Exploring the Meaning and Experiences of Recreation for Young People and Parents Living with Lower Incomes

by

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the research was to explore the meaning and experiences of recreation for young people and parents who live with lower incomes.

Methods and Participants: I responded to the research purpose by speaking with ten youth (aged 13-18 years) and six parents living with lower incomes in a primarily affluent county (population 92,000) on the edge of a mid-sized city in Western Canada. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and writing practices that additionally informed the analytic process.

'Findings': Three papers are presented in the dissertation to show the varied meaning and experiences of sport for young people and parents living with lower incomes. The first paper highlights how young people's ways of being were shaped by their material and familial circumstances, impacting their participation in and relationship to sport. The second paper draws attention to the exclusionary practices of sport that are rationalized through demands for narrow forms of 'ability'. The final paper shifts attention to the parents' experiences of supporting the recreation involvement of their children while living with lower incomes.

Concluding Comments and Significance: The study represents an exploration of the ways class relations are (re)produced in and through recreation to fill a prominent gap in the current academic literature. The three papers collectively show the similar and divergent ways the study participants subjectively experienced recreation in relation to their lower incomes. In particular, the dissertation highlights crucial areas of change to expand the ways recreation is currently provided so that it can be meaningful for more youth. The dissertation is particularly relevant for academics, practitioners and policy-makers who are interested in challenging the narrow and exclusionary ways recreation is often provided.

Preface

The research project, of which this dissertation is part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board on two occasions for the consecutive stages of the project (partnership development and research phase). Approval was granted for "Physical Activity for Children in Edmonton" (Pro 00018518) on December 20 2011 and for "Increasing Physical Activity for Opportunities for Youth" (Pro 00028152) on February 7 2013.

Paper Two of this dissertation has been published as Kingsley, B. C., & Spencer-Cavaliere, N., "The Exclusionary Practices of Youth Sport", *Social Inclusion, 3*(3), 24-38. I was responsible for the data collection, analysis and preparation of the manuscript. Dr. Spencer-Cavaliere contributed to manuscript edits.

Dedication

For Ava, Awen and Carys.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere and wholehearted thanks to the people who gave me their time to participate in the study. As researchers, we don't always fully appreciate what it takes to go through the process of taking part in an interview. You each took a chance in meeting with me and for this I have both gratitude and admiration. Thank you for sharing your insights and experiences so openly. I have learned and continue to learn so much from our conversations.

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Prologue

Blurring the Lines of Separation in the Stories We Tell

I believe that the projects we undertake related to other people's lives are inextricably connected to the meanings and values we are working through in our own lives.

(Bochner, 2001; 138)

Through self-reflexivity, I have come to understand this dissertation as a product of the interaction between my own subjectivities and the stories and experiences of those with whom I engaged during the research (van Stapele, 2014). The text is therefore a co-constructed space that has derived from a process of embodied exploration and discovery (Nencel, 2014). The moments of anger, hope and apathy written into the dissertation reflect the tumultuous relationship I have had with recreation since I was a child. Once a source of absolute joy, recreation has increasingly become a social space through which I am now more likely to experience feelings of frustration and disconnect. The embodied fieldwork I engaged in through this project was therefore largely in opposition to what I perceive has become a dominant model for recreation delivery and consumption – one characterized by professionalism and exclusivity – and a form of recreation that drastically departs from the version I grew up to love.

Interweaved through this evolving history is an ever-prominent culture of individualism that has crept into many aspects of my life and with which I have felt increasingly at odds. Reflected in this culture, I have seen the pursuit of individual achievement privileged again and again at the expense of collective intention and an ethic of care. The three papers were, subsequently, also written against this culture of individualism in the hope that they can be a small part of a larger movement toward a more collective future.

By adopting a community-based and collaborative approach, the research process reflected these collective and relational values. With the intention of creating mutually beneficial and contextually relevant knowledge, I developed relationships with several

community-based practitioners and together we formed and nurtured a partnership over a two-year period. The partnership comprised a core group of four partners – three recreation practitioners and myself – who came together around a shared curiosity and desire for change. The aim of the project was driven by an underlying desire to enhance the ways recreation is currently being provided and supported in Alberta.

As a common interest, our research collective[1] set out to explore the meaning of *physical activity* for young people and parents who lived with lower incomes in an affluent community. *Physical activity*, I came to realize, was a rather redundant academic term that I had imposed on the partnership. It was a term that came to be switched with *recreation* in conversations with partners and the larger practice world[2]. *Recreation* is therefore used as a broad term describing a range of activities mentioned by the study participants that included sport, dance, library programs, biking, and school trips.

The project's research question was important to those of us within the partnership for various professional reasons – academic and practice-based – but our investment in the project was also largely personal. My own reason for exploring this research question was at least partially fuelled by a sense of injustice. One of the most recent sources of this injustice came from a research study exploring the impact of a particular fee assistance program intended to aid the sport participation of children and youth. It was also a study in which I was complicit.

When it came to writing up the findings to be published in a journal (the underlying academic-driven purpose of the study despite alternative claims), the end product did not reflect what I had learned from the parents and grandparents with whom I had spoken. The words "benefits" and "challenges", chosen to thematically organize the data, reduced parents' and grandparents' experiences to a story about personal struggles that could, it was purported, be overcome for the sake of sport.

Ultimately, this presentation of families' experiences did not capture nor challenge the ways people are disproportionately and acutely impacted by political whims

[1] The use of "our" and "we" throughout the dissertation refers to the community-based research partnership.

[2] While writing the first two papers, the term *sport* seemed most appropriate to capture the experiences shared by the young people and parents in a way that would be clearest to readers.

and ill-considered policy, marginalized and pathologized, in a society that generally refuses to acknowledge class at all (Bourdieu, 1987; Bairner, 2007). Such stories serve to maintain a hegemonic status quo while simultaneously positioning individuals as agents of their own change. Moving forward, I endeavoured to be more careful in the telling of stories – my own and those of others.

> *Some stories enhance life; others degrade it. So we must be careful about the stories we tell, about the ways we define ourselves and other people.*
>
> (Burton Blatt, 1987)

To tell a more careful story while advancing current understanding about the meaning of recreation for young people and parents living with lower incomes, this dissertation was written with the intention of moving outside the lens of individualism that has been dominant in the field of psychology over the years (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerd, 1998) and which maintains a particularly strong presence in sport psychology today.

As Henriques et al. (1998) have highlighted, the lens of individualism so often adopted in (sport) psychology focuses in on an individual while typically setting them apart from their social surroundings, creating somewhat of an individual-social dualism. When context is considered (for example, the impact of social agents and so-called "barriers" on sport involvement), cognitive factors, such as choice and motivation, tend to be privileged in explanations for the ways an individual behaves (Wright, MacDonald & Groom, 2003). Such explications regarding human behaviour ignore how individuals are inscribed with the values and histories of particular cultures that differentially privilege them in ways that play out in their day-to-day lives.

> *The question of who we are is tied to the memory of who we have been and the imagination of what we might become, suggesting a process which is at once historical and indeterminate, the result of particular kinds of reflection on what human beings are, what we can know and what is the good life we might desire.*
>
> (Henriques et al., 1998: xvii)

It was necessary to shift away from the focus on individualism that was so ingrained in my researching ways of thinking but was insufficient for understanding the ways the young people and parents in the study experienced recreation and how these experiences were shaped by their individual and shared cultural histories. Further to increasing understanding about the topic itself, my intention in doing so also came from a desire to reinsert some political dialogue into a discipline that has tended to shy away from such conversations, preferring instead to maintain its reputation as the apolitical and amicable dinner guest. In order to do so, I began to write against the individual-social dualism (trying my best to ignore the sense of vulnerability that arose from the fear of being exposed as an imposter), and embraced the inherent messiness of writing a dissertation that was driven by an exploration of subjectivity.

I chose interpretive description as a research method for the project because of its potential to generate knowledge that can bridge academic and professional contexts. Although the research partners did not inform this choice of method, they were involved in the development of the research purpose and scope (e.g. choosing to do interviews to generate data), the recruitment process, the creation of the interview guides, and the analysis for earlier forms of knowledge translation. These collective processes resulted in the co-development of a 'tool kit' relating to (in)accessibility for practitioners along with a series of webinars, workshops and panel discussions to share what we learned. These early stages of interpretation also helped to inform the process of writing the dissertation, which I wrote independently of the partnership.

Before introducing the three papers, it is first necessary to provide a sense of the context within which this project was established. The province of Alberta, characterized by a petro culture and longstanding conservative government, provided a particularly unique political environment for exploring class relations. As the province with the greatest level of income inequality across Canada (Jones, 2014), living with a lower income is something that more and more people are experiencing in Alberta at the same time as social support programs and services are rapidly diminishing under a neoliberal agenda. The community in which the study took place provided an interesting microcosm within the greater provincial context. It is primarily (although not exclusively) an affluent

and white community that has seen rapid growth as a result of "oil money"[3]. Despite being considered the equivalent to a city and urban service area because of its size (population of 65,000), the suburban core is located at the edge of a mid-sized Western Canadian city, functioning as a bedroom community. It is situated within a larger county (total population 92,000) that is comprised of residential acreages, industrial development, and some rural agriculture (agribusiness and family farms).

The participants of the study lived across the county, some within the suburban core and others who came from outside the urban center for services. All of the participants appeared to be white and had incomes that were below or close to the low-income cut-off (LICO). The visible affluence in the community tended to render invisible those who resided with lower incomes within it, increasing the stigma attached to living with lower incomes and inhibiting the allocation (and advocacy for the necessity) of resources and services for those who needed them.

Within this greater political and social environment, recreation itself has been drastically transformed during a neoliberal political era (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Over a period of 40 years, recreation has predominantly become a luxury affordable to few people while simultaneously being underpinned by a philosophy of individual responsibility (for one's participation) (Burrows & Wright, 2007). These factors have obvious consequences for people living with lower incomes whether or not they desire to be involved in recreation due to the notion that they *should* desire it as part fulfillment of their duty as 'good' citizens. Despite this dramatic shift, the experiences young people and parents have with recreation in light of all these factors have not been explored in any real depth further to the almost exclusive attention paid to the availability of economic resources to cover the cost of participation (Penney, 2001; Bairner, 2007).

The three papers that comprise the dissertation collectively reintroduce class relations into a conversation about recreation, beyond only a matter of economic resources. Through each paper, I seek to show how the meaning of recreation for young people and parents was socially constructed and influenced by their individual and shared cultural histories. Specifically, paper 1 highlights how young people's ways of being

[3] "Oil money" was a term used by some recreation practitioners I spoke with during the project

were shaped by their material and familial circumstances, impacting their participation in and relationship to sport. Paper 2 draws attention to the exclusionary practices of sport that are rationalized through demands for narrow forms of 'ability'. Last, paper 3 shifts attention to the parents' experiences of supporting the recreation involvement of their children while living with lower incomes.

As the material circumstances of the study participants were so varied, the dissertation provides only a limited glimpse into the heterogeneous experiences of families living with lower incomes. The dissertation is therefore intended to raise some important social issues that require further exploration and provide some angles from which to view a much larger story about the meaning of recreation. Collectively, these papers show the similar and divergent ways the study participants subjectively experienced recreation in relation to their lower incomes. My hope in writing these papers is to shed light on the ways class relations are (re)produced in and through recreation to provide a foundation of knowledge for challenging existing hegemonic structures and imagining new ways of fostering recreation communities that are enjoyed by more people.

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Paper One

Unequal Playing Fields: The Varied Meanings and Experiences of Sport for Young People Living With Lower Incomes

Those who talk of equality of opportunity forget
that social games … are not "fair games"

(Bourdieu, 2000: 214-215*)*

So All Kids Can Play

The assumption that sport provides a level playing field for young people to enjoy and succeed is wide spread (Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). This meritocratic myth reproduces the belief that all young people have similar opportunities to experience the multitude of profits (e.g. enjoyment, acclaim, friendship) that sport has to offer, if they try hard enough (Brohm, 1978; Spaaij, 2009). The ideological appeal of an equal playing field is particularly palpable in stories of young people living with lower incomes, for whom upward social mobility is presented as a real possibility through sports participation (Karen & Washington, 2010). A lower income, as it is referred to here, is not simply an objective categorization but is instead considered to be a set of interrelated material conditions[4] that are subjectively experienced (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013).

Despite wide belief that sport is a level playing field, researchers have begun to challenge this notion by demonstrating that sport opportunities are not equally available to all young people. This work has shown that young people who live with lower incomes participate less in organized sport than those with higher incomes (Collins & Kay, 2014; Hylton & Totten, 2013). In an attempt to understand this participation trend, researchers have documented the structural constraints that prevent the involvement of young people living with lower incomes by highlighting the limitations of money, time, and transport as primary barriers to sport engagement (e.g. Donnelly & Harvey, 1996; Holt, Kingsley, Tink & Scherer, 2011; Steenhuis, Nooy, Moes & Schuit, 2009).

[4] "Material conditions" refers to an individual's economic status that affects their consciousness and opportunities, for example, their education, family structure, or their patterns of consumption (Bairner, 2007).

Although this research indicates that access to sport opportunities might be far from equal, the nature of sport itself and its role in creating and furthering this disparity is rarely implicated or questioned. Presenting sport as neutral in these ways maintains the belief that once young people can gain access to it, sport is a level playing field. This notion is often reproduced through messaging that promotes the idea that when financial-related barriers are reduced (largely through fee assistance programs), then *all kids can play*[5] and benefit from what sport has to offer. In addition to presenting sport as impartial, these messages also depict young people, regardless of income, as a largely homogenous group with similar desires for organized sport (Donnelly & Harvey, 1996). However, sport is not equal and young people do not experience it in exactly the same ways (Bourdieu, 1991). As such, there is a need to understand what lies beneath the rhetoric by exploring the ways in which young people living with lower incomes might differently experience sport to critically inform the delivery of opportunities and programs.

The Multiple Meanings of Sport

Given the popularity of sport in Canadian society, it is likely that most young people have some relationship with sport, regardless of their material circumstances (Spaaij, Magee & Jeanes, 2014). The idea that youth either fully participate in sport or they are entirely removed from it is therefore misleading (MacDonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson & McCuaig, 2012). It is more probable that sport has some meaning to all young people and that this varies according to the role it plays or has the potential to play in their lives. Bourdieu (1991) has suggested that this meaning is likely to be shaped by a young person's material conditions. Although some empirical evidence exists to support this viewpoint, our understanding of the meaning of sport to young people living with lower incomes is quite limited.

Studies by Coakley and White (1999) and Quarmby and Dagkas (2013) have explored the meaning of sport and physical activity for youth living with lower incomes. Coakley and White interviewed fifty-nine young people (aged between 13– 20), a large

[5] This slogan, as an adaptation from the title, is used by a particular fee assistance program but reflects a similar rhetoric across a range of recreation-based messaging.

number who lived with lower incomes, to understand the decision-making processes that influenced their sport involvement. Study findings indicated that sport had rather diverse meanings across the young participants. Notably, sport did not appeal to many of the youth in the study, particularly the young women who found sport to be childish. However, the influence of the young people's material conditions in shaping these meanings was not fully explored. In contrast, the study by Quarmby and Dagkas (2013) more thoroughly considered the impact of material conditions on the meaning of physical activity through group interviews with 24 young people between the ages of 11-14. They found that the material conditions of participants' lives, such as being raised in a lone parent family with a lower income, limited the extent to which physical activity had value in their lives.

These studies provide valuable insight into the varied meanings sport might hold for young people living with lower incomes. They also raise important questions about whether sport actually matters to young people living with lower incomes and in what ways. However, there remains a lack of knowledge about how young people experience sport and the role of material conditions in shaping these experiences. To add depth and breadth to understanding the meaning of sport for youth living with lower incomes, I engaged with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and in particular the theoretical concepts of habitus, capital and field.

Beneath the Even Surface

Bourdieu's thought (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; 1991; 2010; 2013; Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992) helps to disrupt the idea that sport provides a level playing field in which all young people have the opportunity to gain the profits of participation, while at the same time affording a deeper understanding of the ways material conditions might shape a young person's experiences of sport. In particular, Bourdieu's use (1991) of the concept *habitus* – an individual's schemata of appreciation and dispositions –offers an explanation for the ways people might differ in the extent to which they align with sport in terms of their values and ways of being. Habitus shapes a young person's preferences for sport (or lack thereof) and the extent to which s/he performs in ways that are valued in a sporting field. The more a young person's habitus aligns with (and is valued in) the field of sport, the more likely s/he is to acquire capital in that setting. As an example,

when a young person is familiar with and has had previous experiences in sport, he or she might be more likely to align in ways that are valued which in turn acts as a form of cultural capital.

Capital, in its most basic sense, describes the resources possessed by a person that take on value in a specific field (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital cannot therefore be understood unless in relation to a particular cultural field. A cultural field, such as sport, is a social space defined by series of rules and practices (rituals, conventions, etc.) that are reproduced by the struggle for power between groups or individuals in their attempts to determine what constitutes capital within that field (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). Because capital is unequally distributed across different fields, social agents (or young people in a sports setting) seek to differentiate themselves from others in the field in order to reduce the competition for capital. As such, cultural fields are stratified social spaces in which individuals are hierarchically organized according to the extent to which they align with the dominant discourses in the field.

There are several forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that are relevant for this paper – economic, cultural and social capital. I describe these using sport-related examples to show how their unequal distribution may varyingly impact the experiences of young people in sport. Economic capital refers to material resources related to wealth such as time and money. Young people living with lower incomes will, quite obviously, have less economic capital to invest in the costly pursuit of sport. Cultural capital, acquired through performing in ways that are celebrated in a particular field, is frequently considered a form of "ability" in a sporting context. Cultural capital is therefore often tied up with the capacity to acquire social capital due to the fact that social capital (such as gaining approval from coaches) is more likely to be gained if a young person possesses skills and knowledge that are celebrated in the setting. In these three forms, capital can be invested, acquired and traded in and through sport as a specific field, which necessarily determines what is considered capital and what is not.

Bourdieu's theory provides a useful framework to consider the ways a young person's material conditions might differently shape their experiences of sport. In particular, his work shows how sport is an unequal playing field through which capital is varyingly accrued and converted. To move towards the possibility of a better version of

sport, it is necessary to understand the ways stratification is reproduced through sport and the ways this impacts young people living with lower incomes. It is only with this knowledge that we can start to see the specific ways privilege is maintained and consider areas for possible change.

Such research can also uncover possible explanations for young peoples' decisions regarding sport. This would enable practitioners to better support those who desire it and more thoroughly understand the motivations of those who do not. Without this knowledge, young people, particularly those living with lower incomes will continue to be understood as largely homogenous – individuals who *should* desire sport as an inherently positive aspect of their transition into adulthood (Coakley, 2011). As part of this same discourse, those who do not participate in sport when fee assistance is made available will continue to be cast as deviant (MacDonald, 2003; Wright, MacDonald, & Groom, 2003). Despite the possibilities of further understanding, little empirical research exists that examines these social issues (Lareau, 2011; Spaiij, 2009). In light of this, the overall purpose of the present paper was to explore the meaning and experiences of sport for young people living with lower incomes to further understand the decisions they make, with careful attention to the ways sport itself is an unequal playing field.

Narrative Inquiry

To work effectively with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field, I chose narrative inquiry as a method of analysis and style of representation for the present paper. Combined, Bourdieu's concepts and narrative inquiry provided a lens for gaining insight into and communicating the ways an individual might be influenced by their social context (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a). In this research, it provided insight into the ways the meaning of sport for the young people in the study might be shaped by their material circumstances. Narrative inquiry in particular offers a way of thinking about the stories people tell that reveal underlying narratives about who they are and how they are shaped by past experiences and anticipated futures (Randall & Pheonix, 2009). An understanding of the ways young people make sense of sport in relation to their own lives was therefore enhanced using narrative inquiry.

