“We’re the Ones Working on the Ground, the ‘Real’ Ground”: Exploring Tensions and Realities of Global South SFD NGOs in Fostering ‘Safe Sport’ Environments for Children and Youth

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Abstract

Across the globe, mounting concerns have been raised about the safety of children and youth in sport (Kerr et al., 2020). As such, many global sport organizations have been implementing safe sport policies and frameworks, such as the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, to protect children and youth from abuse and maltreatment (Gurgis et al., 2022). However, in Global South countries, the implementation of safe sport initiatives remains limited, further complicating efforts to protect children and youth. This study examines the relationship between Sport for Development (SFD) programs and safe sport policies and practices, focusing on how these initiatives support – or fail to support – the safety of children and youth participating in Global South contexts. Grounded in decolonial feminist theory, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with SFD NGO staff members operating in Global South contexts (n = 15) and a documentary analysis of key SFD NGO safe sport policy documents (n = 10). Data was analyzed using two complementary approaches, including Bacchi's (2012) What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) approach and critical discourse analysis. Findings revealed that safe sport policies and practices must move away from a universal and 'one-size-fits-all' approach to safeguarding. Instead, there is a critical need for context-specific safe sport policies that account for local geographies and the sociological, cultural, political, and colonial conditions that shape violence and abuse in Global South regions. To meaningfully enhance the safety of children and youth in SFD programs – particularly in relation to gender, race, and class – further research is needed in the SFD field that prioritizes and foregrounds intersectional and decolonial approaches to safe sport.

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Dedication

To Soha and Aden

Dream big and let your imagination run free.

After all, “your life belongs to you, and you alone.”

~ Adichie, 2006

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Table 1.0 List of Acronyms

Acronym	**Meaning**
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based violence
SFD	Sport for Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
WPR	What's the Problem Represented to Be
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
WHO	World Health Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
GS	Global South
GN	Global North

Chapter One: Introduction

"Primum non nocere: First, do no harm."
Thomas Sydenham, English Physician

1.1 Introduction and Research Questions

Sport is increasingly being used by numerous organizations and institutions as a tool for positive health outcomes, social development, and post-conflict reconstruction for diverse populations (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Ponciano Núñez & Carter, 2025). Specifically, children's and youths' participation in sports has been linked to broader societal benefits, including increased economic capital, improved educational outcomes, and higher workplace productivity (Lang & Hartill, 2014). These positive messages of the use of sport for 'social good' have largely been taken up by Sport for Development (SFD) non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world. These entities position sport as a tool to 'positively' contribute to a range of social issues and to achieve notable aims, such as achieving gender equality, upholding human rights and reducing and preventing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (Hayhurst et al., 2021). However, despite the growing use of sport as a tool for SGBV prevention in and through SFD programming, especially those targeting racialized self-identified women and girls in the Global South (e.g., Hayhurst et al., 2014; UN Women, 2020), there is still a need for more research to critically examine the tensions and challenges involved in using sport to prevent all forms of violence and abuse, including sexual, emotional, physical, interpersonal violence, harm, etc. (Anand et al., 2020).

According to the International Research Network on Violence and Integrity in Sport (IRNOVIS), up to 44% of young people participating in sport are victims of violence at the hands of perpetrators (i.e., parents, coaches), bystanders, and even through the physical environment (IRNOVIS, 2020; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Furthermore, in recent years, there has been mounting evidence of sexual, emotional and physical abuse, bullying and neglect when it comes to child and youth maltreatment in

sport globally (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). And yet, the consequences of such abuse and violence on the physical, psychological, and emotional health and development of children and youth remain understudied (UNODC, 2021). Taken together, these concerns (i.e., abuse, violence and maltreatment towards children and youth) have, in part, motivated the steady proliferation of safeguarding measures and research to ensure that children and youth are protected from abuse, violence and maltreatment (Gurgis et al., 2022; McRae et al., 2024; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind et al., 2015). In a partial response to these concerns, international human rights frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), have also emphasized the shared responsibility of relevant actors to uphold children's and youth's right to safety in sport (Rhind et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2024).

