‘Cause he whips the ball (Participant 2).

Participant two also stated that she prefers playing on all girls teams because she thinks that boys would “hog the ball”.

Sports skills are gendered

Two girls supported the idea that sports are gendered. These girls provided varying reasons why this is the case, and the other two girls believed that both boys and girls can play all sports. For instance, one girl believed that all sports are for both genders except for football which she perceived as a sport which is only for boys. She stated:

They can be for both boys and girls. Maybe not football though, cause people, girls don't really like jumping on each other to try to get a ball and hurting each other. But all the rest of the sports are for both boys and girls (Participant 2).

One girl stated, "Not all [sports] are for girls" (Participant 3). When questioned further she said that basketball is not for girls. Two participants stated that all team sports are for both boys and girls. Another child said that many of her friends told her that team sports are only for boys but she believed that when it comes to sports "There's no boys' and girls' [sports], they share" (Participant 1). When Participant 4 was asked if there were any sports that are just for girls or just for boys she responded "No". With follow up questions she continued to assure the interviewer that boys and girls can play all sports.

Rejection of traditional models of sports

Participants believed that girls would appreciate and take more positive experiences away from team sports if they were organized in alternative ways. One child suggested that adults should play sports with children because it would make it more fun. Participant 3 suggested that giving children prizes for participating in team sports would make team sports better. She believed that girls should receive "girl prizes" such as make-up or nail polish and boys should receive "boy prizes" such as Spiderman or Batman. One girl said that a way to improve team

sports would be to eliminate teams and further along in the interview it was discovered that she linked teams with what she considered the advantages and disadvantages of winning and losing.

I: Do you like winning?

C: No, not when it makes other people sad.

I: Oh okay so you don't like when someone wins and someone loses?

C: [shakes head no in agreement]

I: So you don't like it when someone loses.

C: [nods yes, in agreement] (Participant 4)

For Participant 4, a method of improving team sport participation would be to remove the idea of having a winner because she did not want any one to have hurt feelings because they lost a game. The other child stated that there was nothing she would change about sport participation.

Discussion

The goal of this research project was to elicit the perspectives of young girls between the ages of six and nine to discover the factors that encourage or discourage them from participating in team sports. This study worked to identify effective strategies and areas of improvement so that teachers and parents would be informed of how to encourage and develop methods of involving more young girls to feel confident and accepted participating in team sports. Overall the goal of this study was to develop methods of increasing young girls' satisfaction and participation in team sports.

From the findings I have noticed that the family and peer group are major agents of socialization. Most of the methods of encouragement and discouragement reported in this study were influenced by both family and peers. Since the family and peer group both have a strong role in influencing participation, they must also be involved in the process of improving the likelihood of young girls participating in team sports.

Parents were proven to be influential agents who encouraged girls to try sports through their involvement in team sports. This study's findings supported the information found by Statistics Canada in the 1998 study, which stated that children whose parents are involved in team sports are more likely to participate. One of the participants in this study stated that she is encouraged by her parents' involvement in team sports. When she described what she referred to as their encouragement she stated that they watched her games, they cheered for her and they were involved in the organizational aspect of sports teams. Another participant in the study said adult involvement would be a method of improving team sports. From the suggestions of the interviewed girl, the findings support the claim that parents and adults should become involved in team sports so that children will be more comfortable participating in team sports.

Having friends who participate in team sports appeared to be a major influence for children participating in team sports as well. One girl reported that she did not play sports because her friends did not play sports therefore she did not have anyone to play with. The two girls who did play team sports both mentioned their friends that also play sports during their interviews. The link between playing sports and having friends that play team sports led me to question whether friends influence the child to play team sports or if the team sports playing friends are a result of playing team sports.

Adult expectations also played a role in influencing young children's perception of team sports. When interviewing a group of female basketball players aged 11 to 14, Cooky and McDonald (2005) reported that participants believed hard work, persistence, and determination were crucial characteristics of an athletic individual. The children in this study also reinforced the idea that trying hard is an essential to satisfy adult expectations while participating in team sports.

Through interviewing the girls in this study I noticed that they all mentioned gender biases. Some of them disagreed with the gender biases that they had experienced and some supported the gender biases they observed. I noticed that the younger children appeared to be more influenced by gender biases than the older children in the study. The children held the perception that boys are the standard for a team sport athlete, and that boys have what it takes to be legitimate and successful competitors.

Participant 1 supported the perception found in Azzarito, Solmon, and Harrison's, 2006 study, that boys are better skilled and more engaged in sports. One girl said that she preferred to play sports on a mixed gender team because she believed that she would not win on an all-girls team. She perceived that she would increase the likelihood of winning if she played with boys.