Community-Based Research

A community-based approach informed the research process to increase the capacity (expertise, resources, knowledge) of the project (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). The project partnership included myself as the research lead, two accessibility coordinators from a municipal recreation organization and a youth program manager at a provincial non-profit organization. Partners met once a month over a two-year period and co-developed the scope of the project which included the research questions, data collection techniques, timelines, responsibilities, goals, and ethics (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Although the data have not been included in this study, the project also involved interviews with 27 practitioners (service providers and decision makers). The information gathered through these interviews in combination with the regular partnership meetings allowed me to develop a better sense of the social and political context within which the study participants and the project itself were located. This increased the relevance of the project scope (e.g. the research questions) and informed the analysis of the participant data presented in this paper. For example, my knowledge of the community (available services, population demographics and a general 'sense' of the social space) was heightened by the many visits I made to the area to meet with research participants.

Participants

The current paper draws on data from interviews with 10 young people (aged 13-18) and six mothers. The youth participants responded to letters inviting them to take part in an individual interview or group interview with their parents. In total, letters were sent to 150 young people whose parents had applied for and received fee assistance from the municipality to subsidize the cost of recreation. The participants were all, therefore, living with lower incomes but their actual incomes at the time of the interview were unknown.

The study participants lived in a county (population 92,000) on the edge of a mid-sized Western Canadian city. Some came from within the suburban core and others came from the more rural areas outside. The community was predominantly affluent, which seemed to heighten the diversity between participants in terms of the ways they had come to and subjectively experienced their current material circumstances. Some parents had

previously lived with higher incomes and their lower incomes were a result of family separation, death and/or disability. For other participants, their lower incomes had been more sustained. The young people consequently varied in the amount of time they (and their parents) had lived with lower incomes. Five of the parents were single or solo mothers, meaning that they did not live with a partner and/or were raising their children alone.

Generating Data

Data were produced through individual and group interviews and note taking. I adopted several forms of note taking throughout the study, which included methodological, theoretical and personal notes (Richardson, 2000). Notes were recorded after every partner meeting, following each interview and at sporadic times throughout the process. Writing in these ways stimulated reflexivity, allowed me to make improvements to the interviews and research process in general, and provided a way to draw connections between the interview data, partner conversations, and theory.

Returning again to the interview process, six of the young people chose to do a group interview with their parents (one of which was also with a sibling), one chose to do a group interview with a friend, and another did an individual interview. In line with the view that young people have the capacity to make informed decisions about their own interests (e.g., Flicker & Guta, 2008; Roddy Holder, 2008), the young people could consent to an interview without the additional consent of a parent and three chose this option. The interviews were semi-structured and as such, predetermined interview questions were used as guide to stimulate conversation about the young people's experiences of physical activity. The term "physical activity" was used because I felt it would best capture the range of young people's experiences and encompassed sport, exercise, and play. Interview questions asked young people what physical activity meant to them, how important they felt it was to their lives, the nature of their participation, the opportunities available to them, and the extent to which it met their desires. Through these questions, participants often discussed sport-like activities, such as hockey, gymnastics, soccer, dance, and basketball. I asked follow-up questions to explore these experiences in more depth. Parents were also invited into the discussion about their

children's involvement. The interviews each lasted approximately an hour and were audio taped and transcribed for analysis.

Analysis and Representation

Writing was used as a form of inquiry for the current paper. As such it was an equal part of the process as it was the final product (Richardson, 2000). Various forms of writing aided the analytic process by encouraging experimentation. Methodological notes were written to record the process of forming the partnership, conducting the interviews, and engaging with the analysis. Theoretical notes stimulated connections between the data and theoretical concepts provided by Bourdieu and other authors. This process became a lens through which to see relationships that may not have been evident using other means. Personal notes were interspersed throughout all of the other forms of writing, documenting the more affective side of the research process – the struggles, the ecstasies, the uncertainties and the general ponderings of my own process. This form of writing in particular encouraged greater reflexivity about my position in the research process (Richardson, 2000).

During the early stages of analysis, I found the interview data to be extremely "messy". The information provided by participants refused to be neatly organized using conventional methods of analysis and re-presentation in a way that would maintain its depth, complexity and variance. Narrative inquiry allowed the space to explore the messy and complex nature of human lives through the process of writing (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b), while simultaneously allowing clarity of representation in order to communicate the different meanings of sport for the young people in the study. Narrative therefore provided a tool for illuminating the varied meanings of sport in a way I could not have otherwise done (Smith & Sparkes, 2009a).

While using writing throughout the project to aid the analytic process, specific techniques were also adopted to consider the interview data in different ways. Initial immersion with the interview transcripts increased my familiarity with the data and provided a basic understanding of what, at least on the surface, the young people and parents might have been telling me through their stories. Through a constant comparison process, relationships were drawn between segments of the data and compared for

similarities and differences. Moving between the data and theory and through conversations with others, these relationships were challenged and modified in an iterative way, continually shaped and re-shaped over time. Through an experimental writing process, these ideas were re-presented in different forms to consider how they might be communicated in the most impactful way. I referred to two questions provided by Richardson (2000) to guide this process and assess which style of representation to use (*Who is my audience? What are my purposes?)*. Ultimately, I decided a story telling approach aimed at an academic and practice-based audience would most appropriately highlight the ways the young people in the study differently experienced sport (Smith & Sparkes, 2009b). Through this approach, the analysis itself was presented as the story (Bochner, 2001). As such, Bourdieu's theory was interwoven throughout the narrative.

Using creative analytic practices (Richardson, 2000), the stories of three teenagers – Stacey, Joey and Nathan – were created and presented through three distinct vignettes. Creative non-fiction provided a tool for taking data and re-telling it in new ways to engage readers and connect them to the text (Goss, 2013). Fictional strategies were used to transform research findings into a storied form (Smith, 2013). Although the three characters and their stories are largely fictional, they represent an amalgamation of the data provided by all the research participants. The quotes provided in the vignettes are modified frames of data taken straight from the interview transcripts. As such, through the narrative process, the interviews were recast to produce a story about the young people's experiences in sport and the ways these were tied to their material conditions (Griffin & Pheonix, 2014). Following on from the vignettes, I theorize the similarities and differences between the three young people in a way that could not be done in the vignettes.

Stacey

Stacey had done some sport growing up, but hadn't enjoyed it. She played soccer when she was younger and was part of a dance program for a short time but didn't feel comfortable in either. She wasn't even sure why she tried it. It wasn't as though her mum and dad cared one way or another. When her dad was around he sometimes watched

wrestling and hockey on the TV, but it wasn't something they did together. Stacey's dad left home when she was 8 and after that, sport became almost non-existent in their house.

By the time she turned 17, Stacey no longer lived with her mum, and had moved in with her boyfriend. She didn't want to end up with the same limited opportunities her mum and sisters had. Her mum had raised three young girls on her own after Stacey's dad left, and her sister became pregnant before finishing high school (and with it, as Stacey perceived, lost all the potential opportunities high school offered for a better life). She was going to be the first to finish high school and get a good job. Sport didn't factor into that plan. It required too much of everything – time, money and energy she didn't have. Besides, it had never been worth the effort. Her experiences in dance were enough of an indication of that.

Stacey's dance career had been short-lived. She spoke about the circumstances of her last dance class and the reasons she didn't go back. The instructor, a new guy she had never seen before, came into the studio and started giving orders. "He's telling everyone to sit down", she recalls, "And then he picks me out of the line and tells me to dance, by myself." Stacey had tried to go unnoticed, sit down with the others like he said, but he deliberately picked her out. She couldn't do it. Stacey wasn't like the other kids who seemed to love showing off. She hated doing things in front of other people. "So now I'm standing in the middle and I'm supposed to dance by myself. I was so uncomfortable."

She told the instructor she didn't want to do it. Well, she didn't exactly tell him that, but it was pretty obvious to everyone that she wasn't okay with it. The more she refused to do what he said, the angrier he got. "He was getting mad at me, I can't even remember what for." He couldn't understand why she wouldn't just do what he said. Something about her had irritated him from the moment he walked in.

The thought of standing in the middle of the room with everyone watching her made her feel sick. She had to get out of the studio and away from him. As she moved towards the exit, she remembered, "He blocked the door and everything, so I couldn't leave". Stacey was starting to panic. She recalled The Incident that had happened when she was younger. It made her feel lightheaded thinking about it. She needed to get out of there. With tears streaming down her face, she screamed at him to let her go, pushing past to get to the door.

"I got kicked out", Stacey said, recalling what happened afterwards. As if she needed any convincing not to go back, Stacey's mum got a phone call the next day from the administrator. "Disruptive" was the word they had used. She was told not to return to the class.

Stacey had also tried soccer when she was younger but she hadn't fit in there either. "I hated the people", she said. All of them looked the same with their preppy clothes and straight blonde hair. "They were really catty" she recalled, "They had little cliques and stuff like that." She didn't want to be part of their group anyway. She hated how immature they were. The coaches were just as bad. "They get angry at you", she explained, "if you don't do what they want". She just wanted to be left alone, to go at her own pace and do things she felt comfortable with. After a few weeks she decided she'd had enough. "I remember standing there on the field thinking, I really don't want to be here". That was the last time she played.

Over the years, she increasingly distanced herself from sport. Aside from everything else, participating meant taking orders from other people. "I just like doing my own thing", she explained. She also didn't have any desire to keep up with their unrealistic scheduling. Living with her boyfriend meant that she needed to work while attending high school to pay rent. "It just isn't possible with my own schedule", she said. Between work and school, there was little time for anything else, let alone scheduled sport.

Stacey had seen the types of people who played sport in her community. "They come from wealthy families", she said, "They are given everything they need." Their wealth gave them freedom. "They can be young and sporty, and do what they want", she said. They didn't have other things to worry about like she did. She drew from her own experiences. "People who haven't had those privileges have to grow up a lot faster", she said, "They have to work for what they have."

Any flicker of desire to play sport had long been extinguished. The older she got, the more juvenile it seemed. "I'm grown up now" she said, "so I've got higher priorities than going out of my way to be physically active." Sport, quite frankly, seemed a little stupid. She didn't resonate with it at all. The most Stacey

ever did these days was go to the gym when she could get a free trial (and even then, the idea was usually better than the reality of going).

Joey

Joey was 16 years old and lived with his mum, Sherri, and younger brother. Joey and his brother didn't see their dad. Sherri had left Joey's father while the boys were still young and moved her family to a temporary shelter. They had since transitioned into a housing cooperative. There had been no room for sport in their lives in the immediate years since the family's separation. It was only when life eventually settled down that Joey's mum could start to look for opportunities for her sons to play sport. They had expressed an interest and she thought it would be good for them to be involved.

Joey had played hockey and basketball over the years, but never for any sustained period of time. Sometimes he enjoyed it, but more times than not, the coaches expected too much. He wasn't sure if he wanted to play structured sport at all anymore. Similar to Stacey, he found it a bit much in terms of the scheduling. "It was a lot", he said, "four days a week, sometimes up to six, and at least 2 hours a day". He found it tough to keep up with sport when he had so many other things going on in his life. He preferred to play on his own terms.

Joey's brother, Braden, had also played basketball but with a different team. Sherri supported her sons' involvement in sport as much as she could. She applied for fee assistance to cover the costs of playing, though it barely covered the registration. She also drove them to the practices and games. She recalled how difficult it had been when they were both playing on school teams. "I was driving Braden to his practice for 6.45 in the morning and then picking them both up again at 6 o'clock at night when Joey's practice was over." Playing school sports was impossible for kids whose parents couldn't pick them up afterwards. "There's no public transportation" she reflected, "Factors another thing in doesn't it?"

Chauffeuring two children to different sports practices several times a week was an arduous task for any parent. For Sherri, who worked full time and was doing it alone, it often bordered on the impossible. It wasn't just practices and games either. There were also the tournaments and bingos and bottle-drives and end-of-season parties. Sherri was a

support worker and on occasion, was required to work in the evenings. During these times, she couldn't pick Joey up from practice. "I had to miss a few things", Joey explained. With a sense of resignation, he added, "But I came to everything I could".

The following season, Joey's basketball coach pulled him aside during the first practice. "He asked me what my commitment level would be", Joey recalled, "because he said last year I wasn't committed." Joey was hurt by the insinuation. He wasn't committed – that's what they'd all been thinking. "I tried to explain to them but," he tailed off. "They don't understand the situation", his mum said, finishing his sentence. Any attempt at an explanation seemed to make no difference. The coaches and the players on the team thought Joey didn't give enough of himself to the team. "I was pretty upset", he remembered.

After the conversation with his coach, Joey decided basketball wasn't for him anymore. It bothered him that they all took it so seriously. "The kids on my team, they think basketball is everything and you can't do anything else", he said, "I have never really been that competitive". It wasn't just the players and coaches either. The parents were the same. They were there every time the team played, yelling stuff from the bleachers, as though they knew everything. "I just don't really associate with those people" he said frustrated, "I get mad at them because I don't really see the reason why you need to be competitive." To Joey, there was more to life than sport.

Joey's commitment to sporting practices had also been questioned when he played hockey. As he got older, the coaches put pressure on him and the other players to start hitting. "It started to get more and more" he explained, "especially the second last year I played, it was all about hitting." Every practice was the same – hit, hit, hit. It got to the stage where it seemed like hitting was all the coaches cared about. Joey was reluctant to do it. He hated the aggression of hitting and didn't understand why it was necessary. "I'm just not that kind of person", he reflected. The coaches were frustrated when he refused to play the way they wanted. During one practice on the ice, he missed the chance to hit one of his teammates against the boards. "They were getting on me, getting mad at me", he recalled. He avoided the stares he was getting from the sidelines and skated away with his head down. The head coach jumped up off the bench. "You think you know more than us, Joey?" he yelled after him. The coach started to bench him for games. He was eventually

cut from the team entirely. “That was probably the reason I was cut”, he speculated, “I wasn’t hitting guys”.

After several years of persisting with organized sport, Joey had decided enough was enough. “I think this is my last year”, he said, “I didn’t enjoy myself this season”. He elaborated, “I did fine and all, but I’m just kind of passed the competitive thing.” Playing on a team wasn’t fun anymore. It was okay from time to time but the heavy schedules and seriousness of the whole thing were too much. “I just want to go out and have fun”, he said, “Just shoot around and not have someone telling me what to do.” Similar to Stacey, Joey didn’t feel like playing on someone else’s terms. “I just want to go do my own thing”, he said. His mum, Sherri, supported his decision but was disappointed there weren’t any opportunities to play sport that were less competitive and demanded less investment. After all, it wasn’t as though Joey didn’t enjoy playing sport. Not only a lack of inclination, they also did not have the resources for serious competitions. “We’re not going to dedicate our lives and start travelling and doing competitions and things like that” she said, “We could never afford it”. After deciding to quit basketball and organized sport altogether, Joey spent more time shooting hoops and biking around town with friends. He liked having the freedom to choose what he wanted to do on any given day.

Nathan

Nathan was 17 years old and came from a sporty family. He grew up surrounded by sport, watching it on the television, throwing a ball around outside and playing Little League. “My dad was a big sports guy. He kind of pushed the sports a lot”, he recalled. His dad, Dave, had introduced him to football. It was something they did together. Although Dave had died when Nathan was only 12, he was still a large influence on Nathan’s sporting ambitions. Playing football and other sports was a way for Nathan to feel connected to his dad. “He’s not around anymore, so I kind of feel like I’m still with him through sports” he shared, “I kind of feel closer to him that way.”

Nathan’s mum, Louise, was also a big influence in his sporting life. She enjoyed being active herself. “My mum was a key factor”, he reflected, “she always knew when try-outs were and when something was happening, so I got to experience a lot of stuff.”

As a solo parent and with only one income, Louise sometimes struggled to find the time and money for Nathan's sport. "There was a whole lot I missed out on, nothing like significant, just the funds for it, it was pretty expensive to play sports". Despite the demands, Louise tried to make it work. She had help from family friends whose sons were also in sport. They would give Nathan rides sometimes. "She figured it out as best she could", Nathan explained.

As a core part of their family life, sport felt familiar to Nathan. He connected with sport in a way he did not with other activities. It was a place he felt successful and competent. He played a range of sports across recreation leagues, school teams, and casually at the recreation centre where he and his friends could drop in and use the gym. "I just like it", he stated simply, "I'm not a huge school guy, but I just like sports." He didn't have an explanation for why he chose sports. They just made him feel good.

Nathan played football on his school team. He resonated with the culture of football, enjoying competitive elements of the game. "I like the aggression of it" he explained, "It's kind of a rough-and-tumble sport." Not all the aspects of competitive football had come easily to Nathan, however. The structured nature of sport was initially at odds with who he was. "I used to be the casual, go-with-the-flow kind of kid" he reflected, "but I had to learn to get used to the structure and how people run stuff".

Nathan learned early on in sport that coaches rewarded players who were invested. He showed up to all the practices and games, listened to the coaches, followed their advice, and put everything he had into playing. He knew what it took to toe the line. "It's all about how you play, and the way you talk to people." Coaches were the people he needed to impress. "They're a huge, huge factor in sports" he considered, "It goes farther than the field or the court, or the ice." He worked hard to advance his ability and committed in the ways he had been taught were valuable. In turn, the coaches rewarded his dedication to their practices. "They saw I was committed", he said. "If you invest your time", he explained, "then they invest time in you".

Nathan's coaches helped him out when he got stuck with rides to practices or could not make games. They knew it was difficult for Louise sometimes, without Nathan's dad around. "They are a big help", he said. "Sometimes, when my mum was out

of town", he recalled, "I would stay at their houses, and stuff." Nathan was a good player. It was the least they were willing to do.

Having the coaches' endorsement gave Nathan credibility with his teammates. He was also confident and easy-going, which helped him make friends on the team. Football connected him with people he never would have associated with otherwise. "I would have never seen myself being friends with some of them or even talking to them" he said, "but now that we bonded over sports and winning, and stuff, we're actually good friends. We can share things with each other."

Football had provided Nathan a path into a different life that he believed wouldn't have otherwise been available. "Sports can get you places", Nathan stated assuredly, "It gives you options, places to go". Some scouts had recently come out to watch him in one of his high school football games and had since offered him a full university scholarship. He was relieved his university place didn't depend on his exam results. "I'm not the greatest in school, but football got me through it" he said, "It's going to get me a good job". His investment in football had paid off – all the training and the sacrifices he had made. "If you try hard, and work hard, you can get to where you want to get", he said, "It was all a bit of an eye opener". With optimism for his future he summarized, "Football gave me a way out, you know".

Discussion

To more explicitly theorize the young peoples' experiences with sport and highlight the differences and similarities between them, I have divided the discussion into two main sections that are titled using the participants' own words. In *The Person I Am* I outline the ways young peoples' material conditions and family circumstances shaped their habitus – their disposition and desires – and the ways this impacted the extent to which they had a propensity for, or inclination toward sport. Through *If You Invest* I discuss the ways the young peoples' habitus and the amount of capital available to them shaped their experiences with sport in particular ways.

Preceding each part of the discussion is a short scenario about a card game between Nathan, Joey and Stacey. Using Bourdieu's card game analogy (1977) which has been taken up and applied in various ways by Lareau and colleagues (Lareau &

McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lareau, 2011), I integrate and narrate the theoretical concepts introduced earlier in the paper to show the unequal chances available to young people in sport. Through these scenarios, I present the *field* of sport as a card game that is defined by particular rules and conventions. The young people playing the game come to the table with varying levels of comfort with, appreciation for, and knowledge of the game related to their previous experiences (habitus). The players are each dealt a hand with which they must play the game and the value of these cards is differently determined according to the rules (field). A player's success is dependent on the extent to which their cards have value (capital) in the game and the ways in which they play these cards to their advantage. As a social game, success is also largely dependent on who else is playing.