However, and as this thesis will further examine, efforts to safeguard children and youth in sport often unfold within uneven global contexts and power hierarchies that shape how policies are developed, implemented, and enforced (Darnell, 2012). To date, there has been no research that explicitly focuses on the safe sport policies of SFD NGOs that operate in Global South contexts and who conduct programming for children and youth living in these regions. As such, this research project has aimed to explore the ways in which SFD NGOs are implementing 'safe sport' within, through and around their programming for child and youth participants to protect them from all forms of abuse, maltreatment and violence. Drawing on Bacchi's (2012) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR) approach and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Fairclough, 1989, 1995 and McGannon, 2016), the following two research questions underpin this study:

1) How have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors, etc.) conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' within, though, and around their child and youth programming in the Global South?

2) Have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors, etc.) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs? If so, how?

WPR and CDA were employed to analyze data from semi-structured interviews with fifteen (n=15) SFD NGO staff members situated within diverse Global South regions and each SFD NGO's safe sport and/or organizational policy documents (n=10). As will be demonstrated in this master's thesis, the data from participants and policies highlighted five key discourses: 1) the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport as understood by participants and organizations; 2) understanding abuse and maltreatment within, through and around SFD programs; 3) the concept of conditional care – when safety hinges on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints; 4) intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport; and 5) decolonizing knowledge around/within/through safe sport: Global North-South tensions in the politics of protection.

This research is both timely and needed. Whereas some Global North countries have made significant advances in safe sport initiatives, such as the development and implementation of the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS) in Canada (Gadais et al., 2022; Stirling et al., 2023), Global South countries are still experiencing challenges with safe sport. Although there may be some implementation of safe sport interventions within Global South contexts, as evidenced by several UNICEF initiatives, children and youth participating in sport and SFD programs are still placed in precarious positions (Timpka, 2009; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Indeed – as I argue in this thesis – global 'safe sport' interventions, such as the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, CHILDREN Pillars, SSI International Safe Sport policies, are undeniably important but often rely on assumptions of universal applicability. In turn, I suggest that these frameworks, created by Western and Global North organizations, frequently neglect colonial legacies, cultural specificities, and local capacities, particularly

within under-resourced and politically marginalized communities. This is not to say that the Global North is an 'expert' at 'safe sport,' where it effectively protects young people in sport from all forms of abuse, maltreatment and violence; rather, I highlight how and why Western concepts of knowing 'safe sport' dominates across the globe, especially within contexts of the Global South.

Despite growing public awareness, media scrutiny, and emerging research on the prevalence of maltreatment in sport (Lang & Hartill, 2014; Willson et al., 2022), countries in the Global South remain significantly underrepresented in global safe sport and policy development discourse. Furthermore, research on safe sport policies and practices to protect children and youth in Global South regions remains sparse (Lang & Hartill, 2014; Moustakas et al., 2023; Rhind et al., 2017; Rhind et al., 2020). Indeed, recent research by Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2017, 2020), which takes a global perspective, underscores a significant gap in scholarship regarding children's and youth's safety in sport within the Global South. And yet, scholars have underlined how children and youth participating in sport and SFD initiatives in Global South regions often face multifaceted and often distinct forms of violence and abuse, including issues related to sport trafficking and labour exploitation (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004). Moreover, the inherent power dynamics in sport – between participants, parents, coaches, and administrators – can heighten children's and youth's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Rhind et al., 2017). At the same time, scholars, such as Kidd (2008), have suggested that SFD programming may offer significant benefits for children's and youth's social development, health and well-being across diverse settings. Nevertheless, despite these potential benefits, there remains a notable lack of research examining the safety of children and youth in SFD within the Global South (Giulianotti, 2011).

Despite the current safeguarding initiatives in place, as mentioned above, there remains a paucity of research that *addresses the diverse contexts in which these safeguarding measures take place*. Some scholars contend that the scarcity of research lies in examining the utilization of Western