Participant 2 stated that she does not like playing sports with boys because they ‘hog the ball’, and her perspective matches those of other girls in previous studies conducted by Constantinou, et al., 2009 and Clark & Paechter, 2007, where girls reported that boys took sports too seriously and too competitively which made the girls not want to participate. Trivialization of girls’ participation in team sports was acknowledged in this study by young girls; girls reported that their peers belittled them and were disrespectful of their abilities which led the girls to not wanting to play which is similar to the findings of other studies (Constantinou, et al., 2009; Clark & Paechter, 2007).

Teasing was reported as a problem which prevented some girls from feeling comfortable playing team sports. Children must be provided role models to show them that women can be good athletes. Through awareness of females in professional team sports children would be less likely to think that it is unacceptable for females to play certain sports. Teasing could also be prevented through parents and teachers paying close attention to the interactions of children. The adult can give children strategies to talk out their differences instead of using teasing as a means to solve problems.

Traditional ideas of gender seemed to be prevalent throughout the study—whether they were reinforced or challenged. On one hand, one participant noticed clear gender differences by labeling some sports suitable for girls and other suitable for boys. The same child also stated that children should get gender influenced prizes for participating in team sports. On the other hand, similar to Azzarito, et al.’s 2006 study of female high school students aged 14 to 18, the young girls in this study generally disagreed with the notion that sports are divided into gender typed roles but they also were more likely to choose sports that are stereotypically perceived as female sports.

The historical perspective of young girls participating in team sports still appears to play a role in sports with today's young girls. Historically women were discouraged to participate in many sports such as "football, rugby, cricket, and boxing" (Young & White, 2007, p. 5).

Participant 2, a team sports participant and Participant 3 an individual sport participant, described sports such as basketball and American football as sports that are not suitable for girls.

Within this study the girls had many suggestions for the improvement of team sports which challenged the traditional model of sports. This study found supporting evidence that safety is a large concern and danger is a reason for not playing certain sports (see also: Constantinou, et al., 2009). Participant 2 reported not wanting to play certain sports because they are dangerous and stated that sports such as American football are not suitable for girls because it is dangerous. Efforts to change rules to ensure safety while playing would increase the comfort of the girls and reduce the fear of injury.

Conclusive with the findings of the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) (2000) study of children aged 5-12, all of the girls in this study mentioned their own participation in individual sports such as gymnastics or swimming while only two out of four participated in team sports such as soccer or basketball. One of the girls in this study mentioned that she prefers to participate in playground activities such as skipping than play team sports. This study supported the idea found in CFLRI's (2000) study that girls generally choose different activities than boys.

Overall this study supported Welk's (1999) statement that "self-efficacy, perceived competence, enjoyment, some degree of parental influence and access to programs and equipment" (p. 11) (as cited by Crossman, 2008, p. 124) are the most common determinants of

whether a child will participate in physical activity. The findings of this study suggest that family and peer influence play a stronger role in influencing young girls participation in team sports than Welk had previously stated.

Based on my findings the feminist and queer theory lens explains the need for change and improvement in the area of girls' involvement in team sports. The feminist perspective values the idea that all girls have the right to the same benefits and privileges that boys have. Through this study it was noted that some girls did not feel socially and physically capable of exercising their rights to participate in team sports because of their gender. Also one girl even explained that she doubted her gender because she felt like she was challenging the definition of female by participating in team sports. This child illustrated concerns she had with the binary definitions society has developed to define male and female activities. Through society's gradual deconstruction of gender norms this child will be able to recognize that her gender does not influence whether or not she should participate in team sports.

The findings of this study show that there have been many advances over the years in the area of young girls participating in team sports but it also shows that there is a long way to go to attain a society where young girls feel socially accepted and valued in their ability to participate in team sports. With further support, encouragement, and awareness strong, young female athletes who excel at sports will no longer be labeled 'good for a girl' but instead 'good for an athlete'. Finally, this study demonstrates that our society must move beyond simply offering team sport programs to young girls. The young girls described opportunities that they had to participate but they need a venue to participate free of judgment so that they may refine their skills and develop confidence in their abilities.

Conclusion

Children are powerful research informants, through seeking the perspective of young children, children can provide insight that cannot be found through other means of research. If teachers and parents simply asked their children about issues and ways of solving the issues the parents and teachers would be able to solve problems much faster and easier. More research must be explored through the use of young girls' perspectives on team sport participation to gain a more comprehensive perspective on how to improve team sports for young girls.