To demonstrate the ways young peoples' habitus influenced the extent to which they had a propensity for sport, the first scenario shows how each young person's understanding of the card game along with the hand they had been dealt varyingly positioned them going into the game. To highlight the ways capital was unequally available and differently converted in sport, the second scenario describes the ways each young person played their cards during the game.

These scenarios are intended to succinctly show the ways field, habitus and capital interact and how the value of capital is established through a largely relational process (Bourdieu & Waquant, 1992). As such, young people could only accrue capital when they were favourably positioned compared to others in the setting – that is, one young person's gain came at another's loss.

The Person I Am

Nathan had been playing this particular card game since he was young and knew it well. He had been dealt a decent hand – mostly medium-to-high range cards that put him in good stead against the other players. Joey wasn't overly familiar with the rules of the game but was pretty sure he had some respectable cards, depending on who else was playing. Joey and Nathan both had better hands than Stacey who had played the game only once before – they could tell by the look on her face.

In this section I outline the factors that may have shaped the extent to which each young person had (or did not have) a propensity for sport. Despite all living with lower incomes, each young person lived with different material and familial circumstances, which variously shaped their habitus and the extent to which they could acquire capital that would be valuable in the field of sport.

Family structure is fundamental in shaping an individual's habitus (Bourdieu, 1993). Each of the young people had quite different family structures that influenced their upbringings. These different familial circumstances influenced the role sport played in their lives and whether it held any value. Nathan, for example, had described both his parents as being "sporty". Habitus and, as part of this, an appreciation for certain activities (among other things) are often transmitted from parents to their children through family life (Bourdieu, 1993; Lareau, 2011). Nathan's appreciation for sport, or what might be called a sporting habitus, might therefore have been shaped by his parents' appreciation for sport in their own lives.

Nathan and Joey's parents also seemed to value the potential of sport in the lives of their children. They appeared to believe in the merit of what Lareau (2011) has called a concerted cultivation approach to parenting, whereby organized activities such as sport provide a vehicle for the cultivation of their children. Donnelly and Harvey (2007) have referred to this as a developmental ethic, endorsed by many parents who encourage the sport participation of their children based on a belief that skills can be gained that will be useful for (working) life as an adult. Teams sports in particular have been historically valued as a middle-class activity for promoting physical mastery and the display of competences such as strength, sacrifice and personal docility for the greater good of collective discipline (Bourdieu, 1991). This appreciation for team sports was at least somewhat shared and differently reinforced in Nathan and Joey's family structures.

In contrast to Joey and Nathan, sport held little cultural value in Stacey's family. Bourdieu (1984) has said that the distance a person has from life necessities can shape their tastes for activities such as sport. Organized sport represented an activity of luxury that Stacey's family could not afford and as such, Stacey herself seemed to have developed more of a taste for necessity through which she cared little for sport. The focus on day-to-day survival tactics such as maintaining a steady place to live and stretching

benefits to cover the cost of living did not lend itself to long term parenting plans such as cultivating children in preparation for their adult lives. Parents (and young people) therefore differed in their appreciation for the immediate and deferred profits that might be available through sport (Bourdieu, 1991).

Interestingly, despite Joey's mum's appreciation of sport (and seeming taste for luxury), their material circumstances during the early part of Joey's life made involvement in sport impossible. Rather than abandoned entirely, sport was temporarily discontinued while his mum established some sense of equilibrium in their lives. More so than later on in their lives, she did not have the economic capital (money and time) to invest in sport, despite a largely middle-class will to do so. Early involvement across a range of organized settings is an important part of acquiring cultural capital (familiarity, skills, knowledge) that has benefit in sport. Bourdieu (1991) refers to the need for early training as a "hidden entry requirement" of sport participation (p. 370). Nathan's early involvement in sport and his family upbringing gave him an inclination toward sport and a capacity for acquiring capital that neither Stacey nor Joey similarly had.

Gender also played a significant role in differently shaping the young people's habitus and the value sport had in their lives (Laberge, 1995, Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). With gender expectations inextricably tied up with their material circumstances, freedom from necessity seemed to be more a more realistic endeavour for the two boys than it was for Stacey. Although labour was unevenly divided in many of the families with most of the work and caretaking falling on the women (Lareau & Weininger, 2008), this had a greater impact for Stacey than it did for Joey and Nathan who were generally exempt from assuming such a role. Stacey's habitus was thus shaped by expectations of gender associated with her class position (Laberge, 1995; Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). Within these gendered class boundaries, there was absolutely no room for frivolous activities such as sport. To Stacey, sport was for people who could be "young and sporty" – teenagers who were privileged with a freedom from necessity in ways that she was not (Bourdieu, 1991). Gender is also discussed in the next section in terms of the unequal social value that could be gained through sport participation for Joey and Nathan compared to Stacey.

To summarize, family structure and early life experiences played a fundamental role in shaping the young peoples' habitus and the extent to which each young person had (or did not have) a tendency for sport. In the next section I discuss the ways the young peoples' habitus and the amount of capital available to them shaped their experiences with sport in particular ways.

If You Invest

Stacey folded her cards early on in the game. She knew she had little to gain from pretending she was in the contest at all. With others folding and with a couple of good cards, Joey stayed in the game a bit longer than he would have otherwise. He won a few rounds but eventually folded along with the others. Nathan went on to win the game. He had been lucky with his cards and played them well.

Investment in sport is a middle-class ideal that was reproduced in the sport experienced by the young people through demands for money, time, sacrifice and docility (Bourdieu, 1991). The extent to which the young people invested in these ways was shaped by their habitus and the process of weighing up the costs and potential profits of doing so.

Class habitus differently influences a person's appreciation of the (real or imagined) intrinsic profits that are expected from sport and which are also unequally accessible (Bourdieu, 1991). The potential profits available to Nathan, for example, were far greater than those available to Stacey. Nathan attributes and values (habitus) aligned well with the field, increasing his level of comfort in sport and making it easier for him to acquire cultural capital (e.g. "ability") and social capital (recognition and status). Nathan perceived these profits and felt sport was worth the necessary investment of money, time and effort even though his material conditions sometimes made this difficult.

Stacey's habitus aligned far less seamlessly with the conditions outlined by sporting practices than either Nathan or Joey. The dance studio and the other young people who participated in it were shaped by middle-class values that Stacey did not resonate with. She had few experiences in organized settings growing up because they held little profit for her family who had more immediate needs to attend to. Lareau (2011)

has highlighted the disconnect that can occur between the habitus of young people living with lower incomes and the middle-class ways of being that are celebrated in contexts such as sport. In particular, she describes young people who "typically neither participate in organized activities nor grow up in homes where the preferred approach to child rearing meshes seamlessly with the practices and values of society's dominant institutions" (p.63). Performing in front of an audience as Stacey was asked to do in her dance class is, for example, a way of being that is typically encouraged in middle-class families and aligns well with the values desired in dominant institutions such as sport (Lareau, 2011). It was not, however, something Stacey felt comfortable doing and as such, she struggled to fit in and acquire capital in the setting. Without the availability of these profits and with disproportionately high social and economic costs to participate, Stacey distanced from sporting spaces early on.

Although the costs of sport were high for all the young people as a result of living with lower incomes, sport participation would have likely held more potential profits for Joey and Nathan than it did for Stacey because they were boys. At a societal level, sport holds value as a social practice in which "positive" masculine identities can be shaped (Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). According to Bourdieu (1991), "…the sports market is to the boys' physical capital what the system of beauty prizes… is to the girls' physical capital" (p.366). Participating in sport therefore generally holds more social value for boys than it does for girls because it allows opportunities for playing out idealized masculine ways of being that can be considered a form of cultural capital (Laberge, 1995; Ingham & Dewar, 1999).

This additional social value placed on sport participation may provide an explanation for why Joey continued to pursue sporting opportunities throughout adolescence despite not overly enjoying his experiences. Despite his efforts and the skill he had, he never fully gained the cultural capital that might have been available in sport because he did not entirely conform to the masculine ways of being (such as aggression and competitiveness) that were expected in the team sports in which he participated. He did not believe in the value of investing his time and his "body at all costs" for the mere sake of participating in sport. As Bourdieu (1984) has suggested, the limited appreciation for the investment philosophy of sport may have reflected his family's lack of distance

from necessity, particularly when Joey was younger. The transaction costs for Joey to convert his capital were too high compared to the available profits (Spaaij, 2011).

In contrast, sport held more potential for Nathan. As such, the transaction costs were worth the investment. His habitus aligned well with sport and he embraced the middle-class masculine values of the team sports in which he participated. Combined with his deemed "ability", the profits of sport were entirely within Nathan's reach. Particularly through Nathan's story, although to some extent in all the stories provided by young people, coaches and leaders were prominent social agents in the sporting spaces they experienced. Lareau (2011) has referred to such social agents as gatekeepers who are influential in leveraging the extent to which young people can accrue and convert capital in a particular space. Nathan recognized the powerful influence of coaches within and further to the field and the ways they rewarded him his investment.

With the coaches on his side, Nathan was able to acquire vital social capital within the field (Hay, 2012). This meant he was also able to gain further cultural capital by developing ways of being that were not only valued in sport but in other institutions (Lareau, 2011). He could therefore trade his initial reserves of cultural capital for further forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Despite the disproportionately high economic cost of participating (including the costs of time), his investment was deemed worthy because of the potential for acquiring further cultural, social and economic capital. The rewarding of present sacrifices with deferred satisfactions was therefore a real possibility for Nathan who appeared to be more upwardly socially mobile than the other young people (Bourdieu, 1991).

Conclusion

Through narrative inquiry, I sought to explore the meaning and experiences of sport for young people living with lower incomes to further understand the decisions they make about sport with attention to the ways sport is an unequal playing field.

The three young people presented in the paper all experienced limited reserves of economic capital that impacted their relationship with sport, such as not having the disposable income to cover the full expense of participating. However, the meaning of sport diverged for each of them in a number of other ways, influenced by their varying material circumstances and the extent to which they could accumulate and convert

sporting capital. Although the three narratives could not capture all of the intricate variations between the young interview participants, they did shed light on the heterogeneity of young people living with lower incomes, who tend to be homogenously categorized in research and practice (Evans & Bairner, 2013). I recommend that in the future, researchers consider not only the impact of material conditions in much broader ways than they have to this point, but that income and class relations are thought of in gradational, rather than absolute, terms (Weininger, 2002). A gradational approach would allow researchers to consider how young people (all living with lower incomes, for example) might be stratified differently in relation to sport and other areas of their lives.

The present study also showed how gender differently intersected with the young people's material conditions to shape their habitus (their desires and dispositions) and influenced the amount of capital available to them (Laberge, 1995). For example, there appeared to be less value attached to Stacey's sport involvement because of the perceived role of women in her family as caretakers (Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). This lack of value for sports participation was exacerbated by Stacey's material conditions, which made the costs of participation (beyond only those that were economic) disproportionately high when compared to the potential profits.

Gender and class expectations also shaped the conditions of participating in sport that young people had to navigate. For example, displaying aggression and competitiveness were conditions of participating in basketball, hockey and football for Joey and Nathan that were shaped by achievement-oriented middle-class masculine ideals (Bourdieu, 1991; Donnelly & Harvey, 2007). Each of the boys was differently able and willing to conform to these performance values – factors influenced by their material circumstances.

With limited existing research exploring the intersections of class and gender (Donnelly & Harvey, 2007), the present paper provides some empirical understanding of how class and gender intersect to shape the meaning of sport to young people living with lower incomes and influence the extent to which sport was worth pursuing in relation to other aspects of their lives. Additionally, this study supports the suggestion that considering only the individual psychology of a young person in relation to sport limits our understanding of the 'choices' young people make about their participation (Wright

et al., 2003; Spaaij et al., 2014). The meaning of sport to the young people in the study, the decisions they made related to participation, and their capacity (and desire) to acquire a sporting disposition, were shaped by their material conditions which were also tied up with gender ideals. Despite these differentiating influences, meritocratic discourses reproducing the notion of a level playing field (if only one tries hard enough) appeared to be strong. This was especially true for Joey and Nathan, for whom the level of success they experienced in sport was almost directly related to their perceived level of commitment. This narrative was also apparent in the response to Stacey's involvement in dance, through which the message was conveyed to her and the other participants that she did not deserve to experience the potential benefits of sport because she didn't adequately buy into the ethos of sport.

Sporting "success" stories such as Nathan's tend to be granted a disproportionate amount of attention in much of the messaging about the potential of sport (Karen & Washington, 2010). Yet, in the present study, only one of the ten young people who were interviewed participated in organized sport in the concerted and profitable ways outlined in Nathan's story. As such, the experiences of young people were much more varied than those often portrayed in research and practice. In particular, the stories shared by the young people in this study provide some examples of the ways sport is far from a level playing field. The economic, social and cultural profits of participating that are available to some youth may not be similarly available to others along with the (social and economic) costs of involvement that also vary for different youth. With this knowledge, sweeping assumptions about the problems of non-participation and the deviance of young people who "drop out" of sport must be avoided (MacDonald et al., 2012). The implementation of fee assistance programs alone is also not enough to challenge the complexities that were highlighted through this analysis of habitus, capital and field. In addition to increasing opportunities, there is an obvious need to create sporting communities that confront the processes of stratification and marginalization identified in this paper. Such communities would allow more flexible forms of participation and celebrate more diverse ways of being and performing to support the meaningful involvement of a greater number of youth.

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Paper Two

The Exclusionary Practices of Youth Sport

Sport has been used as a tool to address the social exclusion of young people in various policy agendas (Collins & Kay, 2003; Dagkas & Armour, 2012). Social exclusion has been defined generally as occurring when individuals are unable to participate in relationships and activities due to a lack of resources, rights and services (Levitas, Pantazis, Fahmy, Gordon, Lloyd & Patsios, 2007). Hailed for its capacity to provide opportunities for connection and belonging, sport is positioned as having the potential to mitigate some aspects of social exclusion and engage young people who may be excluded in other areas of their lives (Collins & Kay, 2014).

Despite this, sport itself remains a site of social exclusion (Dagkas & Armour, 2012). Exclusion within and from sport has been specifically conceptulized as a process that negatively impacts a person's rights, recognition, resources and/or their opportunity to participate (Spaaij, Magee & Jeanes, 2014). It is worth considering exclusion in opposition to inclusion, which has been described as the sense of belonging to, participating in, contributing to and accessing sporting activities (Spaaij et al., 2014). In light of this, social exclusion not only involves a lack of opportunties to participate in sport, but can also include a sense of othering in sporting contexts (McDonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson, & McCuaig, 2012).

Research examining social exclusion in sport has found that exclusion tends to be mediated by income, gender, (dis)ability, ethnicity and sexuality (e.g. Collins & Kay, 2014; Goodwin & Peers, 2012; Kay, 2014). Trends have indicated lower participation rates for any individuals that diverge from the white, middle-class, 'able' heterosexual male norms that pervade sport (Collins, 2008). A great number of young people have thus been shown to experience exclusion from sport. Girls, for example, have reported experiencing exclusion in sport as a result of male dominance and the (re)production of stringent gender expectations (Kay & Jeanes, 2008). These same gender expectations and the heteronormative masculine ideals that result are also known to alienate a great many individuals who do not resonate with them (Wellard, 2006). Inextricably tied up in these ideals are narrow expectations of 'ability' that support goals of competition and

aggression (Hay, 2012; Wellard, 2006). Such ideals impact the sporting experiences of a large number of young people, including those experiencing disability (Goodwin & Peers, 2012). As a final example, income, the focus of the present paper, can influence both young peoples' desire and capacity to participate in sport (Bourdieu, 1991). The findings from this research suggest that a great number of young people experience exclusion both from and within sport and these experiences require further exploration (Collins & Kay, 2014; Spaiij et al., 2014).

Unequal Sporting Chances

Young people's relationship with sport and the extent to which they experience exclusion are influenced by dominant societal discourses that are (re)produced through sport. As mentioned, sport has a tendency to support the participation those who fit dominant white, middle-class, 'able', heteronormative, male discourses, while undermining the involvement of those who do not (DePauw, 1997). Neither the amount of sport opportunities nor the profits (e.g. a sense of belonging, enjoyment or acclaim) that can be accrued through sports participation are therefore equally available to all young people (Bourdieu, 1984). In particular, living with a lower income has the potential to undermine the involvement of young people and make the profits of sport more difficult to attain (Collins & Kay, 2014).

The term "living with a lower income" is used here to describe individuals who have less economic and cultural capital as a result of their income. Not simply an objective categorization, a lower income (a young person's own income or that of their parents) is experienced subjectively, and can influence much broader matters of education, housing, and values (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013). Young people who live with lower incomes are known to experience social exclusion from and within sport. As a result, there is an important need to understand the ways sport reproduces these processes of social exclusion so they can be challenged (Spaaij et al., 2014).

Participation and Barriers

Research exists that has begun to explore the exclusion of young people living with lower incomes from sport. However, these studies have largely been limited to concerns about low participation rates (Donnelly, 1993; Spaaij et al., 2014), which have been predominantly attributed to financial 'barriers' such as the cost of sports, lack of transportation, and the time commitment necessary to participate (Penney, 2001). Although a useful starting point, this research explains only a small part of a much larger process of social exclusion. Such narrow approaches may also unintentionally and erroneously attribute differences in participation to low motivation when opportunities are provided (e.g. through fee assistance programs) but youth do not participate (Ingham, Chase & Butt, 2002). As a consequence, these young people may be labelled as deviant and problematic (MacDonald, 2003; Wright, MacDonald, & Groom, 2003). A focus on individual attitudes cannot sufficiently explain the ways young people's circumstances intersect with their desires and the opportunities available to them (Wright et al., 2003). Accordingly, 'drop out' narratives may mask and potentially exacerbate the discourses in sport that privilege the participation of some young people while undermining that of others, making motivations of 'choice' neither a simple (nor equal) proposition.

Hidden Requirements in Sport

Characterizing sport as a level playing field where all young people can aspire to the same goals of participation does not accurately represent the ways sport has the potential to exclude (Evans & Bairner, 2013). Far from equal, there are hidden requirements for sport engagement that disproportionately impact young people living with lower incomes (Bourdieu, 2010). These hidden requirements go beyond the need for financial resources and involve, among a range of demands, early participation, particular abilities, and appropriate clothing. Rather than consider the experiences of young people as a matter of the individual, there is consequently a need to consider the empirical experiences of young people living with lower incomes *within* the cultural context of sport (Ingham et al., 2002). By considering the ways in which sport is an unequal playing field for young people experiencing lower incomes, we can begin to see how they may be impacted by exclusion (Spaaij et al., 2014).

Youth are likely to move in and out of sport at different times in their lives, making exclusion a fluid process rather than a discrete end point (MacDonald, Pang, Knez, Nelson & McCuaig, 2012). Evans and Bairner (2013) have recognized the importance of exploring these varied experiences, stating the need to question how sports are "read and received in specific contexts of opportunity, by specific social groups, with specific needs and resources to access them" (p. 152). However, our understanding of the many ways young people living with lower incomes actually experience sport is thus far inadequate (MacPhail, 2012). This is a critical omission given that complete exclusion from sport is an unlikely scenario for most young people (Spaaij et al., 2014). The majority of young people have *some* experience of sport, whether this occurs casually with friends, in an organized community setting, or at school. Yet our understanding of these experiences remains sparse.

Experiences of young people in sport

Although the number of studies exploring the sport experiences of young people living with lower incomes is limited, there are several researchers whose work begins to uncover some of the processes of exclusion that youth might encounter. Coakley and White (1999) interviewed fifty-nine young people (aged between 13-20) to understand the decision-making processes that influenced their sport involvement (or lack thereof). Approximately three-quarters of the youth were living with lower incomes. The researchers found that young people's participation was indeed influenced by more than only material constraints. Among other factors, youth spoke about the need for adequate physical skills, in addition to their desire for activities that were not tightly controlled by adults.