conceptualizations of 'safe sport' to promote safeguarding in Global South contexts (Tak et al., 2024; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). In turn, researchers have underlined the need to value *alternative perspectives* to diversify SFD curricula, programming, and policies to recognize the unique aspects and *local context of SFD in relation to its globally connected fabric* (Reiter, 2018; Rhind, 2020). Taken together, it is evident that a disconnect persists between policy makers and Global North UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, Child Protection Strategy 2021) and SFD NGOs (e.g., Right To Play) as to how to effectively implement safe sport practices within youth SFD programs in the Global South – particularly in ways that meaningfully engage with the local particularities in which these programs operate (Rhind, 2020). This disconnect highlights a critical need to examine how power and control shape *whose knowledge* is recognized as valuable and legitimate, and how that knowledge is produced, circulated, and applied when it comes to producing safe sport policies and programs within SFD, especially in the Global South. Surprisingly, safe sport and SFD have been treated as distinct domains, despite their profound and ongoing entanglements. Indeed, SFD NGOs are frequently presumed to uphold safe sport principles simply because of their association with the 'social justice' rhetoric (Hayhurst et al., 2014); and yet, this assumption dangerously obscures the lack of critical oversight, accountability, and implementation of safeguarding measures within many SFD programs *themselves* (Whitley, 2025). Notably, we know very little as to how SFD NGOs operating in Global South contexts address gender, racial, and class (in)justices for children and youth within, through and around their safe sport policies.

1.2 Research Purpose

Given the challenges and tensions noted above, this study is put forth as a response to the (global) mobilization of new safe sport policies and frameworks (e.g., Safe Sport Education for Youth, 2025) and Global North sport organizations (e.g., Athletics Canada) that are being produced to support the safety of children and youth in a variety of sport contexts (e.g., SFD, NSOs). Given the large uptake and creation

of new safe sport initiatives across Global North contexts, this study explored the relationship between safe sport practices and SFD initiatives operating across Global South contexts, where 'safe sport' is widely understudied (Brackenridge et al., 2012). Further, this study aimed to address the gaps in the safe sport and SFD sector by critically examining Western conceptualizations and policies of safe sport (e.g., the International Safeguards for Children in Sport) and the homogeneity of such initiatives in Global South contexts. In so doing, the goal of this research was to provide much-needed insights into the uptake of 'safe sport' in SFD programs operating to protect children and youth in diverse Global South contexts. As such, the overall objective of this study was to investigate how SFD NGO staff members operating youth- and child-focused programs in the Global South conceptualize and implement safe sport practices, while engaging with intersecting issues of race, gender, and class. It also explored how these practices contribute to the decolonization of knowledge production through the development and application of their policies and programs. As noted above, the following two research questions underpinned this study:

1) How have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors, etc.) conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' within, through, and around their child and youth programming in the Global South?
2) Have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors, etc.) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs? If so, how?

1.3 Structure of Thesis

Before outlining the contents of the preceding chapters, it is important to note that any terms placed in single quotation marks throughout this thesis – such as 'safe sport' – are intentionally marked to signal a critical stance, questioning the assumed stability, neutrality, or universality of these key terms.

This thesis contains ten chapters. Chapter Two outlines the key terminology and language adopted throughout the study. Next, Chapter Three provides a brief overview of relevant academic literature relating to safe sport in the Global South, safe sport policy, and SFD. Chapter Four presents the theoretical framework and epistemological foundations that ground this research. Thereafter, Chapter Five details the methodological approach, followed by Chapter Six, which outlines the methods of data collection and analysis. The data were analyzed using Bacchi's (2012) 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach and Fairclough's (1989, 1995) and McGannon's (2016) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Chapters Seven and Eight then present the key findings produced from semi-structured interviews with fifteen (15) representatives from twelve (12) SFD NGOs and a documentary analysis of ten (10) SFD NGO safe sport policies. Chapter Nine synthesizes the study's major and overarching findings. Finally, Chapter Ten draws together the central analytical threads of the thesis by offering policy recommendations, discussing study contributions and limitations, and identifying future directions for research in this area.

1.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the research study, including the two guiding research questions and the study's purpose, which responds to the mobilization of Global North safeguarding policies and frameworks. In turn, this study examined how safe sport is conceptualized and adopted in Global South contexts through SFD initiatives, to address the gap in the literature. This chapter concluded by outlining the structure of this thesis and provided brief details regarding the contents of the remaining chapters.

Chapter Two: Key Terms, Epistemological Tensions and Paradoxes

The following chapter provides an overview of some of the key terms and concepts that are taken up and utilized throughout this study. However, before delving into the overview, it is important to acknowledge a key epistemological tension that permeates this study – chiefly, my reliance on Global North or Western-centric concepts and language to critique the very systems of knowledge and power those definitions uphold. Put differently, the act of naming and analyzing these frameworks is necessarily shaped by the same epistemologies I seek to interrogate. To address this paradox, I include a reflexive discussion following the definitions below, which acknowledges and critically engages with this contradiction.