Overall the children involved in this study noted many changes that can improve the likelihood that young girls will participate in team sports. More social progress needs to be made to alleviate the gender norms that prevent young girls from playing team sports. Since family and friends were described as the most common forms of encouragement or discouragement they are in the best position to make a change in the way young girls feel about playing team sports. In order to see young girls participating freely in team sports teachers and parents must make a conscious effort to encourage team sport participation for all children. Teachers and parents must be mindful of their personal (and often imposed) expectations, actions and words as well as other people's expectations, actions and words to ensure that children recognize that all children (regardless of gender) can and should enjoy the benefits of team sport participation.

Benefits of the study

This study was beneficial to all parties involved. The study benefited the young girls' by giving them a safe place to share their thoughts and feelings about participating in team sports. The interviews allowed the girls to think about and analyze their perception of participating in

team sports. The study also provided the researcher insight into methods that teachers and parents can use or avoid to support girls' participation in team sports.

Teachers and other educators can use the strategy and findings of this study to improve programs and teaching strategies. This study showed how valuable interviewing students can be to make simple changes in the programs. Teachers and educators should ask children about their perspectives. Teachers could make a physical education program which supports skill building and focuses on having fun instead of winning and losing. Encouragement proved to be an important characteristic in developing positive self-images which led to more involvement in sports. Teachers should encourage children to try new sports and provide positive feedback which is based on effort not only skill. The information found in this study can also be applied to boys participation in team sports. Boys should also be encouraged through opportunities and positive feedback. Opportunities for all children to practice and refine skills would boost overall competence and lead children to feel more comfortable participating. This study's findings have provided methods of improving boys and girls perceptions of others which will benefit sport participation.

Limitations of the study

Future research would help to build on the findings of this study. The data gathered from this study were limited to the information children were willing to provide to the interviewer. The children may have been influenced by their perception of what the interviewer wanted to hear. Further research would provide information from a larger sample. Since this study only focused on the specific experiences of four girls from one neighbourhood in Toronto they can not be generalized. To encourage young girls to participate in team sports teachers and parents

must remember that all children are unique and they must learn to understand what personally encourages individual girls to participate in team sports. With further exploration of the factors that were reported as influencing participation in team sports, a more generalized theory could be defined.

Key Recommendations and Implications for Practice

After conducting this study I have developed key recommendations for future research and practice. In order to fill in the gaps in the current research, investigators could replicate this study on a wider scale by using more participants. Interviewing more participants would assist in generalizing the results and estimating the broad impact on young females. In addition to interviewing more participants, the future investigations could ask childcare and classroom teachers to document the occurrences of sport or gender related teasing.

Based on the findings of this study I would recommend continued research involving young girls sharing their perspectives on how to improve team sports. Through this study I was able to access thoughtful and intellectual responses from young girls. Girls as young as six are not usually given the opportunity in research to provide their opinions and ideas but through this study they showed how they could assist research efforts.

Through analyzing the research data it has been determined that parents and teachers must provide children with encouragement, support, and opportunities to develop and refine their athletic skills in order to provide young girls the opportunity to confidently participate in team sports. Since lack of skill was listed as a reason for not participating in team sports, girls must be both given the opportunity to improve their skills and provided a fun non-competitive venue where they can feel confident and successful. From the perspectives of the girls interviewed

parents could attend the games and practices of their children. Parents could also practice and play sports with their children.

Children also stated that they need to feel safe and comfortable while playing sports both physically and emotionally. Safety measures should be put in place to insure that children will be safe and reduce the risk of injury. Teachers and parents must work with children to eliminate teasing to make team sports emotionally safe as well. Children should be informed of the effects bullying and teasing can have on other children. Teachers could implement bully-free school programs to reduce the risk of children being bullied because of their gender or skills. Children should be informed that both boys and girls can play sports through adult role models.

Through awareness of the abilities of women in sports children will be informed that females can be strong athletes and competitors. With more exposure to professional women's sports teams, boys and girls would be able to see women in the game instead of on the side cheering for men as they play. Female parents and teachers can set an example for young children by playing team sports and sharing their stories with children.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment Materials



School of Early Childhood Education

June, 2010

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian,

My name is Heather Christian. I am currently a student in the Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies in the School of Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University. In order to fulfill the requirements of the Early Childhood Studies program I am conducting a research assignment on participation of young girls in team sports.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your child to participate in an interview about her experience with team sports. In order to find the information for this study I am looking to interview girls aged 5 to 8 years of age that have either participated or not participated in team sports currently or in the past.

Participants will be interviewed at the childcare centre at the time determined by the parents between the hours of 4:00 and 6:30 pm from Monday to Friday about their experiences related to participating or not participating in team sports. The interview will take approximately fifteen minutes. The interview will involve children answering questions about their experience participating and team sports and experiences that have led to their decision in whether they would like to play team sports.