As part of a collection of studies, Macdonald et al. (2012) examined the place and meaning of sport for young people. They interviewed Indigenous, Asian and Islamic youth between the ages of 10 and 16 in Australia and Hong Kong. The findings from these interviews suggested that despite participants' desire for inclusion, factors such as cost, geographical dis/location, cultural constraints and racism made participation difficult. The impacts of financial resources in this study were, however, limited to a discussion about cost and transportation as barriers.

Finally, Quarmby and Dagkas (2013) explored the place and meaning of physical activity for young people between the ages of 11 and 14 living with lower incomes in lone-parent families. They found that the availability of financial resources impacted participation in a number of ways, beyond the difficulties associated with cost and transportation. For example, they found that the material conditions of young people's lives influenced the value they placed on physical activity.

These studies offer an important starting point from which to begin understanding the sport experiences of young people who live with lower incomes and the ways in which these experiences may be exclusionary. However, greater exploration of how young people living with lower incomes experience sport is required (MacPhail, 2012). Such research would provide a deeper understanding of the exclusionary practices of youth sport so they can be challenged in relevant and meaningful ways. In the present study we consequently set out to explore the sport experiences of young people living with lower incomes, questioning how sport itself may be implicated as an unequal, differentiating and exclusionary practice. A brief overview of Bourdieu's work is provided to explain how it was used to inform the analysis of data in the study.

Theoretical Framework

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991, 2010; Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013) was used to inform the analysis of the empirical data and provide a framework for understanding the experiences of young people in sport. Bourdieu's concepts of *capital, field* and *habitus* helped to uncover some of the ways in which income influenced young people's experiences of sport, beyond just the availability of financial resources to purchase opportunities.

Sport participation requires a certain amount of both economic capital and cultural capital for youth to gain opportunities for sport and have enjoyable experiences when they do. *Economic capital* includes not only resources of money but also related privileges such as the availability of free time. *Cultural capital* is the profit or privileges that can be gained through the expression of particular ways of being that are valued in a cultural *field* (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital includes, in its broadest sense, the possession of 'ability' i.e. performing in ways that were valued in a sport context.

Cultural capital also results from the possession of values and desires that are aligned with those reproduced in sport. The acquisition of cultural capital in sport and across other fields (e.g. education, family life) occurs at an early age and is influenced by a person's *habitus,* a system of tastes and preferences that defines the attachment of meaning to social practices (Bourdieu, 1991).

Habitus is strongly influenced by the material conditions of a person's life (Bourdieu, 1984). The habitus of individuals are consequently shaped by the subjective ways they experience their incomes (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013). A young person's habitus can shape the ways they attach meaning to sport and influence the extent to which they can acquire cultural capital in a particular field. Because capital is unequally distributed to maintain its value, young people have to compete for sporting capital with other participants who may have more favourable material conditions for accumulating the profits that are available through sport.

Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus helped to draw lines between the individual and shared experiences of young people and how these were mediated by their lower incomes. The ways material conditions can shape habitus and contribute to an unequal distribution of capital uncovers some of the ways sport continues to be a site of exclusion for young people living with lower incomes.

Research Approach

Developing the Research

The purpose of this study was to understand the sport experiences of young people living with lower incomes. A community-based approach informed the research process to bring together a diverse set of knowledge and expertise across practice-based and academic contexts (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). I initiated a partnership between two municipal accessibility coordinators and a youth initiatives coordinator from a provincial recreation association. Partners met one to three times per month depending on the stage of the project over a period of two years. The partnership collectively developed the scope of the project, which included the research questions, data collection techniques, timelines, responsibilities, goals, and ethics (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). I chose Interpretive Description (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) as

the method for the project with the intention of generating knowledge that could bridge academic and professional contexts. Relevant literature was drawn upon to provide "scaffolding" through which to ground the study (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham & O'Flynn, 2004, p. 5). The design of the research was additionally shaped by the practice-based knowledge provided by the partners (Thorne et al., 1997).

The research was conducted in a community where the Department of Recreation and Culture had introduced fee assistance for recreation for residents experiencing lower incomes (and in which two of the partners worked). Passes were provided that enabled free use of local recreation facilities and a reduced rate on program registration (25% of the original cost). Those who received passes were also referred to other services to reduce barriers to participation, such as the provision of additional funding for equipment, bus passes, and registration in sports programs outside those offered by the Department (e.g. by schools, community leagues, private clubs). As a partnership, we were particularly interested in understanding the experiences of the young people living in their community (between the ages of 13-18) whose parents had received fee assistance. According to facility-use records, young people had the lowest participation out of all those who had received assistance and we believed this represented a larger pattern of involvement. Parents and children under the age of 13 were comparatively the highest users.

Ethical approval for the project was granted from a University Research Ethics Board during the initial stages of the partnership and a modified ethics proposal was approved once the scope of the project had been determined. Partners additionally engaged in discussions throughout the project about the most appropriate way to conduct the research, reflecting a relational ethics approach (Boser, 2007).

Participants

Given an expressed need in the literature to consult young people about their sport experiences (MacPhail, 2012), the partners prioritized interviews with young people (between the ages of 13-18) in addition to speaking with parents about the fee assistance they received. The community where the research took place was predominantly affluent, with a rapidly growing population of approximately 92,000 residing in the suburban core and surrounding areas (Municipal Census Report, 2012). To recruit participants one of

the accessibility coordinators sent 150 letters to young people whose families had received fee assistance and consented to being contacted by the Department. To receive fee assistance, the parents of these young people had attended an 'intake' meeting at their local Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) branch and expressed their desire for assistance due to a lack of disposable income (more often than not this was determined by an income cut-off).

In total, ten young people (13-18 years) and six parents participated in either a group or individual interview. All of the parents I spoke to were mothers, five of whom were raising their children as single or solo parents. Single parent in this sense meant that parents were no longer living with their partners. Solo parent meant they were parenting alone (the case for at least three of the parents). Two of the three young people interviewed without their parents present shared that their fathers had left home when they were younger. One was also living apart from her mother as a result of alcohol addiction.

The study participants had experienced lower incomes for varying amounts of time. Some of the parents previously had higher incomes and found themselves in newer circumstances as a result of separation, disability, and/or abuse. Other parents and young people had lived with a lower income over a more sustained period of time. The housing circumstances of the families were largely unknown, but two of the interviews took place in housing cooperatives in the suburban core. In terms of employment, four of the parents worked (one of these women was concurrently pursuing higher education). Two parents experienced disability and could no longer work. As such they received an assured disability income of approximately $1,300 a month.

The material conditions of the participants' lives are significant in this study because they are understood to shape the habitus of individuals over time. They are thus likely to have influenced the young people's relationship to sport and the extent to which they could accrue cultural capital (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013). In terms of participation, only one of the youth participants was continually engaged in structured activity, some moved from program to program in search of positive experiences, and others were not involved in sport at all at the time of the interviews.

Data Collection

The study comprised one individual interview and seven group interviews. Young people could choose to take part in an individual or group interview, with or without their parent. Two interviews were conducted without parents present. There were challenges with the group interviews – for example, one of the parents felt unable to discuss income-related topics in front of her child and waited until she was out of the room to do so. However, the majority of youth stated a preference for a group interview. Youth aged 14 and above were permitted to consent to an interview without the additional consent of a parent, in line with the view that young people have the capacity to make informed decisions about their own interests and consistent with other community-based research approaches (e.g. Flicker & Guta, 2008; Roddy Holder, 2008).

The interviews took place in a number of locations that included the community library, recreation centres and participants' homes. Interviews were semi-structured and as such, an interview guide was used as a foundation from which to ask young people about their experiences of physical activity more generally, a term I felt would best capture the range of young people's experiences and encompassed sport, exercise, and play. Questions asked young people what physical activity meant to them, how important they felt it was to their lives, the nature of their participation, the opportunities available to them, and the extent to which it met their desires. Through these questions, participants often discussed sport-like activities, such as hockey, gymnastics, soccer, dance, and basketball. Follow-up questions were asked to explore these experiences in more depth. Parents were also invited into the discussion about their children's involvement. The interviews each lasted approximately one hour and were audio taped and transcribed for analysis.

Analysis

Initial immersion in the data, which comprised numerous readings and re-readings of the transcripts, revealed that youth had multiple experiences of exclusion in and from sport across varying levels and ages. At this stage of the analysis, I adopted an iterative approach in order to navigate between the data and a broad body of literature (Thorne, 2008). For example, I drew upon social theory to better understand the influence of class

relations and how these were working at an individual level while simultaneously working in ways that connected these young people through their experiences living with lower incomes. A constant comparative technique made these relationships more apparent (Thorne et al., 2004). Through this process it became evident that the exclusion experienced in and from sport by young people was closely tied to cultural capital and was mediated by their lower incomes. Bourdieu's work (1984; 1991; 2010; 2013) was drawn upon to inform the remainder of the analysis. In particular the concepts of field, habitus and capital were considered to examine the influence of material circumstances on young people's experiences of sport. Using this lens, the exclusionary practices of sport became more apparent. The data were thus organized into three themes to demonstrate the ways the young people in the study experienced social exclusion in and from sport. These themes are presented below as, *The Fundamental Isn't Even There, The Way You're Brought Up,* and *One of the Worst.* Pseudonyms have been used in place of participants' real names to protect their identities.

The Sport Experiences of Young People

The accounts provided by the participants in the study highlighted the prominent influence of cultural capital on young people's experiences. Ability, as a form of cultural capital, appeared necessary for meaningful involvement. Evans (2004) has described ability as the possession of a range of attributes that are valued in the sport setting. One study participant, Brittany, who was 15 years old, described ability as a particular form of knowledge. She described this in relation to her own capacity to be involved saying, "I would like sports but I don't know how they work. Soccer is the only one I really understand".

Knowing how sports "work" required learning how to engage in a culture in which particular ways of being – dispositions, appearances and actions – were desired (Hay, 2012). Knowledge was not only about learning the constitutive rules in the setting, it also included knowing how to perform field-specific skills (such as ball-handling skills, offensive strategy, etc.) in addition to performing in less obvious ways (such as

conforming to particular sports 'etiquette') (Hay & Hunter, 2006). Without these necessary forms of ability, young people experienced exclusion within and from sport.

Themes were created using the participants' own words and demonstrate the ways young people experienced social exclusion as a result of the demand for particular ways of being in sport. The first theme, *The Fundamental Isn't Even There,* describes the ways participants perceived the importance of acquiring sporting abilities at an early age for successful participation. *The Way You're Brought Up* paints a picture of young people's upbringing and the conditions of their existence (Bourdieu, 1984) that influenced their desire to participate in sport and their capacity to acquire cultural capital in order to do so. Finally, *One of the Worst* describes the experiences of young people when their abilities did not match up to those expected in the field.

The Fundamental Isn't Even There

This introductory theme offers examples of the ways parents and young people perceived the need to be involved in sport early to shape the fundamental ways of being necessary for participation. 'Ability' served as cultural capital for young people who acquired it, creating a dissonance between those with more capital and those with less. This theme demonstrates the need for ability across varying sporting contexts and is divided by three subheadings: "*Dealing with a four-year age gap",* "*At the level of a six year old,* and "*You can't go in as a newbie*"

Dealing With a Four-Year Age Gap.

We begin this theme by outlining an example about the need for early involvement in hockey. One of the parents, Julia, recognized that developing sporting abilities in hockey started at a very young age. She recalled her older son's first experiences playing as a child. When Paul was as young as 8 years old she could see the disparity between his abilities and those of the other children on his team. She said,

> [Paul] started to play hockey when he was 8. Most people here, because of the affluent society that we live in, have their children already [participating],

> probably when they're between 3 and 4…. so you're dealing with a four year age gap. Some of those kids, like I said, started at 4 and he's coming in at 8 and not knowing how to skate. The fundamental isn't even there.

Paul did not have the foundational skills for hockey other peers his age had developed. In this account, Julia acknowledged the role of affluence on early skill development. The availability of economic resources is an obvious facilitator for providing opportunities. Further to this, however, the development of sporting ability is part of a broader process of "concerted cultivation" for middle-class parents who tend to have a high level of involvement in their children's lives to ensure they grow up to be 'well-rounded' individuals with adequate amounts of cultural capital (Lareau, 2011, p.2). Enrolling children in a variety of activities, including sport, is part of this cultivation process. As a result of the affluent area in which he lived, Paul found himself competing for capital with peers who had been cultivating their sporting abilities from a very young age and across a variety of contexts.

Julia contrasted Paul's experiences to those of her other son, Steven, who began shaping his hockey abilities at an earlier age. She explained, "Steven came in to play hockey at a very young age, so he started in Tom Thumb…[the]youngest level" Not only did Steven join a hockey team, but he was also in a free community program in which families could learn to skate. Julia said, "We enrolled [him] in the 'Can Skate' program. And so that's where he started to, got the technique." She described Steven's skating ability and the impact this had for him in terms of his experiences in hockey: "Steven is much, his fluidity is different, and so, and they saw potential in him, and he was a bigger child, as in stature. And so yeah he did really well." Steven's physicality as a bigger child and the skating fluidity he was able to develop early on were cultural resources that put him on a more equal level with his peers. This cultural capital led Steven to gain recognition from coaches and experience some success in hockey.

At the Level of a Six Year Old

Jacqueline and her mum, Caroline, also recognized the need to acquire particular abilities from an early age to participate in a range of sports. Jacqueline was 13 years old

and had been deterred from joining some activities because of a deemed lack of ability. She said, “For a couple of years I haven’t joined anything, because I’m not into soccer, and you really have to start at an early age to do gymnastics and hockey and stuff like that.” Discussing gymnastics later in the interview, her mum, Caroline, said, “For a 14 year old to go in and start gymnastics she would be out of place, cause she’d be at the level of a six year old kind of thing”. The acquisition of abilities necessary in gymnastics had not begun early enough for Jacqueline. Learning to perform in these ways was such a concerted process that Jacqueline and her mum perceived there to be no way Jacqueline could enter such a setting with any real expectation of fitting in. Caroline specifically articulated an eight-year gap between the abilities of other participants and those of her daughter. Particular ways of being consequently had an age attachment that could be used as an ideological stick against which youth could be measured. Jacqueline described the expectations of ability in gymnastics for someone her age saying, “The older you are, the harder the program is. I’ve seen girls my age, they’re supposed to learn how to cartwheel on balance beams. I can’t even do a cartwheel. So balance beam, cartwheel. No, couldn’t do that”. As young as 13, the cultural capital necessary to access a gymnastics program were beyond those available to Jacqueline and had been for a number of years.

You Can’t Go In As a Newbie

The final aspect of the theme presents Scott’s experiences of needing to join particular programs or teams early on in life. Scott, who was 15 years old, perceived this need across a number of contexts. Similar to Jacqueline, Scott chose not to join or try out for certain activities because he believed it would not be a place he belonged based on a lack of acquiring cultural capital early on in that particular field. To make this assessment, he compared himself to other young people he imagined would be in the setting. Discussing a particular BMX club he knew about and had had an interest in joining he said, “They’re extremely organized, very organized. And you can tell that there’s kids there that have been there, you know, since they were really little.” Scott was able to perceive both the nature of the environment (“extremely organized”) and the manner in which cultural capital in such a setting would have been acquired (“since they were really little”). As such, he determined the club was a place he did not belong.

Neither Jacqueline nor Scott had actually been in the sport settings they discussed, but had a clear sense of what these settings would entail and the ways they themselves were different from the other participants who attended. Self-exclusion therefore sometimes occurred based on taken-for-granted assumptions about the forms of ability necessary for participation.

Scott also enjoyed playing basketball and spoke about the team at his school. He had chosen not to try out for the team that coming year. He explained his reasoning behind this decision saying,

> Yeah there is a team, but unfortunately in grade ten, they're going to pick all the kids that were on the teams in 7, 8, and 9, because again, they want to win. You can't go in as a newbie, and expect to get a spot.

Scott recognized that not playing on the team in previous years would prevent him from being involved at his current age because he had not acquired the cultural capital necessary for participation. Contrary to the previous example in which he had a sense he would not fit in, Scott had been provided a more overt indication that he did not belong on the school basketball team having tried to join during grade 7 without success.

In addition to early and consistent participation, the context in which the refinement of abilities took place also appeared consequential. One sporting environment was not always equal to another when it came to transferring the ability gained in one context into a different context (Bourdieu, 1984). Scott described increasing his soccer ability while playing at lunchtime with friends. He said, "I progressed. What really helped me was, like grade 2, 3, 4 and 5, we always played soccer in the field [at lunchtime]." Despite acquiring cultural capital in the context of playing soccer at lunchtime with friends, this did not transfer into a different field: "I got pretty good doing that but never with an actual team." The ways of being that were deemed capital in a casual setting did not necessarily transfer as capital into a more organized setting. This was also evident in the example Scott provided about the "extremely organized" BMX club. Consequently,

early involvement in and of itself did not necessarily ensure entry into a range of environments. Instead, early and consistent opportunities to participate across a variety of settings were needed to refine abilities in ways that were valued in a range of contexts. For Scott's soccer, this may have meant early participation in a more organized setting, such as playing on an "actual team".

The Way You're Brought Up

The following theme illustrates how young people's life circumstances and the ways they were "brought up" impacted their experiences of sport. The theme is divided into three sub-headings – *Parental Values, An Issue of Survival,* and *I Wish I Had Known* – to show how the study participants' conditions of existence influenced the meaning they attached to sport and the role it played in their lives. Sylvia, a study participant who was 18 years old, explained how upbringing can influence sport participation saying,

> I guess it's all in the way you're brought up. You know, [it] doesn't matter if it's different beliefs, or like just personal preferences. Some people you see come from wealthier families, [they] get to partake in more activities, because they can.

In this articulation, Sylvia highlights the interplay between personal values, material conditions and sport involvement. Beliefs and preferences, such as the value of concerted cultivation, served as cultural capital for some of the young people in the study because they aligned with the values that were reproduced through sport (Bourdieu, 1984). Sylvia, however, appeared to have fewer of these cultural resources than the other study participants.

Parental Values

Beliefs and preferences, such as the value of concerted cultivation, can serve as cultural capital when they align with the values that are reproduced through sport (Bourdieu, 1984). Parental values and the values they impart on their children can

therefore impact a young person's sport participation. Sylvia spoke several times about the ways her parents' values impacted her involvement in sport. She said,

> The only team I was ever a part of really was that little softball league….Yeah. I think it, everything just kind of goes hand in hand with everything. Like you know everything just depends on personal values, parental values, how wealthy your family is.

In contrast to many of the other young people in the study, Sylvia's parents did not make concerted efforts to support her involvement in sport. Sylvia's father had left home when she was 11 and her mother was "not sober". As such, Sylvia had not really ever been involved in sport. Although she did not speak too much about the context of her life growing up, she did share that she had been, "on welfare for most of my life". She described her current circumstances, saying

> Well my biggest priority right now is helping my boyfriend pay rent. We live together, because [I] can't live with my mum. So we live together and we have to pay rent, and we have to pay the bills, and we have to buy groceries. So in order to do that I have to work, and go to school so that when I'm out of school I can continue going to [university]. And then get a career for myself, because I don't want to have the same disadvantages as my parents, and my sisters, my grandparents and all my friends. I want to have something going for myself. So that's my priority is getting on that path.

Sylvia did not view sport as playing a role in getting her on that path and instead viewed it as a privilege that was available to people who had more wealth. Bourdieu (1984) refers similarly to the tastes of freedom deriving from material conditions that allow a certain distance from necessity. Sylvia's life was not one that allowed such tastes of freedom. Instead it was a life coloured by necessity, with priorities such as working to

pay rent and completing high school. Sport did not have a high value-attachment in Sylvia's world and she instead appeared to distance herself from it.