2.1 Reflexive Acknowledgement and Navigating Epistemological Tensions

Drawing from decolonial feminist approaches, this study emphasizes the crucial role decoloniality plays in how knowledge is produced and disseminated (Nimführ, 2022). As this thesis is a form of knowledge production and dissemination, I acknowledge the epistemological tensions that are associated with this research study through engaging with and utilizing Global North and Western-centric definitions of key terms (e.g., safe sport, safeguarding). Further, I acknowledge the paradox of using Global North/Western-centric frameworks to critique and analyze the very colonial epistemologies and structures they help sustain (Omodan, 2024). Although these approaches and understandings of 'safe sport' can provide essential insights and act as strong analytical tools, Global North/Western-centric frameworks are not universally applicable or can be homogenously applied to diverse contexts, such as the Global South, as they can erase multiple forms of knowledge. Thus, I approach the study herein with great sensitivity and 'reflexive humility,' which refers to the act of critically navigating and acknowledging tensions when engaging with and conducting work in uneven power relations (Kidd, 2011). Overall, throughout this thesis, I aimed to include diverse forms of knowledge and plural epistemologies in a method that

foregrounded the lived realities of marginalized communities that have been (and continue to be) harmed by Global North and Western-centric perspectives (see Omodan, 2024). Importantly, I did not speak to the child and youth participants of the SFD NGO programs I studied (a limitation I further explain in Chapter Ten) and so cannot claim to properly uphold their 'lived realities' through this work. However, I suggest that speaking to the staff members responsible for 'safe sport' in each SFD NGO offers a meaningful starting point for amplifying their perspectives and addressing their needs.

This methodological approach – centring the perspectives of safe sport staff rather than directly engaging with young participants – brings to the fore a related epistemological tension: the reliance on Global North and Western-centric definitions of key concepts, such as safe sport, safeguarding, child protection, child maltreatment, and abuse, particularly in a study grounded in a decolonial feminist framework. To navigate these tensions, I intentionally draw on the work of Global South scholars and centre their voices throughout the thesis, aligning with the broader aim of valuing and integrating diverse forms of knowledge (see Collyer, 2016). Importantly, and as mentioned above, I do not include Global South perspectives, whether from scholars or the interviewees (SFD NGO staff members), merely to supplement Global North/Western-centric safe sport frameworks. Rather, I use these perspectives to reframe how arguments are constructed and how recommendations are shaped. Lastly, and as I have highlighted above, I acknowledge the epistemological tensions and paradoxes associated with this work and do not try to 'fix' them. Instead, I have highlighted these tensions to illustrate how the coloniality of knowledge mirrors power relations and exercises dominance.

2.2 Defining 'Children' and 'Youth'

First, this study uses the terms 'child' and 'youth' due to the various definitions and age ranges implied in differentiating between a child and youth. The United Nations, in *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*, defines a "child" below the age of 18 years (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

However, the United Nations also defines "youth" as those between the ages of 15 and 24 years (United Nations, n.d.). According to this definition, children are considered persons under the age of 14 years (United Nations, n.d.). Due to the discrepancies pertaining to defining child and youth, and in conjunction with the age ranges of participants that SFD NGO staff tend to provide programming to (5-25 years), I will use these two terms interchangeably throughout this study and provide distinctions when necessary (Crowe, 2024).

2.3 Conceptualizing 'Global North' and 'Global South'?

Throughout this thesis, I employ the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South,' and it is important to clarify their meanings given the decolonial feminist approach taken up in this study (further explained in Chapter Four). This study draws on Haug's (2021) understanding of these terms, which move beyond simple geographic distinctions. While a traditional divide exists between what is geographically classified as the Global North and the Global South (Mahler, 2017), the distinction is better understood through four key indicators: politics, demography, wealth, and technology (Odeh, 2010). Global North countries are often characterized as democratic, wealthy, and possessing enough resources to advance and create innovative technologies (Odeh, 2010). Countries typically identified as part of the Global North – such as Canada, the U.S., France, and Australia – are often characterized as democratic, economically wealthy, technologically advanced, and underpinned by relative peace, human rights protections, and security (Odeh, 2010). However, the Global North is not defined solely by geography. As Braff and Nelson (2025) emphasize, it refers more broadly to concentrations of global power and privilege. Haug (2021) further argues that the 'Global North' functions as a hegemonic force that shapes global structures through coercive and/or powerful meaning-making measures and practices. Importantly, these forces extend beyond international borders as they also operate within Global North countries themselves, where neoliberal, capitalist and colonial logics contribute to the marginalization of native and Indigenous and