The choice to participate in the interviews is voluntary and will have no impact on future relations with your child's childcare centre or Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or are interested in your child participating in the study please contact Heather Christian at h3christ@ryerson.ca

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

Heather Christian



School of Early Childhood Education

Consent Agreement

Experiences with Team Sports

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators:

Heather Christian MA ECS candidate of Ryerson University

Supervising faculty Nicole Neverson PhD

Purpose of the Study:

As part of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies program at Ryerson University I am required to conduct a research project. I am conducting this study in effort to complete the research project requirement of my graduate program.

The purpose of this study is to discover the factors that encourage or discourage girls aged five to nine to participate in team sports. Discovering the factors that both encourage and discourage girls to participate in team sports will help educators to develop a more inclusive practice in team sports. The goal of my study is to give girls a voice and to use the collected data to inform teachers of ways to encourage young girls to participate in sports. This study will seek to understand the factors that influence a group of girls aged five to nine to participate or not participate in team sports by understanding the factors that discourage and encourage girls to participate in team sports, educators will be informed of what they are doing right, and what needs to be improved.

Description of the Study: Participants will be interviewed at the childcare centre at the time determined by the parents between the hours of 4:00 and 6:30pm through Monday to Friday about their experiences related to participating or not participating in team sports. The interview will take approximately fifteen minutes. The interview will involve children answering questions about their experience participating and team sports and experiences that have led to their decision in whether they would like to play team sports.

What is Experimental in this Study: None of the procedures in the process of making the book are experimental in nature.

Risks or Discomforts: It is possible that you or your child may wish to end the interview. It is possible that you or your child may be uncomfortable with your child telling the interviewer about her experiences or feelings about sports. You can choose not to answer a question or end your participation at any time, if you no longer wish for her to continue.

Benefits of the Study: This research project will benefit future practice by allowing researchers and teachers to learn from your child's experiences so that they may develop more inclusive team sport activities. This research will help to identify areas of improvement in the current situation so that children may feel more encouraged to participate in team sports. It is hoped that your child will benefit from sharing her ideas, feelings and experiences about participating in team sports by giving her an opportunity to reflect and develop a better understanding of her personal decisions.

Confidentiality: All recordings, transcripts and observation notes will be securely stored for the purpose of investigation in the primary investigators home. The only people who will receive access to the audio recordings, transcriptions and observation notes will be Heather Christian and Dr. Nicole Neverson. After September 2010 all data will be deleted, shredded or erased. Quotations from interviews may be used in the research findings but the child's name and identity will not be identified at any point throughout the research findings. Prior to publication the subject may review or edit the audio recordings or transcripts to insure the child's perspective is properly identified.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson or the

childcare centre. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Heather Christian

Dr. Nicole Nerverson

Telephone: 416-979-5000 ext 2603

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board

c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation

Ryerson University

350 Victoria Street

Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

416-979-5042

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, Ryerson University.

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to your child being in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Parent/Guardian (print)

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Please sign below if you give permission for your child to be audio-recorded during her interviews.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Name of Child (print)

Signature of Investigator

Date



School of Early Childhood Education

Assent Agreement

Child's agreement

My Experiences with Team Sports (Please write a check mark to all the sentences that are okay with you)

I am willing to talk, about my experiences with team sports _____

It's okay with me that:

1. Things I talk about will be written down. _____
2. I can stop the study at any time. One way I can do this is by saying "stop now" or I can say "next question." _____
3. I can end being part of the study at anytime without any questions being asked. _____
4. I can ask for my mom and/or my dad to present when we are talking. _____

My name _____

My signature _____

Today's date _____

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Do you play team sports?

What team sports do you play?

Do you think there are sports for girls and sports for boys?

If so what are they?

How are girls and boys treated in physical education class?

Do you think teachers have the same expectations of you and a boy?

Why do you play team sports? Why don't you play team sports?

Prompts: Who encourages you to play sports? How do they encourage you?

Who discourages you to play sports? How does he/she discourage you?

What made you want/ not want to play team sports?

What do you like/dislike about team sports?

If you could change anything about team sports what would it be?

If child doesn't play sports: What would you change about sports to make you want to play?

* Boys are also socialized to take on specific characteristics. From infancy boys are being socialized to develop 'male' characteristics which match the typical characteristics required to play sports. Boys who do not develop characteristics required for playing team sports may be considered less 'male'. Since boys and girls often develop their expectations of what it means to be male or female based on the opposite gender, both are also influenced by societal gender expectations and assumptions.

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