Interestingly, the parents who participated in the study *did* attach a high value to the role of sport in their children's lives even though their material conditions did not allow much distance from necessity. This may have been a result of living in an affluent community, which put pressure on parents to maintain a particular way of living to avoid stigmatization. In addition, some of the parents discussed having had previously higher incomes. Their changing life circumstances may have therefore resulted in a change in social position that was not necessarily accompanied by a simultaneous shift in values (Bourdieu, 2010). Such incongruence led to difficulties when parents believed in the value of sport participation for their children but did not necessarily have the material conditions to support it. In the following sub-theme, parents describe some of the life circumstances that made concerted participation in a variety of sports generally unattainable for their children.

An Issue of Survival

Two of the parents, Julia and Janet, described the material conditions that pushed sports to the fringes of their lives. Julia had separated from her partner and left with her sons to live in a temporary shelter before moving into the housing cooperative where they were living at the time of the interview. She described their lives at the shelter as a time of survival, during which sport was not a consideration:

> You know, like I said, when you were in the environment that we were in, it was an issue of survival, so a lot of people in that scenario, they're not looking at that (opportunities for sport). They are more looking at what's ahead of them, relative to where to live and we were in that situation too.

Trying to find opportunities for her sons to be involved in sport was not a realistic endeavour during this time in their lives.

Janet also spoke about a change in life circumstances that made sport participation for her children extremely difficult. She explained,

> I had gone out into the work world and then my son got hurt, which changed everything….And my son was quite young and he needed a lot of, like we were at the hospital, there was a lot of that. So, it was, it's hard to go from like a $70,000 paying job, down to like, we were on social assistance for a while. Because it's just the way it was, like we, it was either, I take care of the kids and you know, and one with a handicap and that, and it was just, it was hard. It was a hard adjustment for the family, hard adjustment for me. We were in the middle of a huge lawsuit, so there was nothing, like really literally nothing. Like it was like, we were at the food bank, you know, and we had done that. And I remember there were times…where we didn't have money to put gas in the car, to go across [town], which is not very far.

Even later on when Janet had returned to work, having each of her children consistently participating in sport was not a possibility because of the requirements of time associated with involvement. Janet was a solo parent but identified (to some extent) as a single mum. She said, "I'm a single mum, so I find it difficult to try and keep up with my kids schedules all the time. I work with the federal government, so it's like you know, I'm coming home and then it's like you know, going here, going there." Asked if and how it impacted their participation she said,

> I had to cut it down, and I'd have to say to them, okay so one can play at one time, you know, because my boys, when they wanted to play outdoor soccer, they were almost on competing nights, and then there's was one of me and I had to be in two different places. So you'd have to say… okay so, this one [is] your turn to play, your turn to play, your turn, your turn. Because I couldn't keep up to it, you know.

I Wish I Had Known

Caroline also explained how her family's life changed and the impact this had on their sport involvement. She described how her two younger children, Tori (12 years) and

Jacqueline (14 years), had not had early and consistent opportunities for involvement in sport after separating from her partner. She compared their involvement to her two older children, Carter (19 years) and Mitch (16 years), who had been able to play soccer every year from an earlier age. She said,

> I got divorced 4 years, separated 4 years ago, so it was a very different lifestyle. So whereas [Carter] and [Mitch] got to be participating in soccer, outdoor soccer every year, I think [Jacqueline's] gymnastics, all that kind of thing, as of four years ago, and I don't get any financial support, so I'm just living on my salary, I had to go back to work. So money is different.

Caroline spoke about the fee assistance available that could have helped provide earlier opportunities for her daughters. However, not knowing about the many forms of assistance meant that she had only recently applied for funding to support her daughter's involvement. She explained,

> I wish I had known that there were other grants available for things like the outdoor soccer...It would have been really nice to know it, and I guess in hindsight, maybe I should have clued in, but at the time I didn't, at the time [it] was just sort of a whole new sort of world, and what was out there.

Highlighting the significance of lost time in terms of sport participation, she added, "[Tori] is 12 ½ now and her brothers started [soccer] when they were 8". As indicated by the previous theme, this lost time meant Tori had missed out on the opportunity to acquire the cultural capital necessary to put her in a position to compete with her peers.

At the time of the interview Caroline was waiting to hear whether she had secured the funding necessary for Tori to register on a soccer team. Tori's involvement was dependent on receiving this funding and without it she would not be able to play:

> I'm just waiting now to hear back to see if we've been accepted or not, but I really have my fingers crossed because I would love to give the opportunity, she loves soccer....Someone had mentioned that there were grants out there, so I hadn't known beforehand. I wish I did, I wish I had known four years ago, because I would have had her, definitely in that then.

Although fee assistance had the potential to provide sporting opportunities for young people, it could not guarantee early or concerted involvement. Funding was annually determined and required a new application with each new sporting opportunity. Jennifer illustrated the inefficiencies of this process saying,

> Yeah it's not always easy to get funding for [participation in sport]. They have X amount of dollars, depending on how many people have donated, and last year, I was hoping to get him in for the spring session. They didn't have any funding left, so he couldn't play.

Some of the parents were consequently in a continuous cycle of applying for funding to try to initiate and maintain their children's participation in a system that did not guarantee their efforts would pay off. The likelihood of young people having early and consistent involvement in sport over time was extremely slim, if possible at all. Participation, if it did occur, was therefore usually sporadic and occurred in select activities. This led to instances in which young people's 'abilities' in sport were not comparable to those of their peers.

One of the Worst

This final theme describes young people's experiences with/in sport when their abilities did not match up to those of their peers. This theme is divided into four subheadings – *It just kind of ruined it, Didn't make the cut, Lumped in* and *Afraid of what*

people would say – to highlight how young people's conceptions of their (in)abilities were shaped in relation to others and were mediated by the processes of differentiation inherent to sport.

It Just Kind Of Ruined It

This sub-theme highlights how young people's experiences were differently impacted depending on the extent to which there was a focus on performance rather than participation. Joining hockey at the age of 8, Paul was already four years behind some of his peers in terms of their skill level. Paul recalled his initial experiences playing hockey saying,

> Yeah so I started out and I wasn't, I played on like the worst like possible team there was, cause I couldn't skate or do anything, and I didn't do good on that team at all. I was probably one of the worst.

Paul's conceptions about his ability were shaped early and were made in comparison to his peers in the setting. Despite determining that he was one of the worst players on the team, he continued to play: "I just wanted to go and play. I didn't think too much about being bad. I just thought I was part of the team, even though I wasn't doing well". The environment he described may have been one that emphasized participation more than performance, which allowed him not to have to "think too much" about his (in)ability. This changed as he got older and the focus on ability increased: "I did well, and I got better, but that kind of became the end of it, because once you get up there that's where they really, really start to take it serious." To Paul, "up there" was a sporting space that resembled one of seriousness. He spoke about playing at this level, describing parents who "live through their kids." He also described situations where he "got benched a few times for, I don't know." Summing up the experience he said, "It just kind of ruined it, eventually." The environment portrayed was one that demanded particular ways of being that Paul was not willing or able to perform.

Processes of differentiation that sorted those with ability and those without were heightened in sporting environments that had narrow conceptions of what it meant to be

'able'. Tina described her daughter's participation in gymnastics when she was younger and how she felt the focus on performance led to her daughter's reduced sense of confidence. She said,

> It started to go sour when people put a lot of focus on the technique and not so much the attitude, and how well the child was just willing to participate. It was how well they were perfecting the skill, and they'd focus on that skill and in turn, bring down the child's esteem, instead of just building up their participation. And that really brought down a lot of confidence, in my children, anyway.

Tina believed there should have been a focus on participation rather than the focus on performance that seemed to shape the program.

Didn't Make the Cut

Scott and his mum similarly described the impact of a performance culture on Scott's experiences in school sport. However, in contrast to Paul and Brittany's experiences, the focus on performance prevented his participation entirely. Jennifer spoke about Scott's attempts to make it onto the school basketball team in grade 7 saying, "he tried to make the basketball team at school, but didn't make the cut because they're really competitive." Asked what he thought of the school sport process, Scott said it was "kind of stressful". He highlighted the public nature of the try-outs explaining, "They wrote numbers on our hands. [Then] they would call us up and we'd have to start doing lay-ups and stuff." His mum, Jennifer, recalling the experience, said to Scott, "Do you remember how packed the gym was? Kids were lined up sitting all the way around, and you could tell right away that your kid wasn't going to make it".

Having kids sitting around the perimeter of the gym turned it into something of an amphitheatre, where abilities were put on display for comparison with others. Following the try-outs, Scott described how the names of those who made it onto the team were written on a piece of paper and hung up on a wall at school: "After that, we just went back to class and they posted up who made it on the team, on a board in front of the

gym." Scott was not selected to play on his school team. His mum, Jennifer, expressed her frustration saying, "It's really discouraging to be told before you've gotten started, that you suck." Julia also spoke about this in terms of her own sons' chances of participating in school activities. She said, "You're limited because they're only going to pick [the best] for these [school] teams…so if you're not the best at it, what is available for you in the school?" The selection of the "best" players and the lack of availability of alternative options that existed for young people when they were not deemed able enough was reasserted by Scott's mum, who said,

> That school has got to win, so they just take the top people. Where do they go? What do they do? That's really not encouraging kids to play, it's encouraging kids to compete and win. And there's got to be a place for everybody else.

In the following sub-theme, Tina described what such a "place for everybody else" had looked like for her daughter, Brittany, when she participated in gymnastics.

Lumped In

Lumped in provides an example illustrating how not being fully excluded from sport did not prevent exclusion *within* sport (Spaaij et al., 2014). Tina described her daughter, Brittany's, experiences in a gymnastics program that grouped participants according to ability rather than age. She had been involved in gymnastics inconsistently growing up and had not developed the same abilities as other young people her age. As a result, Brittany was placed in a group with much younger children. Tina explained,

> I found room in the budget to put her in gymnastics but her skill level is deemed to be at sort of a beginner level, where it should be at the age of 14… she was lumped in with 5 and 6 year olds, which just does not work. So then that money was sort of just thrown out the window, because she wasn't comfortable being in a group of younger children.

The message conveyed about Brittany's ability by her placement in a program with young children was made extremely clear to her and the other participants: she did not measure up against the standards expected for her age. Not surprisingly, she chose to stop participating in the program. This account additionally highlighted how decisions about young people's sport participation involved a necessary process of weighing the costs against the potential profits of involvement. In this instance, the financial cost had greatly outweighed the benefits and money was deemed to have been, "thrown out the window". This paints a picture of how the availability of disposable income (or lack thereof) can impact decisions about sport participation.

Afraid of What Other People Would Say

As a social setting, the other participants in sport largely influenced the experiences of the young people in the study. The presence of peers provided a measuring stick for comparisons of ability and comprised an audience with the potential to judge. As mentioned previously, Sylvia's relationship to sport was one that had ended quite early in her life. She explained what she believed to be the main reason for not participating saying, "[My] biggest holdback (from joining sport) was I was afraid of what other people would say. I think a lot about what other people are thinking about me". Not fitting in and the fear of judgement made sport a setting in which Sylvia perceived she would have little capital. Describing the impact of this she said, "Being self-conscious, like feeling not as good as you could."

Sylvia described an alternative setting in which she felt she did belong. She had been involved in the army cadets until four years prior to the interview. She described how she felt in that particular environment saying, "I just, I loved it. I love the people, I love you know, going out on trips. I liked all the different activities they were having us do, and the discipline. I don't know, that's weird to say, but I liked the discipline."

Sylvia went on to say that cadets represented the "type of person I am". Asked further about this she spoke about perceiving differences between her own ways of being and those of other girls that played sports, who she described as "blonde" and "preppy". The use of the term "preppy" to describe young people who participate in sport demonstrated the association Sylvia made between sport involvement and wealth. Sylvia

viewed sport, or at least the sports that might be available in her community, as a symbolic expression of a class position that did not match her own (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013). Preppy children are considered those who are cultivated, or prepared, for their futures in a very deliberate manner, such as through involvement in sport. Sylvia distanced herself from this culture and related instead to cadets. She said, "That's why I felt like I belonged in a more masculine environment, because this is the way I am." Cadets provided a stark contrast from sport and a place that more closely represented who Sylvia was and the material conditions of her life.

Discussion

Sport is often hailed for its capacity to promote a sense of belonging and mitigate processes of social exclusion that may be experienced in other areas of life (Collins & Kay, 2003; Dagkas & Armour, 2012). However, sport itself remains a site in which young people living with lower incomes face exclusion (Collins & Kay, 2014). Although structural barriers to sport have been well documented for youth living with lower incomes, this body of research explains only a small part of a much larger process of exclusion (Wright et al., 2003). As such, further research was required to understand the social exclusion of young people living with lower incomes in sport.

Through this study I sought to further understand the ways sport reproduces processes of social exclusion so they can be challenged (Spaaij et al., 2014). The following discussion considers the ways the study participants experienced exclusion in relation to sport and how these forms of exclusion reflected or departed from those reported in the existing literature.

Previous studies exploring the sport experiences of youth living with lower incomes have predominantly focused on low participation rates and the need for more widely available opportunities for sport (Donnelly, 1993; Spaaij et al., 2014). The youth in the study did indeed struggle to gain sporting opportunities as a result of their limited financial resources, which impacted the availability of time, transportation and money for participating. Fee assistance programs, such as the one implemented by the Recreation

Department in the current study, offset some of these financial-related barriers to increase opportunities for sport (Frisby et al., 2005).

Despite this, young people's exclusion resulted from more than simply a lack of opportunities. Their experiences demonstrated that the nature of these opportunities was also important. Realistically, youth needed early, concerted and consistent opportunities in particular sporting contexts to develop the necessary 'abilities' to compete with their peers and develop a sense of belonging. However, the material circumstances of their lives made this form of involvement largely impossible. Although fee assistance provided sporadic opportunities for sport, funding was annually determined and therefore rarely supported continuous participation. Increasing the availability of opportunities, as has been advocated for in previous literature (e.g. Dagkas & Stathi, 2007), is unlikely to make sport less exclusionary as long as such narrow demands for ability exist (Hay, 2012). To acquire these forms of ability requires a process of concerted sporting cultivation that was neither achievable nor desirable to most of the young people in the study.

It is also worth highlighting that the processes of exclusion in this study went beyond only the need for ability and were part of a broader demand for cultural capital in sport. The material conditions of the participants' lives shaped each young person's habitus, including their values and desires (Bourdieu, 2010). When a young person's habitus was inconsistent with a particular sporting context, they tended not to have the capital necessary for a sense of belonging in that field. Sylvia, for example, found sports to be "preppy" and avoided them. Scott was deterred from joining a BMX club because he suspected it was "highly organized". These examples demonstrated how some sporting fields did not resonate with the young people in the study and support the suggestion that sporting 'tastes' can be shaped by class (Bourdieu, 2010; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013). When considered in light of the structural barriers that existed to inhibit involvement, young people were unlikely to make a concerted effort to join activities in which they had already assessed they would not fit. This demonstrates the intersection that occurs between the costs of involvement associated with structural constraints and the available profits or capital that young people could accrue. Without the profits of fitting in and

feeling a sense of belonging, overcoming the structural barriers of cost, time and transportation, if at all possible, were simply not worth it.

As a final consideration, the community in which the young people resided was also of particular consequence in relation to the exclusion they experienced in sport. Returning to Lareau's work (2011), the demand for and distribution of cultural capital appeared especially disparate in an affluent community in which a philosophy of concerted cultivation seemed to pervade. Although the parents in the study valued the role of sport in their children's lives and tried to orchestrate as many opportunities as they could, the sporting peers of the youth in the study would likely have had more opportunities than most to acquire cultural capital. This pushed the cultural capital bar even further beyond the reach of the youth in the study than it may have been in a less affluent environment. The context is thus largely significant when considering processes of exclusion in future research.

Conclusion

Through the present study I sought to explore the sport experiences of young people living with lower incomes to further understand the processes of social exclusion that exist in sport so they can be challenged in relevant and meaningful ways (Spaaij et al., 2014).

The participants in the study provided some examples of the exclusionary processes that are apparent in sport. Structural barriers, such as the demand for money, time and transportation impacted the young people's involvement. Additionally, youth experienced exclusion because they did not have comparable reserves of cultural capital to other participants in sport. This demand for cultural capital included the need for particular abilities, values and desires that were celebrated in the various sporting fields.

As such, without reserves of economic and cultural capital, young people experienced exclusion in a number of ways. They were denied entry into sport, had less-than-meaningful experiences within sport, or they made choices not to participate. It is clear from their experiences of not belonging that exclusion occurs both outside of and within sport (Spaiij et al., 2014). It is also evident that gaining access to sport does not necessarily ward off other experiences of exclusion (Goodwin & Peers, 2012). Although

fee assistance programs provide increased opportunity for sport, they alone are not enough to alleviate social exclusion because of a broader demand for capital that is unequally distributed along class lines. Further, the presence of fee assistance programs might serve to neutralize attempts to challenge the more deeply rooted processes of exclusion that impact the sport experiences of young people living with lower incomes if their limitations are not acknowledged (Jarvie, 2012).

At times, the sports available in the community did not resonate with the young people in the study. Youth often felt they did not belong in these environments and the costs of participating tended to outweigh the profits. As a result they had little desire to pursue sporting opportunities or were deterred from joining. Although a form of self-exclusion, these choices were tied up with the material conditions of young peoples' lives (MacDonald et al., 2012). As Evans (2004) has highlighted, "class does not just determine choice and preference in sport. It also determines a person's physical capacity, 'their ability' to realize those choices and preferences, let alone extend them" (p.102). The nature of choice is not therefore straightforward and blurred lines exist between self-exclusion and enforced exclusion (Spaaij et al., 2014).

To conclude, the purpose of this study was to further understand the ways sport reproduces processes of social exclusion so they can be challenged (Spaaij et al., 2014). The findings of the study demonstrate the interlaced nature of the exclusionary processes in sport that impact young people living with lower incomes. The material circumstances of participants' lives intertwined with the availability of economic and cultural capital which in turn shaped the extent to which young people felt they 'fit' within sport. Cultural capital was not only acquired through sporting opportunities, but was also influenced by upbringing and family values. Exclusion cannot therefore be fully understood in terms of the availability of financial resources or opportunities for sport. Further research about the sport experiences of young people should consequently consider influences of income or class in much broader terms (Bairner, 2007).

In addition, practice-based initiatives intended to make sport less exclusionary should aim to strive beyond the provision of fee assistance and start to challenge the various ways sports privilege a few young people over a great many others. Although situated in terms of income, the exclusionary processes highlighted in the present study

are likely to impact more than only young people living with lower incomes. The same narrow expectations defining what it means to be 'able' in sport are known to negatively impact those who experience disability (Goodwin & Peers, 2012), those who do not conform to heteronormative ideals (Wellard, 2006), or any young person who performs in ways that are not celebrated in a sporting field. The structures and goals of sport therefore need to be redefined to meet the desires and celebrate the strengths of a wider range of youth.

In order to confront some of the identified exclusionary processes, the power structures that comprise largely unacknowledged scaffolding in sport should be challenged (MacDonald, 2003). Sport must consequently be reimagined. This will require new ways of thinking to find solutions that acknowledge the complex and interrelated processes that maintain exclusion. In such a scenario, young people would not be conditioned in normalizing ways to fit the dominant structures of sport (Shogan, 1998; Spade, 2012). Instead, these sport communities would disrupt the narrow hegemonic discourses that continue to exclude a great number of young people. Rather than asking the question, "Would *you* like to play *our* game", this version of sport would be grounded in the alternative reflection, "This game is not working. Are you interested in creating a new one?"

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Paper Three

"Not As Good as the Joneses": Parents' Experiences of Supporting Recreation For Their Children While Living with Lower Incomes.