racialized populations (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). Particularly, Global North countries are inherently responsible for the instability, impoverished communities, and conflict that occur within Global South countries. For instance, many Global North countries are responsible for environmental degradation and the adverse side effects of climate change, due to the increased consumption of energy resources (Uddin, 2017). Yet, the problem lies in the lack of accountability from the Global North, where the North fails to accept responsibility for the environmental destruction caused by industrial and rigorous activities (Uddin, 2017). Rather, the North continues to place pressure and 'blame' on the Global South "to be careful about environmental degradation" (Uddin, 2017, p. 107).

In contrast, the term 'Global South' typically refers to those regions historically subjected to colonization and current structures of economic and political inequality. However, this too is not merely a geographic label but a dynamic, relational concept shaped by global power hierarchies. Indeed, other 'markers' of Global South contexts may be military conflict or instability, impoverished communities, unstable economies, a lack of wealth and technology, etc. (Odeh, 2010). Importantly, Global South countries are not largely confined to geographic areas or spatial boundaries, but are regions shaped by colonial and imperialist practices (Haug, 2021; Odeh, 2010; Schneider, 2017). Further, the research herein adapts the understandings of Haug (2021), who defines the Global South as regions affected by systemic inequalities stemming from colonial legacies but recognizes the potential of unique and diverse perspectives of power, knowledge and society that these regions can offer. Essentially, and according to this definition, countries in the Global South would include areas of Africa, India, Pakistan, Brazil, etc.

2.4 The 'West' versus the 'East'

Throughout this document, I employ the terms 'West/Western' interchangeably with 'Global North.' According to Hall (2019), the term 'West/Western' can be defined as a historical construct, referring to the *types* of societies created by capitalism and neoliberal ideologies, which is often evident

within Global North economies. In turn, I use the term 'Global North' to refer to wealthy and powerful countries (Odeh, 2010); and the term 'West/Western' to reference the *types of societies and cultural beliefs embedded within these countries* (Hall, 2019). On the other hand, Clifford (1980) and Said (1977) define the term 'East/Eastern' as a colonial discourse that justifies a means of control and ascendancy from Global North countries. Further, while the term 'East/Eastern' is not primarily used to reference geographic areas, when used interchangeably with the term 'Global South,' it may homogenize diverse cultures and create problematic discourses (Clifford, 1980; Said, 1977). For these reasons, I will not be using the terms 'East/Eastern' interchangeably with 'Global South.'

2.5 Clarifying 'Maltreatment,' 'Abuse,' and 'Violence'

Another key concept used in this research is 'child maltreatment.' The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) defines child maltreatment as:

> All types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (para. 1).

Importantly, Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020, p. 13) state that, although maltreatment is used interchangeably with abuse and violence, it should instead be considered an "all-encompassing" term that includes the above-mentioned concepts (i.e., abuse and violence). For the purposes of this research, the term 'maltreatment' will be used to illustrate the effects that abuse and violence have on children and youth participating in sport within the Global South. In the table below, I have outlined the different terms related to maltreatment that will be used throughout the study.

Table 2.0: Defining Key Terms

Term	Definition

Abuse	"Acts of commission or omission which lead to children experiencing harm" (Rhind et al., 2015, p. 73).
	"Often used in reference to a sexual act committed against a person by someone in a position of power and/or authority. The term is used most frequently when speaking about sexual violence committed against children (i.e., includes grooming behaviours, digital sexual interactions)" (SSAIC, 2017, p. 1-2)
Violence	Sexual Assault: "Any unwanted sexual act or behaviours which is threatening, violent, forced or coercive and to which a person has not given consent to or was not able to give consent (i.e., attempted rape, forcing a victim to penetrate the perpetrator's body)" (SSAIC, 2017, p. 1)
	Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV): "Refers to any harmful act that is perpetuated against one person's will that is based on socially (ascribed) gender differences between male and females" (UNHCR, 2011, p. 6).
	Violence: Refers to the intentional use of power and force against a person or a group, that can result in injury, psychological harm, etc., (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).
Maltreatment	Sexual maltreatment: "Any activity that involves engaging a child in a sexual activity (e.g., sexual relations, performing sexual acts, watching a child undress, attempt to have sex)" (Fortier et al., 2019, p. 5-6).
	Psychological maltreatment: "Includes acts that have a high risk of harming a child's mental health, safety or development (e.g., threatening a child, verbal abuse, force)" (Rhind et al., 2015, p. 5-6).
Harm	"Negative physical and/or emotional impact of consequences" (Rhind et al., 2016, p. 73).
Risk	Within safe sport, risk refers to the likelihood or chance of a misconduct to occur within the sporting space (Safe Sport Commission Singapore, 2025).

Child protection	"Child protection is a part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. It refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm" (Reid, 2014, p. 2).
Environmental Justice	"The just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in environmental decision-making to ensure full protection from disproportionate environmental and health impacts, and equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment" (Center for Sustainable Systems, 2024).
Environmental Violence	Refers to how injustice is experienced through various stressors, such as pollution, and the impact it has on one's health and rights (Center for Sustainable Systems, 2024).

2.6 Conceptualizing the Difference between 'Safe Sport' and 'Safeguarding'

Lastly, this study employs the terms 'safe sport' and 'safeguarding.' While these terms are often used interchangeably, they are applied with distinct meanings in this research. Herein, 'safeguarding' is defined as actions taken by sports organizations, administrators, facilitators, coaches, and others to ensure that *all* children and young people are safe from harm (Kerr & Stirling, 2019). This research study will also use the definition of 'safe sport' developed by the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), defined as "creating and maintaining a sport environment/community where *all persons* who participate in sport-based programming and activities can work together in an atmosphere that is free of physical, emotional and sexual misconduct" (Koller, 2018, p. 1057). As noted earlier in this chapter, I intentionally adopt this widely accepted Global North definition of 'safe sport' to examine how the assumptions embedded in such 'standardized' frameworks, particularly the portrayal of a universal approach to safeguarding, may lead to unintended consequences when applied in diverse cultural and political contexts. Echoing Audre Lorde's (1979) insight that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 98), I aim to critically interrogate the colonial and exclusionary foundations of dominant safe sport definitions. Doing so reveals not only alternative forms of knowledge but also acts of resistance that challenge the universality of Global North frameworks.

To summarize, this study uses *'safeguarding' to describe 'actions'* and uses *'safe sport' to describe the need for creating an 'environment' of security.* Specifically, my thesis research was informed by three distinct types of safeguarding typologies that will be discussed in relation to SFD, including: 1) safeguarding in sport; 2) safeguarding around sport; and 3) safeguarding through sport. *First, safeguarding in sport* focuses on protecting children and youth from harm during training or competition and usually focuses on relational types of maltreatment (i.e., parents, coaches) (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). *Safeguarding around sport* focuses on situations that are external to sport, but that may be shaped by sport (i.e., displacement due to mega-sporting events) (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Lastly, *safeguarding through sport* involves utilizing sport to achieve humanitarian goals, development and peacebuilding and can promote and protect children's and youth's rights (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of how I engaged with and employed key concepts and terms within this master's study. Given the nature of this study, it was crucial to underscore how I addressed the tensions and paradoxes associated with using Global North/Western-centric frameworks to critique and analyze the colonial structures they help to sustain (Omodan, 2024). The next chapter offers a brief outline of the related literature and concepts that inform this study, including SFD, safe sport, the Global South, and human rights frameworks such as vernacularization. I conclude Chapter Three by highlighting and critiquing current policies and elucidating the gap in the literature.

Chapter Three: A Review of Literature

This chapter offers an overview of the related literature and concepts that inform this study, including SFD, safe sport, the Global South, and human rights frameworks. Following a discussion of the concept of 'vernacularization' (Merry, 2006, 2015), I outline the development of 'safe sport' in the Global South and illustrate the complexities of safeguarding children/youth and (the often) precarious situations they experience in sport within Global South regions. Then, I attempt to establish the relationship between safe sport and sport for development (SFD) initiatives and its attendant benefits, before lastly outlining key gaps in the current literature (e.g., the lack of implementation of safeguarding policies and practices) and weaknesses in current policies that aim to address the safeguarding of children and youth in Global South regions.