Living with a lower income is known to shape the role of recreation in a person's life (Bourdieu, 1991). Yet, influences of income in shaping the desire and capacity for recreation have not been fully considered. In this study I sought to explore the influences of income on the meaning of recreation for parents who supported the involvement of their children while living with lower incomes. Living with lower incomes refers here to describe individuals who have fewer resources as a result of their income. Not simply an objective categorization, a lower income is experienced subjectively and can influence much broader matters of education, housing, and values (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013).

The introduction of the paper reviews current academic literature to provide insight into the ways a lower income might influence the meaning of recreation for parents in relation to their children. In particular, I call attention to the ways income might impact parents' desires for recreation and the capacity to support involvement. The need for a more thorough understanding of parents' experiences is also highlighted in light of increasing pressure on parents to support the recreation involvement of their children. Recreation in this paper refers broadly to organized forms of extra-curricular social activities (such as dance, library programs, and school trips) and more casual activities (such as biking and shooting hoops).

The Desire for Recreation

Material conditions can shape the extent to which recreation assumes a valued role in a person's life (Bourdieu, 1991). A person living with a lower income is likely to have a limited amount of distance from daily necessities and may consequently acquire a "taste for necessity" through which some recreational activities are viewed to be an extraneous and unnecessary luxury (Bourdieu, 1984). As a result, parents may differ in their desires to support recreation and in the types of activities that have relevance in their

lives. Despite this recognition, there has been little exploration of parents' experiences of recreation in relation to their children.

An ethnographic study by Lareau (2011) explored the lives of twelve poor, working-class, and middle-class families and is one of the few studies that seeks to understand the meaning of recreation (among a range of other aspects) in the lives of parents living with lower incomes. Lareau showed how structured forms of recreation were largely irrelevant to the lives of families living with lower incomes. The sacrifice required for parents to support organized recreation participation mostly outweighed the potential benefits. Organized recreation did not generally feature in the lives of their children who instead tended to have greater freedom to engage in more unsupervised forms of play. Parents of poor and working-class families consequently seemed to adopt a *natural growth* approach to raising their children compared to parents of middle-class families who tended toward the *concerted cultivation* of their children through organized recreation.

In contrast, other research has suggested that organized recreation can, at times, play an important role in the lives of parents living with lower incomes. A study by Holt, Kingsley, Tink and Scherer (2011) asked parents living with lower incomes about the developmental benefits of sport participation. Building confidence and experiencing exploration were two of the personal benefits perceived to be gained through sport participation. Parents' also identified social benefits that included making new friends and building relationships with coaches. Despite highlighting some of the ways parents might value the role of sports for their children, the benefits of involvement were not critiqued within the context of living with a lower income. Put simply, the benefits of sport in this study are presented as an inevitable result of involvement and equally available to all participants. Yet, as previous research has indicated, recreation is subjectively experienced in relation to a person's material circumstances and these circumstances need to be considered in any discussion about the value of recreation in parents' lives (Bourdieu, 1991).

Quarmby and Dagkas (2013) also considered the significance of recreation for families with lower incomes. They examined the meaning of physical activity in the lives of young people from low-income, lone parent families. The study comprised interviews

with young people (11-14 years old) who shared that their parents often encouraged physical activity involvement. However, participating in physical activity was made difficult due to their family circumstances, which involved varying custody arrangements and left little free time. Although parents appeared to value physical activity through the perspectives of their children, material circumstances restricted the enactment of these values in practice.

This study is useful for highlighting the ways material conditions can shape the recreation experiences of families living with lower incomes. However, only children were interviewed in the study and parents did not have the opportunity to share their own understanding and experiences of supporting recreation. Speaking to parents directly is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of recreation in their lives and the extent to which recreation has relevance for their children. Responding to current gaps in the literature, this must be done with consideration for parents' material circumstances, which is likely to shape their desire and capacity to provide recreation opportunities for their children.

The Capacity to Support Recreation

As highlighted by the aforementioned studies, living with a lower income influences parents' capacity to support the recreation involvement of their children. The impact of income in terms of capacity has, however, largely been understood in financial terms. In this regard, previous research has tended to focus on constraints of transportation, cost and time experienced by parents (e.g. Tirone, 2003; Holt et al., 2011). Through this research, the availability of financial resources has been shown to clearly impact parents' capacity to support recreation involvement.

Despite the insight this research provides, it also has some limitations. First, constraints tend to be presented as discrete rather than part of a larger interconnected process of inequity relating to social class and tied to a broader set of power relations. To use transportation to demonstrate, transportation to and from recreation activities is a fundamental aspect of young peoples' recreation involvement and a responsibility that typically falls on parents (Hoefer, McKenzie, Sallis, Marshall & Conway, 2001). This is a demand on parents' time generally, but becomes exceedingly difficult when parents do

not have their own vehicle or struggle to afford the maintenance on a car they do own (e.g. paying for gas). Using public transit greatly extends the time it takes to reach activities while parents lose hours in a day that may otherwise have had earning potential or been dedicated to other activities (e.g. homework, family time). Transport, cost and time are therefore necessarily interrelated and unequally constraining for individuals living with lower incomes due to a disparate distribution of a number of resources (Donnelly & Harvey, 1996).

This leads to a second limitation of the existing research in that it has primarily considered the need for economic resources at the expense of considering other resources. Recreation participation not only demands economic resources such as money and time but also demands a range of cultural resources. For example, familiarity within particular recreation spaces and knowledge about the expected ways to engage are cultural resources that may be more or less available to parents depending on their material circumstances due to lack of interest and/or limited opportunity. Cultural constraints are therefore as important as economic constraints when considering the capacity of parents to support their children's recreation involvement (Wright, MacDonald & Groom, 2003). However, the cultural demands of recreation and the impact of these demands at a personal level have seldom been considered. Further research is therefore needed to understand the diverse demands of recreation and how parents living with lower incomes experience these demands.

Understanding parents' experiences of these demands has become particularly pertinent in light of a changing economic and cultural context in which the pressure on parents to provide recreation for their children appears to have increased (Coakley, 2006; Collins & Kay, 2014).

Increasing Pressures

There are several factors that suggest the pressure on parents to support recreation for their children has increased over recent decades. The rise of neoliberal approaches in Canada (and beyond) has reduced government responsibility for recreation programs and withdrawn substantial amounts of funding (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Tirone, 2003). Recreation has consequently shifted from a focus on public good to an enterprise model

of cost recovery and financial profits for certain individuals who benefit from a market-driven approach (Frisby et al., 2005). This privatization has led to increased participation costs and more centralized, rather than localized provision, resulting in greater demands on those who wish to participate (Coakley, 2010). Simultaneously, individual responsibility for one's own participation has been promoted, which has put the onus firmly on parents to ensure their family's involvement (Reid, Panic, & Frisby, 2002). These interrelated factors have intensified the burden of responsibility on parents wishing to have their children involved in recreation.

Fee assistance programs have been introduced in the wake of diminished recreation funding in an attempt to offset the high costs associated with participation for those with lower incomes (Whitson, 2011). However, little is known about the impact of such policies (Frisby et al., 2005), particularly the experiences of parents who access these resources to support their children's involvement. The study by Holt et al. (2011) provides insight into parents' experiences of receiving fee assistance for their children to participate in sport. In particular, it highlights some of the limitations of fee assistance for making sport more attainable for families living with lower incomes. Spence, Holt, Sprysak, Spencer-Cavaliere & Caufield (2012) also deduced that the federal Children's Fitness Tax Credit in Canada, intended to reduce the cost of participation in organized physical activities, is vastly ineffective and predominantly benefits families with higher rather than lower incomes.

In light of this research, more needs to be understood about the meaning of recreation for parents who support the involvement of their children while living with lower incomes. Such research would shed light on the potential relevance and impact of policies intended to aid parents living with lower incomes in supporting their children's recreation involvement. The current study consequently sought to understand the experiences of parents who support the recreation involvement of their children while living with lower incomes and in doing so, explored the meaning of recreation in their lives.

Theoretical Framework

The paper draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1990, 1991) to inform a more thorough understanding of the meaning of recreation in the lives of parents living with lower incomes. The specific concepts of habitus, doxa, and capital helped to understand the potential reasons parents supported their children's recreation involvement even though their material circumstances made it difficult to do so.

Habitus refers to a system of tastes and preferences that defines the attachment of meaning to social practices (Bourdieu, 1991). A person's habitus therefore influences the meaning recreation takes on in their lives – their desire to engage in it and their tastes for particular forms of recreation. *Doxa* refers to commonplace values and perceptions that permeate a particular social space (Bourdieu, 1990). Doxa therefore transcends any one person's particular habitus to reproduce shared (hegemonic, normative) assumptions about the meaning and value of social practices such as recreation that are widely taken for granted (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013).

Capital is of particular relevance to this study because it refers to the costs of and available profits from participating in different field such as recreation (Bourdieu, 1986). Recreation provides a site in which economic capital – resources of money and time – are invested and can be traded for cultural and social capital. Cultural capital refers to the privileges gained when a person aligns with preferred ways of being in a particular social space. For example, feeling comfortable or competent in a recreational setting (and having a disposition to maintain these feelings) is a form of cultural capital. Social capital is similar to cultural capital in that it can only be gained by 'fitting' within a social space, but specifically refers to the privileges acquired through membership to a particular group. For example, a friendship or acquaintance that is valued within (and across) cultural fields is a form of social capital.

With regard to the present study, a person's habitus and their doxic experiences would have informed parents' decisions about recreation involvement and the value it had in their lives. These concepts were therefore particularly useful for exploring the potential reasons why parents supported their children's recreation involvement in light of their material circumstances and their experiences of doing so.

Research Approach

Community-Based Research

A community-based research (CBR) approach was adopted for the research to bridge knowledge and expertise across practice-based and academic contexts (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). The partnership included myself as the research lead, two accessibility coordinators from a municipal recreation organization and a youth program manager at a provincial non-profit organization. The accessibility coordinators enhanced the research substantially by providing situated knowledge about the fee assistance they offered, the families they worked with, and the community itself. The partnership additionally included a youth initiatives coordinator from a provincial recreation association who provided broader knowledge about the provision of youth recreation in the province. With the most research experience, I took a leadership role in research activities.

Developing the scope of the project was largely a collective effort. Partners met 1-3 times per month over two years and made decisions regarding the research questions, data collection techniques, timelines, responsibilities, goals, and ethics (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). I chose Interpretive Description (Thorne, Kirkham, & MacDonald-Emes, 1997) as the method for the project with the intention of generating knowledge that could bridge academic and professional contexts. The design of the project was therefore shaped by a combination of practice-based knowledge and relevant literature to provide scaffolding through which to ground the study (Thorne et al., 1997; Thorne, Kirkham & O'Flynn, 2004).

A University Research Ethics Board granted ethics approval for the study during the initial stages of the partnership. Once the scope of the project had been determined a modified ethics proposal was approved. Partners additionally engaged in discussions throughout the project about the most appropriate way to conduct the research, reflecting a relational ethics approach (Boser, 2007).

The two accessibility coordinators worked in a municipal recreation department that had established a fee assistance program in the community in which the study took place. Fee assistance for recreation can come from a number of sources in Canada. Several national charities provide funding (up to approximately $250.00 annually) for children and youth to participate in physical activities with a predominant focus on sport.

Many municipal recreation departments have also implemented fee assistance to provide access to their community recreation centres and associated programming (Frisby et al., 2005; Whitson, 2011).

The particular fee assistance relevant to the study provided passes that enabled free use of local recreation facilities and a substantial reduction in programs offered by the department (25% of the original cost). At the time at which these passes were distributed, families were also often referred to or informed about other assistance such as bus passes, food banks or external funding for recreation. However, as was discussed by the parents in the study, this did not always occur. Some parents did not find out about the availability of additional fee assistance for recreation until much later. As such, the parents in the study differed in the extent to which they had accessed fee assistance beyond that provided by the department.

To receive fee assistance from the municipal recreation department, the parents had attended an 'intake' meeting at their local Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) branch and expressed their desire for assistance due to a lack of disposable income. More often than not, assistance was provided if a family's income fell below the low-income cut-off (LICO). The LICO is a Canadian-wide income threshold below which a family is likely to devote a larger portion (more than 20%) of its income on necessities such as food, shelter and clothing than the average family (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Participants and the Community

The study took place in a primarily affluent county located on the edge of a mid-sized Western Canadian city in which there was a large suburban core surrounded by residential acreages, industrial development and some rural agriculture (total population 92,000). To recruit participants one of the accessibility coordinators sent 150 letters to families who had received financial assistance from the municipal recreation department and had consented to being contacted. To adequately respond to the research purpose the partners collectively decided to speak with parents who had received fee assistance to offset the costs of participation. By applying for and receiving fee assistance, these parents had already taken measures to support the involvement of their children and as

such we believed they could provide insight into their experiences of doing so and the meaning of recreation in their lives. In the recruitment letters I asked to speak with parents and their children (aged 13-18) with the intention of simultaneously learning about the experiences of youth and along with their parents' experiences of supporting them in this pursuit. Because it was parents' perspectives we were interested in for this paper, I only included the data from the six parents interviewed.

All of the parents who took part in an interview were mothers, five who were raising their children as single or solo parents. Single parent in this sense meant that parents were no longer living with their partners. Solo parent meant they were parenting alone. The mothers shared stories that indicated very different reasons for their lower incomes and the extent to which their material circumstances were intergenerational. Some of them found themselves experiencing lower incomes as a result of separation, disability, and/or abuse. In terms of employment, four of the parents worked (one of these women was concurrently pursuing higher education). Two experienced disability and received an assured disability income of approximately $16,200 annually (compared to the median family income of $94,460 in the province) (Statistics Canada, 2009). The housing circumstances of the families were largely unknown, but two of the interviews took place in housing cooperatives in the suburban core.

Generating Data

Data were generated through interviews and reflective notes. The interviews took place in the community library, a recreation centre, and participants' homes depending on the participants' preferred location. Interviews were semi-structured and as such, an interview guide was used as a foundation from which to explore participants' experiences (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The interview questions asked parents about physical activity – what it meant to them, how important they felt it was to their children's lives, the nature of their children's involvement, and what they felt supported or inhibited opportunities for participation. Despite asking about "physical activity", parents spoke about a range of recreational activities (e.g. cycling, school trips, golf and visiting the library). I consequently felt that the term "recreation" might better encapsulate the activities described by participants so this term was chosen as the descriptor for the present paper.

Having their children present may have deterred parents from discussing their living circumstances as fully as they may have if they were alone, however, we prioritized giving choice to participants with regard to the nature of their interview rather than impose our own research preferences (Boser, 2007). The interviews all lasted approximately one hour and were audio taped and transcribed for analysis. Reflective notes were also taken following each interview and throughout the process of establishing and nurturing the CBR partnership (Richardson, 2000). These notes were used to provide additional context to the data produced in the interviews.

Analysis

Data analysis for the study was ongoing from the beginning of the partnership. Contextual knowledge was mobilized through conversations between partners leading to a more thorough understanding of the efforts of the Municipal Recreation Department to reduce financial barriers to recreation. This information and further conversations led to the development of the interview questions and informed the analysis of the interview transcripts.

After an initial process of immersion, during which the transcripts were re-read numerous times, I sorted the interview data into various groupings to thoroughly explore any relationships between the accounts provided by parents' (Thorne, 2008). Data were compared against each other and considered in relation to their broader contexts through a constant comparison approach (Thorne et al., 2004). During this process, Bourdieu and other social theory (as later described) were drawn upon to consider the potential influence of class relations for each parent while also considering the shared experiences of participants. Moving between the data and theory in an iterative manner led to the eventual development of three themes: *A Well-Balanced Life, Feelings of Guilt,* and *Not As Good As the Joneses.* Pseudonyms have been used in the findings in place of participants' real names to protect their identities.

'Findings'

A Well-Balanced Life

In the theme, *A well-balanced life,* I highlight the reasons parents felt recreation had value in their children's lives. Parents perceived recreation involvement as a means for belonging, developing culturally valued skills, and providing opportunities that could alter life circumstances. The theme is divided to outline the three main roles of recreation in young people's lives from their parents' perspectives and includes the sub-themes, *Part and Parcel, Build Your Skills* and *Connect to Healthier Kids.*

Part and Parcel

The first sub-theme refers to the ways parents believed participation in recreation was an important element of belonging for their children. Julia described the importance of recreation in her children's lives saying, "It allows your children to be part and parcel of activities that everyone else is able to be part of."

Parents felt their children's involvement in recreation was a significant part of fitting in and being part of the "norm". Janet had missed out on particular opportunities for recreation herself when she was younger due to the financial constraints experienced by her family. As a consequence, she felt she did not have the opportunity to develop a certain athletic identity that she recognized as valuable in society. She explained,

> When I was a kid we had no access to any of that (recreation). It did affect me as an adult. I really missed that….I'm not prone to go out and join sports teams now, I'm not athletic. I think if I had started when I was younger I could have grown up more that way. Being athletic is the norm, and I am so not the norm.

The sense of loss she felt from this lack of involvement motivated her to do what she could to provide recreation opportunities for her children. She spoke about her desire for them to have a different experience saying, "As a parent you always want something better for your kids."

At the time of the study, Janet had been saving up for twelve months to surprise her daughter by paying for a trip to Paris as part of her French class at school. She explained how she wanted her daughter to be able to share in the experience with others in her class: "It's an opportunity of a lifetime, you know. And I mean I want her to be able to take part in that….[Such trips are] definitely not an everyday occurrence in our house, not at all."

For Janet, the importance of the trip seemed to arise as much from the desire for her daughter to be able to take part with her peers as it did from the desire for her to experience France itself.

Being "part and parcel" was difficult for the participants in the study who lived with lower incomes in what was a predominantly wealthy area. Middle-class (White) norms prevailed in a suburban core marked by expensive cars, newly developed infrastructure, and an overbearing number of Starbucks establishments. With a fear of stigma, some of the families felt a pressure to maintain an outward appearance of a higher income status. As such, evidence of living with lower incomes was rarely visible.

Participation in physical activities played a role in maintaining an outward appearance of wealth. Julia spoke about how important fee assistance had provided golf equipment for her sons and covered the cost of membership, allowing them to participate alongside others who held a social status higher than their own. She said, "[they] made sure [my sons] had golf clubs and shoes. They've blended in. They are part and parcel of the upper echelon at the golf course."

Julia also spoke about the importance of discretion when it came to receiving financial assistance if it is to reduce the differentiation between families. The Department's fee assistance program issued facility membership cards that were identical to those that had been paid for to avoid potential stigmatization. Julia explained the impact of this for her family saying, "The kids never had to face the fact that they were being funded in a different format than their counterparts. Nobody knows we're any different than anyone else." Making sure their children avoided differentiation was extremely important to some of the parents.

Build Your Skills

The parents in the study quite clearly appreciated the value of recreation, not only for fitting in, but also for shaping their children into 'contributing citizens'. They recognized that important skills could be learned through recreation to benefit their children as adults. As indicated in the title of the main theme, Julia believed recreation gave her sons a "well-balanced life". Involvement in recreational activities held esteem alongside academic success to maintain what she believed to be a sense of equilibrium in her sons' lives.

The hope for employment opportunities was one aspiration parents pinned on their children's recreation involvement. Julia had encouraged both her sons to gain lifeguard and teaching certification with the intent that it would lead to valuable skills and future opportunities. Caroline had similarly enrolled three of her children in a program that trained young people to be recreation leaders in their community in hopes they would develop a range of culturally-valuable skills and gain better employment opportunities. Participating involved applying to the program, having an interview and becoming a trainee. After volunteering as camp counselors, youth received the opportunity for paid employment. Caroline explained,

> After you complete level three, they basically have the opportunity to get hired on by the County during the summer. It's just fabulous for them, and it combines everything…from getting them involved, for them to learn new things, and getting them active. It's very valuable…they get to put it on their resume and they actually experience working.