3.1 Vernacularization

Coined by Sally Engle Merry (2015), the concept of "vernacularization" refers to the ways in which, for example and given the focus of this study on children's and youth's rights to safe sporting environments, global human rights norms are (mis)translated into local contexts. Merry (2015) describes vernacularization as the process of translating and adapting international human rights standards so they align with local cultural meanings, practices, and social contexts. This process aims to make global norms more understandable, acceptable, and actionable within specific communities. By emphasizing vernacularization, Merry (2015) calls for a more inclusive approach to human rights, one that values and incorporates local knowledge systems and challenges the hegemony of standardized, global metrics and top-down frameworks. Boldly put, Merry (2015) critiques the imposition of universalized knowledge and pushes for the importance of local, relational, and embodied ways of knowing. This study engages with the concept of vernacularization, alongside a decolonial feminist approach (further explained in Chapter Four), in an effort to challenge universalist assumptions, to reject 'one-size-fits' all frameworks, and to

foreground the significance of power, translation, and modes of resistance when it comes to interrogating Western-centric models of 'safe sport.' It is essential to challenge and reject universal and 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to safeguarding, as 'safe sport' can take various shapes depending on local contexts of the Global South, which I outline in the section below.

3.2 (Safe) Sport and the Global South

As this study is grounded in a decolonial feminist approach (further delineated in Chapter Four), it is crucial to provide insights from Global South scholars, in addition to Global North scholars, outlining how sport in the Global South is distinct from sport in the Global North. Throughout this section, I also briefly trace some of the key developments of 'safe sport' practices in the Global South.

To start, while sport has no universal definition, this thesis defines sport in various ways that have been guided by the participants' understandings and practices of sport within their SFD programs. In this thesis, sport is defined and oriented as a competitive physical activity (see Sterchele, 2015) and is also defined as play, organized and community-based sport, recreation and leisure (see Right to Play, 2021; see also McSweeney et al., 2025). Further, I suggest that it is important to recognize how Global South sporting practices may be distinct from the Westernized sporting ideals centred on competition, individualism, and 'winning' (Ju, 2025). This is not to suggest that there are no alternative and diverse forms of 'non-Western' sport in Western/Global North countries; rather, I echo other scholars who have contended that often global SFD NGO programming is grounded in Westernized sporting ideals and thus (maybe) inappropriately using culturally irrelevant programming in Global South contexts (see Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). Indeed, across the globe, sport has been (and continues to be) advocated as a tool for addressing social exclusion, empowering marginalized populations, and social integration (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2014). However, in the Global South, sport is often entangled with colonialism, resistance, and the use of sport to enrich national development in comparison to the Global North (Biyanwila, 2018).

To elaborate on the various aspects of sport in Global South regions that shift from the 'sporting norms' that have been established in the Global North, I provide examples from contemporary scholarship to better highlight such differences. First, Toffoletti et al. (2018) point to the broader lack of research that focuses on sport to address the intersections of gender, race, sexuality and class within Global South regions. They suggest such research is dominant across the Global North, which leaves women's and girl's encounters and roles within sport marginalized and silenced across the Global South (Toffoletti et al., 2018). Global South scholars Ratna and Samie (2017) raise similar concerns, highlighting how issues of race, gender, and ethnicity in sport have been traditionally documented by White Western researchers and mainly produced for English-speaking countries or economies. As a result, the literature continues to misrepresent the experiences of non-White women and girls, often marginalizing their engagement with sport (Ratna & Samie, 2017). This misrepresentation is further reinforced through the use of reductive labels such as the 'Other' when referring to racialized and ethnic identities (Ratna & Samie, 2017). Besides the need for accurate representations of sport in the Global South, sport for children and youth in these regions is not always 'fun' and 'participatory' and instead, may involve child labour and child trafficking (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004). That is, sport may place children and youth across the Global South in precarious and challenging conditions – conditions that, while may also be present to some degree in Global North contexts, deserve distinct attention and contextual understanding(s) (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004). These vulnerable positions often deprive children and youth of their rights to health and use exploitative measures against them (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004). At the same time, sport is also often defended, regardless of context, vis-à-vis its 'evangelical' role in enriching health and well-being (Biyanwila, 2018).