Parents often referred to the value of recreation for the development of skills deemed important for young people as they moved into adulthood. Some of the parents referred to these as "life skills". Asked what she would like in the way of recreation programming for her daughter, Tina shared,

> Well I personally think anything to do with life skills right now is a huge benefit for young people. I mean they're just not learning what they need

to know to be responsible individuals. They're not learning that at home, as much as they could be.

Sharing what she felt her children gained from recreation, Janet said, "Problem solving, caring, life skills, team spirit." Jennifer additionally felt physical activities provided opportunities to, "Have fun, be good sportsmen, learn how to play as a team, and build your skills." Belief in the value of recreation for the positive development of young people appeared to be widely shared by the parents (but not necessarily by the young people themselves).

Connect to Healthier Kids

This final sub-theme describes the ways parents believed sustained recreation participation for their children provided an avenue for avoiding involvement in less favoured activities and was a way to connect their children to youth who shared similar, 'healthy' (class) values.

Some parents believed in the value of recreation for deterring youth from making alternative choices that were deemed less conducive to a positive life path. In particular, parents appeared to share in the societal disapproval of the "disengaged adolescent". Caroline was thankful her children had opportunities for recreation because it provided an alternative to less desirable activities. Talking about the free library programs her children attended, she said, "These are all things designed just for teens, to give them something to do. Not hang out in the mall." Tina worried about the ramifications of a lack of opportunities for her own children and other young people in the community saying, "The street is about the only place (for them to go if they don't have recreation) and that's where they tend to get into trouble, being in groups, or loitering." These values reflect a broader narrative about the power of recreation for deterring the negative (and deemed otherwise inevitable) behaviour of young people considered at risk. Recreation is perceived to be an alternative avenue for moulding contributing citizens as a more 'productive pastime'.

Parents viewed hanging out in groups without obvious productive outcomes unfavourably. Friendships and the potential to gain positive social networks was part of

the positive image parents held about recreation. Janet spoke about the role of recreation in connecting her daughter to other youth who had similar values to their own in terms of health, community, and commitment. She said,

> Another thing is, I think it's good for them to connect to, sometimes healthier kids, in a way. You know. Because…as a parent you're always watching who their friends are. You know, and when they are hanging out with other kids that are committed to you know, a community, whether it's like, I just want to call it leadership, but….You know that really have a heart and that to help people.

It was not only gaining friends that appeared important but gaining particular types of friends that reflected a similar class position. Janet believed recreation was important for developing social networks comprised of others who were familiar with and embraced very specific (middle-class) ways of being. Only then did these friendships become valuable.

With large value placed on recreation involvement, the parents in the study sought to provide and support opportunities for their children. Unfortunately, the participation of their children required large investments by parents that were not always possible. The next theme highlights the many ways parents were expected to support their children's engagement in recreation and feelings of guilt that resulted when they could not do so.

Feelings of Guilt

In the theme, *Feelings of Guilt,* I outline the ways parents perceived a responsibility to support their children's recreation involvement. This responsibility transpired in a variety of ways and included the need to support their children by providing transportation, volunteering their time, modelling an active lifestyle, and providing financial support. All of these ways of supporting children in recreation pursuits appeared to comprise part of what parents believed it meant to be a 'good' parent in a middle-class community. However, maintaining these values while living with lower

incomes led to feelings of stress and guilt because of the limited resources parents had to support recreation participation. The theme is sub-divided and includes *No Additional Income, Good To Support Your Kids,* and *It's Just A Fear.*

No Additional Income

As the orchestrators of their children's recreation pursuits, parents contributed financial resources where they could to cover the cost of participation. Jennifer shared how her material circumstances made supporting recreation involvement difficult. She explained, "There is no additional income for things like this." Nicole also discussed the lack of disposable income her family had for recreation. Speaking about how her family would not attend the recreation facility without fee assistance she said, "We would just never go, because it's just, who has 30 bucks kicking around that you got nothing to do with, right? Not me."

Some parents would go to extensive lengths to raise the funds necessary for participation. Janet spoke about her experiences of raising money to pay for her son to register in soccer:

> My first son said, mom I want to play soccer. I'm like okay I'll figure out a way, if you want to play soccer, I'll figure out a way. And I took like a little tiny (job), you know, help people and stuff like that, to try and gather enough money to put him in for the first season.

When parents could not gather the resources needed to pay the costs of recreation, they tried to acquire financial assistance. The burden of responsibility to support recreation became apparent in light of parents' relief when they received financial assistance. Tina discussed the sense of pressure she felt when she could not provide recreation opportunities for her children. She said, "I didn't know of the [financial assistance] program until I became disabled and I was fretting because my children need something." She spoke about the financial assistance she received saying, "It's a huge relief."

Jennifer also discussed the impact of the fee assistance for relieving the pressure she felt at having to financially support recreation for her children. She said, "I was actually in tears when they called and said this is a new program….It's so important for the kids, and relieves so much stress and feelings of guilt at having to say no for the parents."

Julia also referred to the significance of the financial assistance saying,

> That was a true godsend for me, because it allowed me to get discounts so that they could still continue on with their swimming levels and training at a drastically discounted rate. And so the financial assistance to me was just a welcome thing.

Although the necessity of financial assistance is highlighted through these stories, perhaps of more significance is the sense of responsibility parents had for providing recreation in a culture that does not support them in this pursuit.

Further to providing recreation for her own daughter, Tina paid for the opportunity for her daughter's friends to be involved so that she would have somebody to participate with. Tina and her daughter had free entrance to the recreation centre as a result of the financial assistance. However, some of her daughter's friends did not have access because their parents did not qualify for assistance but could not afford the entrance cost. She explained,

> I have a ten punch card I bought on my own so that if she has a friend that she wants to come with that doesn't have one, then I just hand her the card and she'll pay for the friend for the day. So it works quite well. But then it's out of my pocket, and I don't mind doing that because I love for her to have the opportunity to engage with her friends, in whatever activity she's participating in. But it would be nice if it was sort of an option that any child could participate.

Not only did Tina put efforts to into making sure her daughter could participate in recreation, she also sought to improve the quality of this experience by paying for her daughter's friends to participate.

Good To Support Your Kids

Parents felt numerous other responsibilities to support their children's recreation involvement. Along with providing the financial means, parents provided transportation for their children to get to and from activities in a community in which the locations of such activities were quite diffuse. Caroline spoke about how her family's ability to go to the recreation centre was dependent on her driving them. She said, "[The recreation facility] is fairly far out there so [attending] is contingent upon me driving us [there]."

To some of the parents, staying with their children during activities was also part of what it meant to be a good parent. Sitting in the stands of hockey rinks or along the sidelines of sports fields was something the parents did regularly. Caroline spoke about going to the recreation facility and being there with her children. She said, "We tend to go more as a family, as opposed to dropping them off. It's not sort of the thing I would do, just drop them off." Leaving your child at a facility or program was perceived negatively in a community in which parents actively engaged in their children's lives. This put pressure on parents in terms of time; the need to not only transport their children to activities but to also stay with them while they were participating. Julia spoke about a variety of pressures on parents, including the pressure of time. She explained, "For a quite a few people finances come into question….And then your gas, your time, you know, people are working shifts, its hard to coordinate that." The demands of recreation made coordinating involvement particularly difficult for parents living with lower incomes. These demands were additionally intensified for five of the six participants who were single or solo parents.

The support of parents went further than transporting young people and staying with them during activities. It also involved more concerted efforts, such as volunteering as coaches, timekeepers, and fundraisers. Jennifer discussed stepping in as the coach of her son's community soccer team: "[It was] very poorly organized. At one point nobody

else would step up and I ended up kicking off my high heels and hiking up my skirt, and trying to coach them. I know nothing about soccer."

Janet also spoke about volunteering for the recreation organizations her children were involved with. She started by describing her son's involvement in basketball and said,

> I was on the organizing committee, or you know, whatever they called that…Board of whatever, I can't remember what, parent committee or something. Yeah and then, with Kristen when she was in brownies, I was you know, volunteered as Tawny Owl, and even with soccer, much to my boys, I don't know how happy they were about it, but I volunteered as their assistant coach one year, in soccer, because they, yeah it's just, they needed somebody and a girlfriend of mine was doing the soccer, and she's like I just, I need, some – I'm like okay, you know I'm here anyways. I'd never miss a game.

In addition to volunteering, attending all of her sons' soccer games was important to Janet and appeared to be a mark of parental achievement.

Jennifer also volunteered for the community basketball league in which her son played. She described her responsibilities as a parent saying, "And we're volunteers as well. Parent volunteers, mostly…we had to score keep and time keep. We had to all volunteer to do that….You were never short of volunteers, never short of parents cheering the kids on." That the organization was never short of parent volunteers indicated that there existed a culture of volunteerism through which there was an expectation that parents would be involved in their children's recreation. The 'good' contributing parent fulfilled their supportive role by score keeping, time keeping and cheering for their children. Janet embraced these expectations saying, "I just think it's really good to support your kids, show them that you're invested in what they're doing."

None of the parents seemed to object to volunteering. On the contrary, they appeared to accept these parental expectations. Despite this, the need to live up to these expectations put pressure on the parents in the study that was exacerbated by their material circumstances. Janet, for example, was attending university and working while

raising her three children alone. Julia was also a solo parent of two children and did shift work. The hours she worked were consequently irregular and changed frequently. Time was a privilege that eluded the parents in the study or was at least extremely difficult to accumulate. Attending games and finding time to volunteer was not an easy task, even when they achieved it.

It's Just A Fear

In addition to volunteering, some of the parents also shared that they felt an expectation to be involved in recreation as participants themselves. They believed they had a responsibility to provide positive modelling for their children. Caroline discussed taking her children to the trail system so they could ride their bikes. With an apologetic tone she shared, "I'll just sit on the bench, which I know isn't modeling very well."

Tina also believed she should participate in her children's recreation pursuits as much as possible to encourage their participation. She explained, "I think it's important for us to be involved in our kids' lives. I think we can inspire each other. I can teach them skills that I might have learned, they can teach me."

Further to modelling and inspiring participation in recreation, some of the parents believed they had a responsibility to teach their children physically active ways of being. Janet spoke about her embarrassment at not having taught her daughter to ride a bike. She explained what had prevented her from doing so saying,

> This is kind of embarrassing…but [Kristen] just learned how to ride a bike last year. Last year. And that was partly my fault, because um, [my son], just before her, had been involved in a very bad accident…where a boat had come down on his head, when he was five years old. And um, and I think I was just freaked, you know. So she kind of got the brunt of my [fear]. I never really encouraged it.

She added, "You know, I, my ex husband is not around, anywhere around. So um, and I, it's just a fear, it's just a fear that I haven't been able to get over. You know." One of Kristen's friends had taught her to ride a bike the previous year, at the age of 14.

Despite Kristen having learnt to ride, Janet felt she should have been the one to teach her daughter at an earlier age: "I'm like, yeah, that was really dumb, [Janet], you should have taught her that earlier, you know. 'Cause she's going to be fine and she's not going to get hit, you know?" Having learnt to ride a bike, cycling had become an activity that Kristen and her mum did together. Janet again discussed her perceived need to support her daughter by also being involved in recreation:

> I just said you know, I need to support her in this, and so we got [bikes] together. I need the exercise, she'll drag me out, you know. And so and we go together, you know, and I'm not always with her, but for the most part we do it together.

Similar to Janet, Tina also believed she needed to support her children by participating in recreation more frequently but spoke about the challenges she faced in doing so. She explained,

> I have an anxiety panic disorder, so they're often helping me cope with different challenges through the day, and are a very good support system for each other…But it would be nice to get out of the house more, push myself out of the house more, and partake.

She found the older, smaller recreational centre in the community a less overwhelming space to be in. It was in this same facility that I met Tina and her daughter for the interview. She said of the facility, "I get noise sensitive, light sensitive and I find here I'm a little more settled. My core is a little more settled."

Modelling 'positive' recreation behaviours for children was difficult for parents in different ways and was often tied up with their material circumstances. For example, the anxiety that inhibited Tina from participating in recreation also prevented her from being able to work. For Janet, the accident involving her son that made her fearful to teach her daughter ride a bike was also the reason she had to leave her job. In other circumstances, parents had not had the recreation experiences themselves to develop a habitus that was

seamless with the recreation spaces their children occupied. When parents did not model recreation, it consequently tended not to arise from a lack of valuing recreation, but from a range of other factors that were often intricately tied to their material circumstances. This incongruence sometimes led parents to experience feelings of guilt when they could not live up to expectations of what it meant to be a 'good' recreation parent.

Not As Good as the Joneses

With the vast responsibilities parents assumed for supporting their children's recreation involvement, gaining financial assistance was one way of relieving some of the stress they experienced. However, the process of gaining financial assistance was not straightforward. It required parents to reveal and at times prove their lower incomes so that they could be classified as worthy enough to receive it. Trying to prevent their children from being differentiated in and through recreation consequently led to parents enduring many processes in which they themselves were differentiated. Rephrasing the original term, "Keeping up with the Joneses", one of the parents used the phrase, "Not as good as the Joneses" to refer to the fear of stigmatization based on her material circumstances in comparison with others in the community. The theme is sub-divided and includes *Kind of Humiliating, Magic Number,* and *Not So Visible.*

Kind of Humiliating

To gain financial assistance, families often had to show they had a need substantial enough to justify its allocation. This need was usually demonstrated through paperwork that indicated parents' lower incomes. Having to 'prove' their income by presenting paperwork to an agency was demeaning for parents. Nicole explained how she felt about having to apply for financial assistance to gain a membership pass to the local facilities: "Hi, I'm broke, so I'd like this pass. It's kind of humiliating." Janet also spoke about her experiences applying for financial assistance. She explained her hesitations and described how difficult it was to apply initially saying,

> I think when you go through something like that it is difficult to ask for help. So when I saw [information about the financial assistance] in the [recreation] book...I certainly knew I qualified for it….[But] I thought [to myself], [are] they going to make me feel, you know, lesser than? I live in an affluent community, are they going to make me feel like I'm not as good as the Joneses?

Revealing and, at times, having to prove their incomes to receive assistance occurred on a frequent basis for parents in the pursuit of accessing recreation opportunities for their children. Parents found themselves having to discuss their material circumstances with leaders, coaches and administrators in order to find ways for their children to participate. Caroline described explaining her circumstances to a soccer club because the external fee assistance she had applied for did not come through in time to cover the cost of registration when it needed to be paid. She said,

> It's $225 for her to do the outdoor soccer in the spring. I know that because I've gone and registered her, but I did go to them and let them know that I was applying for [financial assistance] and if I don't get it [she won't be playing] so I haven't promised her anything. I told her I'm looking into it and I'm certainly trying, so I'm really hoping that goes through.

Trying to secure funding to cover a range of recreation costs required parents to juggle a number of fee assistance applications with the registration processes of different teams and programs. There was rarely any coordination between agencies that provided fee assistance and those that provided recreation, which made this process even more difficult for parents. It also led to many situations where parents were forced to explain their material circumstances to recreation providers in order to provide justification when they could not pay registration fees on time or meet other conditions of participation. This resulted in the differentiation and 'othering' of parents and their children in and through recreation.

Magic Number

In Canada, financial assistance tends to be allocated to families whose income falls below what is known as the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO). One of the parents referred to this cut-off as a "magic number". To Nicole, the cut-off was a mysterious and arbitrary number that did not seem to make sense. She said, "I don't know what they base [the allocation of assistance] on. Obviously there's some sort of magic number that's used to decide." Despite seeming arbitrary, the magic number had very real impacts for families because it determined whether they gained assistance or not.

The Recreation Department tried to be flexible when it came to allocating their own fee assistance. As such, they sometimes provided families with incomes above the cut-off access to services. For example, the department had provided assistance to a woman and her sons because her husband was withholding financial resources. Janet also discussed benefitting from this flexible system, having been given an extension on the assistance she received despite an increase in her income. She explained, "I had knee surgery and was using the gym but [we] couldn't afford it on our own. She allowed us one more year, without the [paperwork]….It really, really helped us. I wouldn't have been able to afford it."

Even with this occasional flexibility, there were still many people who did not apply for or did not receive assistance because their income level was above the LICO. Nicole said, "I know there are a lot of people who live in this area [whose] income is just a little too high, so they don't get the recreation access pass [but] would use it if they had it." Janet spoke about how, as of the next year, her family would no longer receive financial assistance because she had started earning slightly more than the level of income specified by the cut-off. She explained this saying, "…we're just over the brim."

Despite a higher income, Janet shared that she did not have the disposable income to cover the high cost of recreation. Tina also highlighted this problem explaining, "There's a lot of low-income families who don't qualify or know of the program but don't have the extra finances [for recreation]." The use of the LICO as a determining factor for receiving assistance was therefore problematic and resulted in a large number

of families without either assistance or the disposable income to pay for recreation opportunities.

On top of the limited scope of fee assistance due to the cut-off, there was a general lack of visibility when it came to living with a lower income in such an affluent community. As a result, available assistance was difficult to find out about and conditions of participating were not always explicitly communicated.

Not So Visible

Living in an affluent community, some of the parents strived to maintain an outward appearance of holding a higher social position so as to avoid stigma. Janet highlighted this point in the following excerpt from her interview:

> I don't consider myself a normal single mom. You know, because I've done well for myself now. I have constantly been going through education, upgrading myself, you know. I've never just sat down and said okay, I'm going to be a waitress. I've always strived to achieve higher and instilled that in my kids…. Some people lump all single parents into the same thing, right. It's just the way it is, you know, it's just the way it is.

Janet's attempt to differentiate herself from other single parents was reflective of the larger community culture in which higher incomes were often assumed and heteronormative family structures were ubiquitous. Having a lower income and single or solo parenting were not therefore very 'visible' in the community and were actively concealed by many. Jennifer discussed the extent to which living with a lower income was largely hidden in the community. She said, "I have no idea what my next-door neighbour, or down-the-road's financial situation is. People don't really know who's on subsidy and who isn't, so far be it from me to approach anybody and say anything [about fee assistance]."

Janet spoke about becoming a solo-parent family and how she and her daughter, Kristen, felt different to other families in the community. She said,

> There are so many couples, so many families out here, with a mum and a dad. Like [Kristen] had said when we were here, something about, I remember you saying to me one time, you know mum, I'm one of the only, one of my friends, that…don't have a mum and a dad. And that was you know, and that is how I felt, you know. I felt like the odd man out.

In such a community, where lower incomes and single or solo parenting were seemingly absent, it was difficult to make fee assistance known to the people who wanted to access it. Julia discussed this problem saying, "The accessibility is there, it was a phenomenal support network. My concern is it's not so visible."

Janet talked about the haphazard way she found out about assistance and how valuable it had been: "If I hadn't stumbled upon it we would not have access to all of those things. Because really that's what kind of got us into the soccer, got us introduced to it, got us introduced to the community sports."

Nicole discussed finding out about financial assistance through a friend who was already accessing it:

> We've been here since 2007, and one day my friend came home and she said, did you know you can go and get this pass, and you can go for free? And I was like, what? I didn't even know this….So it's not really well advertised, maybe. I've told everyone I can think of.

Janet spoke about discovering a less formal type of financial assistance at a local soccer organization. After talking to the coach and the administrative assistant to explain the reason she was late paying the $300 registration fee for her son, they offered to cover the registration costs. She shared,

> I had called the soccer association and it was a little late already, in the season, and I had called them and I came in, and this is what I really learned, you know how people touch you when you're not in a great position. And I came in and [I said to the administrative

> assistant]…here's the $300 [for registration] and [explained that] it took a lot to get the $300. And she said oh well you know I'm sorry, we can't accept that. And I almost started crying, I was like well why [not]? She says no, no, he's on the team, but we would like to pay for this. We have a fund for families that really need our help. And I started to cry, because I really was in a place where I really did need the help.

Although the waived registration fee provided some obvious relief for Janet, she received assistance only by chance after being compelled to disclose her material circumstances. The high cost of participating forced her into a position in which she was differentiated from other parents who had the available resources to pay the registration costs on time. Instances like this were not uncommon and further reinforced the 'othering' of parents with lower incomes.

The covert nature of living with a lower income often resulted in the presumption that most parents whose children were involved in recreation had higher incomes. A consequence of this was that the costs associated with activities were not always explicitly obvious. Julia spoke about the hidden costs of uniforms and additional clothing her sons needed to participate in various activities. In particular, she described her son's participation on his school's basketball team and the coaches' decision to buy team clothing (at the expense of parents) without first consulting the families. She said, "It bothered me. There was never a note sent home to say they were getting track pants."

The decision to order track pants was one of a number of situations in which requirements of participating were not made explicit and the availability of disposable financial resources was assumed. Julia had also attended an initial meeting about the team in which parents were told simply to, "bring your chequebook". It was only by sitting through the meeting that Julia found out how much it would cost to have her son involved, which was expected to be paid as a lump sum at the start of the season. She described realizing she could not cover the initial fees saying, "Finances are extremely tight. I remember coming out of that meeting and I couldn't do it. [I thought], I can't afford for him to go out there".

There was little consideration for the decision making process that might be necessary for parents to go through before financially investing in their children's recreation. In addition to not being given the details they needed to make informed financial decisions about their children's recreation involvement, parents were also put in situations in which this decision making process became quite public. Hidden requirements, such as paying for additional equipment and clothing, made providing recreation opportunities substantially more difficult for parents living with lower incomes (Bourdieu, 1991). A lack of financial explicitness consequently had unequal impacts across families with varying levels of available resources.

Discussion

In the current study, I sought to understand the experiences of parents who support the recreation involvement of their children while living with lower incomes and in doing so, explored the meaning of recreation in their lives. The following discussion draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1990, 1991) and other researchers who have used a similar theoretical lens. This work helped to inform an analysis of the parents' experiences of providing recreation and the meaning it has in their lives with attention to their material circumstances. Bourdieu's concepts habitus, capital and doxa help to provide an understanding about the reasons parents living with lower incomes might have wanted to support their children's recreation involvement despite having fewer economic and cultural resources and the role of their predominantly affluent community in shaping these desires and experiences.

Habitus has been described as a system involving perception and appreciation (Bourdieu & Waquant, 2013). A person's habitus therefore influences the meaning recreation takes on in their lives. In terms of the participants in the study, some of the parents seemed to have developed somewhat of a middle-class taste for recreation, at least as far as their children were concerned. They perceived the valuable role recreation could play in their children's lives, in particular, for helping them be "part and parcel", connect to "healthier kids", and gain "life skills". These perceived profits of participation were forms of cultural and social capital that parents believed could help their children as they moved through adolescence and into adulthood. The potential to accrue and convert

these various forms of capital through recreation therefore seemed to be viewed by parents as an opportunity for social mobility (Spaiij, 2011). Janet was clear that she wanted her children to connect to "healthier kids" who contributed to their community. Not just any social connections were therefore viewed as capital, but only those with particular types of children who shared similar (middle-class) values. Recreation was a particular space in which parents believed these forms of capital could be acquired.

Perceiving the potential profits available through recreation, parents tried to orchestrate as many opportunities for recreation as they reasonably could. The parents had what Bourdieu (1984) might consider a taste for luxury despite not being particularly far removed from the day-to-day necessities of life. Although some of the parents' lower incomes were fairly new, which may explain the lack of coherence between parents' seemingly middle-class preferences and their material circumstances, the social space also appeared incredibly important in shaping parents' values about recreation. The community in which participants lived was predominantly white and middle-class, characterized by newly developed infrastructure. As such it reflected the North American suburbs described by Howell, Andrews and Jackson (2002) as "largely white metropolitan peripheries and populations dominated by an aesthetic and consumer oriented possessive individualism, that underlies a more self-righteously advanced adherence to notions of achievement, morality, and privilege" (p.162). Involvement in recreation was an overt display of consumerism that the parents in the study seemed to believe they were individually responsible to provide for their children. As such, the consumption of recreation was tied up in notions of what it meant to be a 'good' parent in an affluent community.

The way recreation was embraced in the community, as an essential element of young people's lives, at least by adults, reflected what Howell et al. (2002) have referred to at the individual level as a "suburban habitus" (p.165). This largely middle-class habitus is similar to the one described by Lareau (2011) that led parents to engage in a process of concerted cultivation in raising their children. At a collective level, I would propose the social space itself reproduced somewhat of a *suburban doxa* – a dominant taken-for-granted assumption about the fundamental value of recreation that its members aligned with to varying extents. The parents in the study made efforts to align with this

suburban doxa as much as they could to avoid distinction within the social space and were differently able to do so. This process resembled a form of "passing" through which individuals perform in particular ways to avoid stigmatization (Brune & Wilson, 2013).

The 'performance' of class-related behaviours has been more specifically referred to as class passing by Foster (2005). The parents in the study appeared to create a process of class passing for themselves and their children by orchestrating recreation opportunities in order to feel "part and parcel" of their community. Janet, for example, made large economic sacrifices so that her daughter, Kristen could go to Paris with her school class. However, by trying to obtain opportunities for their children, parents themselves often experienced differentiation when applying for fee assistance or providing justification for late payments. Despite the humiliation experienced by some parents during this process, the differentiation of parents appeared worthwhile if it meant their children could pass on a public stage. Recreation within such an affluent community consequently presented a site of constant negotiation between class differentiation and passing for those living with lower incomes.

Although parents valued the role of recreation in their children's lives, their material circumstances made providing opportunities for recreation a difficult task. Parents did not have the disposable income necessary to always cover the high costs of participation, some experienced anxiety around certain forms of recreation, and most described large time demands in terms of transportation, supervision and volunteering. Despite these large demands on parents, the need for copious reserves of economic and cultural capital to be involved in recreation tends to be ignored within a suburban discourse that presents recreation as a lifestyle choice (Howell et al., 2002). As such, when parents do not provide recreation opportunities for their children it is often viewed as a personal deficit rather than related to material differences (Bairner & Evans, 2013). Reflective of this moral discourse, when the parents in the study could not support their children's recreation involvement in a multitude of ways some of them experienced feelings of stress and guilt.

With this in mind, future research and practice-based recreation initiatives should avoid reproducing stringent ideas about the forms of recreation that are most desirable as a part of a particular (middle-class) lifestyle. Such messages not only lead to the shaming

of families who do not engage in these ways, they limit the range of recreational activities that could be enjoyed by a broader number of individuals. As shown by Lareau's (2011) study, the children of working-class and poor families had a variety of recreational experiences that were less structured, self-directed and allowed a large degree of autonomy. Concerted cultivation through highly structured forms of recreation may not, as it is currently presented, be the only and most desirable way to experience recreation for many families, regardless of their material circumstances.

Conclusion

In the present paper I set out to understand the experiences of parents who support the recreation involvement of their children while living with lower incomes and in doing so, explore the meaning of recreation in their lives. Using Bourdieu and other social theory to support an analysis of the data, three themes were presented to show the ways parents perceived the value of recreation to help their children achieve a "well-balanced life", the sense of responsibility parents felt to support their children's involvement in a range of ways and the "feelings of guilt" they experienced when they could not, and the potential for stigmatization in an affluent community in which living with lower incomes was "not so visible".

The discussion of the findings highlighted the importance of the social space for shaping the meaning of recreation for parents and the role it played in their lives. In a predominantly affluent suburban community, recreation involvement was made to appear as though a natural and fundamental part of a young person's life. As such, it was parents' moral responsibility to support opportunities for their children. The current paper provides empirical insight into the ways such social spaces may be experienced by parents living with lower incomes. For the parents in the study recreation presented a site of potential differentiation and passing. Providing opportunities for their children to pass appeared to take priority over the parents' own experiences of differentiation when applying for fee assistance and 'proving' incomes. In an ideal situation, greater government subsidization would reduce the cost of recreation for all those who desire it and reduce the differentiation and potential stigmatization of parents. In lieu of this, fee

assistance programs will need to broaden their guidelines to ensure they provide funding to all who need it without making people 'prove' their incomes.

Finally, in light of the pressure parents faced to support their children's recreation, discourses that reproduce the notion of recreation as a moral choice and an individual responsibility must be challenged. Structured and organized forms of recreation are privileged over other forms of recreation, demanding large reserves of economic and cultural capital to participate. These narrow forms of recreation may not be the only and most desirable way to experience recreation for many families, regardless of their material circumstances. Shaming parents when they cannot or do not want to aspire to have their children in these recreational activities must therefore be avoided. These dominant forms of recreation must also be questioned for the ways they privilege the participation of some over others.

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Epilogue

At Best, An Inconclusive and Momentarily Complete Conclusion

Journal notes, April 13 2012

The interviews I have been doing for this project feel like one continuous rehearsal. The interview ends and yet the play continues, with new ideas emerging and changes constantly being made. It feels as though no matter how many times I talk to people, I will never really know what I intended to know at the start of the project. The end performance will never take place; the rehearsal will just gradually stop happening.

It feels like a difficult place to begin, the start of a conclusion, when you know that any culmination, any final performance, eludes you. Even after a conference, a toolkit, a dissertation, a Ph.D. defense, the play continues. At what point would it therefore be best to begin a summary of learning that endlessly continues even after the words are typed or spoken? From birth might be the best place but maybe not the most practical. The seamless way I merged into recreational spaces growing up (and how this changed for me over time) is, however, no less part of the dissertation than the interviews that took place with participants.

And how to neatly package some sort of conclusive argument when few things about the process were orderly? It is probably best to declare failure up front and move on from there. As with the dissertation, then, the conclusion avoids any claims of comprehensiveness. It instead admits its limitations as a presentation of a few ideas that have persistently and successfully pushed their way into the forefront of my mind over the course of the project. These ideas do not, therefore, come with a guarantee that they are the most globally important points. I can however promise that the conclusion, as a momentarily complete story, will at least present a place from which the next rehearsal could begin.

"The point of a story is to present itself
momentarily as complete, so that it can be said…"

(Steedman, 1986: 22)

Before jumping into the main ideas, it seems conventionally apt to return to the intention of the project and the dissertation – a good place to start any conclusion, inconclusive or otherwise. The purpose of the project, or at least one portion of it, was to explore the meaning of recreation for young people and parents who lived with lower incomes in an affluent community. This purpose was driven by an underlying desire to enhance the ways recreation is provided and supported in Alberta. Merely stating this intention necessarily encourages a question about the extent to which we achieved our goal, despite my inclination to ignore it. The answer, in short, is not to any great extent, although it is impossible to know the reach of the knowledge that was created and shared over the course of the project and I would prefer to remain defiantly optimistic.

My personal desire behind writing the three papers of the dissertation was to highlight the ways class relations are (re)produced in and through recreation. This purpose was a little more achievable, even if the three papers could only provide a glimpse of a much larger picture relating to this issue. Providing a foundation of knowledge for challenging existing hegemonic structures and imagining new ways of fostering recreation communities remains, however, a lofty goal that unfortunately (although predictably) does not lend itself to simple or widely applicable solutions. The next part of the conclusion will, however, attempt to suggest ways this grand aim could be tentatively approached.

This part of the epilogue is written with several audiences in mind – academics, policy-makers and practitioners. Rather than separate the ideas according to the presumed interests of each of these groups, I determined it might be more helpful to outline possible motivations for engaging with the ideas and leave it to the reader to decide which lens to adopt or position to take in doing so. Three possible motivations readers might have for engaging with the next phase of content are therefore:

- To consider some of the ways research, policy and practice might unintentionally and detrimentally impact individuals living with lower incomes.

- To explore possible ideas for simplifying recreation (in non-simplistic ways) so that young people can start to reclaim it in ways that are meaningful to them.

- To engage with ideas for future research that might support the enhancement of more careful policies and practices.

The following content has been divided into three sections. *Mis/recognizing class privilege* outlines several moments during the research process that highlighted for me the ways class privilege is unconsciously reproduced through daily interactions. *Stratifying practices* draws attention to the ways these class-based assumptions influence (and are reproduced through) policy and practice. In this section I reflect on recreation fee assistance programs in particular as a site for the maintenance of stratifying practices. Finally, *Simplifying recreation* shifts its focus to recreation itself as a social practice that propagates the marginalization of certain groups. This section suggests ways we might start to reimagine the potential of recreation so that it might be meaningful for a larger number of (young) people. Ideas for future research are embedded throughout the three sections (and highlighted in bold), presented as areas for exploration that might support more careful policies and practices.

Mis/recognizing class privilege

The individual-social dualism can easily creep its way into declarations about the need to alter personal understanding if we do not first acknowledge the social roots of this understanding – the self-blame that arises in the reminder of one's own privilege or the outside authoritative voice condemning others as if the source of this voice was not itself invariably part of the creation of skewed histories.

> Journal notes, June 13 2012: Self-Righteousness
>
> *It surely comes from a place of privilege, this feeling, the belief that a family should be nothing but grateful. Why am I doing these interviews? To confirm what great work the recreation department is doing to remove barriers? I have met all of the people who are working to implement the initiative and, for most, they genuinely believe it is important. To hear criticism about it during the interview made me defensive. Next followed my rise to a position from which I could look down, upon the ungrateful family and their critique of the program, ultimately silencing them.*

Bourdieu (1984) has spoken about the ways privilege is maintained through a process of misrecognition. In other words, class stratification and an uneven distribution of power is usually taken-for-granted. There were many moments of mis/recognition during the project (my own and those of others) but a couple of them stand out in ways that have merit in attempting to move forward in more careful ways than in which I proceeded (or we, if you choose to come on board) in reaching this point. The first time this particular mis/recognition came to light was during an interview with a practitioner from outside the community. I started to see it everywhere, in subtle and interconnected ways across research, policy, and practice. The practitioner shared with me that s/he suspected there were people receiving fee assistance who were "cheating the system". That is, they were receiving fee assistance but were perceived not to need it. These conclusions – about whether a person was low-income *enough* to receive services – were drawn from visual markers such as the quality of their clothes or the vehicle they drove.

I had initially viewed the practitioner's perspectives as isolated and set myself firmly against them. And yet I distinctly recall a later interview during which I dubiously listened to the mother who told me she had saved for her daughter to go to Paris as I questioned her credibility for the study's purpose. Low-income *enough?* The stratifying lines of class were everywhere, externally projected through an immeasurable number of daily interactions and practices.

How are research practices implicated in (re)producing the marginalization of certain groups of people?

I began to contemplate the notion of what it meant to be considered *low-income enough* – not only to gain access to resources and services but to also be considered credible in accepting them – and how these stratification processes played out across a range of contexts.

Stratifying practices

The differentiation of individuals living with lower incomes seemed to be particularly prominent in the allocation of services such as recreation. These processes

often appeared to denigrate those whose lives they were intended to support. Fee assistance programs provided many of examples of this - the use of the LICO, for example, that forces people to prove their need for assistance or an intake meeting to adequately filter those who do not *truly* need the services.

I would like to clarify that neither of these motivations were true for the practitioners who allocated fee assistance in the community in which the study took place. On the contrary, many of them actively tried to avoid the differentiating and stigmatizing practices that are an inherent part of most fee assistance programs. Despite these intentions, strained fee assistance budgets made a process of selectivity imperative to ensure that the few resources that existed were distributed according to the greatest need (on paper, at least). The end result was, consequently, often the same no matter the intention behind it: the sifting and sorting of humans who were compelled to identify under a particular label to receive resources and services that should have been more readily available. This points to the problematic nature of fee assistance programs: their very existence serves to absolve government responsibility in the provision of necessary services (Riches, 2002) and maintains the dependence (and othering) of those who need them (Titchkosky, 2003). Women are disproportionately marginalized by such policies and practices, and it is likely that this factor was at least partially reflected in the make-up of the sample in this project which entirely comprised women, most of whom were single or solo parents.

To avoid simplistically denouncing fee assistance and advocating for their eradication, I will instead suggest that, while fee assistance in recreation might be necessary at this present time, researchers, policy makers and practitioners have a responsibility to consider the broader implications of fee assistance and other similar practices that marginalize particular groups of people while maintaining the privilege of others (Spade, 2012). Without any simple suggestions for how this could be done, the creation of co-learning spaces for critical, action-oriented dialogue and reflection between those who tend to work in isolation might at least provide a platform to begin this challenging process.

How can co-learning spaces be helpful for engaging researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in critical, action-oriented dialogue about recreation?

Simplifying recreation

This brings us back to recreation itself, the point from which this story began. The lessons previously highlighted – about marginalizing assumptions and stratifying processes – were so clearly reproduced through the recreational activities experienced (or avoided) by the young people in the study. In particular, papers one and two showed how stories of overcoming (lower incomes, disability, gender, etc. etc.) misrepresent the numerous ways sport is an unequal and exclusionary field that disproportionately undermines the participation of many youth. Out of the ten young people in the study, only one participated in the concerted and continuous ways necessary for 'successful' sport involvement and much of this was based on the good fortune that his abilities fit within the confines of those that are celebrated in sport environments (although it is by no means my intention to portray that this good fortune was in any way random).

The sport opportunities available in the community for young people appeared to be largely shaped by a high performance culture that prioritized the development of elite athletes over the participation of many others. Through a historical look at Canadian sport since the 1970s, Macintosh and Whitson (1990) have shown how high performance has become the major emphasis for Canadian sport organizations at the expense of access and equity. This dominant version of sport did not align with the preferred ways of playing or recreating described by the young people in the study and needs to be reconsidered if a more full potential of recreation is to be realized, rather than the narrow middle-class (able, white, etc.) version that is currently privileged.

Inextricably related to the high performance drive that was so evident in the young people's sporting experiences is the increasing professionalization that recreation has seen over the years (Coakley, 2010). Involvement in organized recreation has become a gold standard for parents who fear their children's (educational, professional, marital) futures depend on it and who are subsequently willing to go to astronomical lengths to support their involvement. Professionalization and the individualistic culture that feeds it has led to the heightened administration of youth sport which has, among a range of consequences, pushed the costs of playing to dizzying heights, produced soccer training academies for children as young as 18 month olds (Little Kickers, 2015) and led to small children playing "double headers" (two consecutive games) on a Saturday morning. As

long as parents are considered the primary consumers of youth recreation, activities will continue to be provided in ways that are less-than-meaningful for the young people they are intended for. They will also always reflect the tastes of middle-class parents who can afford to pay for them.

In highlighting these issues, I hope to initiate some change, even if it is only small, in the provision and consumption of recreation. To do so will require identifying not only the areas in which recreation is currently failing, but identifying the areas in which it succeeds. It will also require reimagining the potential of recreation as a place that *can* be enjoyed by more people. Although the young people in the study had experienced many moments of exclusion in recreation, their hope for something better was unwavering. As Scott (15 years old) said about his and his friends' desire for recreation,

"We just want something simple."

Based on the previous points, I believe Scott highlights one of the most problematic aspects of youth recreation as it currently exists – it has become overcomplicated at the hands of adults. It also highlights an area for future focus, stimulating some useful questions for further research and practice in the hopes that recreation can be reimagined in ways that can make it more meaningful for a wider number of youth.

How can recreation provide meaningful opportunities and spaces for more young people?

In what ways are meaningful opportunities for play already provided for young people?

I would start this process of simplifying recreation by pouring the piles of mud requested by Scott so that he and his friends could ride their bikes without fear of being arrested for trespassing. I would also ask the library to keep hosting monster workshops because to Jacqueline at least, that was one of the forms of *physical activity* she enjoyed

the most. Amongst this point, then, there is an additional learning for those of us who are slow to pay attention to what young people tell us, even when we ask for their input: we need to avoid narrowly defining the meaning of physical activity, or recreation, or sport on behalf of young people when they are telling us it means something different. Only then will we be able to see the potential of what recreation has to offer.

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