Moreover, the development and implementation of 'safe sport' in the Global South remains limited and underexplored in the literature. Indeed, most of the safe sport research has been piloted and evaluated

in European and Global North contexts (Rhind & Mori, 2020; Tak et al., 2024). Rather than exploring the utility of safe sport within Global South countries, these regions are often viewed as a 'venue' to host sport mega-events or to adapt modern sport frameworks, often embedded with Westernized and secularist values (Amara, 2010; Banda et al., 2024). In turn, the limited body of research that does examine the application of safe sport in global contexts, with the minimal inclusion of some Global South countries (e.g.., Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020; Rhind & Mori, 2020; Owusu-Sekyere, 2017; Wilson et al., 2022) often relies on Western safe sport frameworks – such as the International Safeguards for Children in Sport – to examine how safe sport is conceptualized. While this research provides valuable insights, it tends to promote a 'one-size-fits-all' model of safe sport that overlooks the complex and shifting factors specific to Global South contexts, which can significantly influence the implementation of safeguarding practices. Further, Global South scholars like Kisakye et al. (2023), who are exploring safeguarding measures in these regions (e.g., Uganda), state that "applying a strategy developed in the Global North to contexts within the Global South may have little effect if cultural nuances are not an *a priori* consideration" (p. 10). In the next section, I briefly define SFD and the integration of 'safe sport' within such initiatives operating in Global South contexts.

3.3 Safe Sport and Sport for Development (SFD)

A common and widely accepted definition of Sport for Development (SFD) is provided by Lyras and Welty Peachey (2011), which describes SFD as

> The use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution (p. 311).

While there has been evidence of the effectiveness of SFD programs and policies in achieving gender equality, peace and social inclusion, education, and health (see Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), the

internationalization of safeguarding in sport raises issues and concerns within the SFD movement (Rhind, 2015; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). The safeguarding movement originated in Global North countries, where the sport systems may have the resources to mitigate and operate in safe environments (Rhind, 2015). In comparison, children and youth who participate in SFD initiatives within the Global South may be at greater risk of abuse within sport due to various risk factors, which may include normative cultural ideas, and structural elements (e.g., unregulated child protection laws) (Rhind, 2015; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020), which is further discussed in this thesis. Further, this research study does not strive to compare the levels or cases of abuse and maltreatment within Global North and South contexts but rather offers new insights into context-specific safe sport issues for children and youth in the Global South. In turn, to address the risk factors that place children and youth in precarious conditions, understanding the social, cultural, and political arenas of Global South regions and integrating safe sport policies within and through SFD may provide a promising opportunity to support children and youth's safety (Rhind, 2015). What is clear is that SFD programs and initiatives can cultivate and optimize 'safe spaces,' but how the concept is interpreted, adapted and enacted across diverse geographical and cultural contexts warrants deeper probing and further examination. As Merry (2015) argues, global norms do not simply travel intact; they are vernacularized – translated into local meanings and practices that may align with, resist, or reshape dominant definitions. Definitions of safe sport are not merely neutral or merely descriptive. Rather, they are constructed through discourses between individuals and groups that determines what 'counts' as harm, abuse or safety. Thus, it is imperative here is to better understand how 'safe sport' and, in turn, 'safe space' is shaped by the situated and contextualized realities in which SFD programs operate (Jones, 2021; Oxford, 2017).

In the current moment, the SFD sector faces multiple challenges and limitations, including the ongoing perpetuation of Western hegemonic ideologies (Banda et al., 2024; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012;

Lindsey et al., 2017). Global North-South relationships are often shaped by imperialist dynamics that position the Global South "as passive actors in development initiatives" (Banda et al., 2024, p. 813) – a pattern that extends beyond, but is especially evident within, SFD contexts. In a partial response to these dynamics, Mwaanga and Adeosun (2020) advocate for the integration of the 'Ubuntu philosophy' into the design of SFD programs. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that can be described as "being human through other people" (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013, p. 83). Ubuntu is also seen as "a system whose values the members of a community measure their humanness" (Idoniboye-Obu & Whetho, p. 233). Overall, Ubuntu philosophy calls for treating other people with sympathy, dignity, compassion and values moving towards harmony and reconciliation (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Mwaanga and Adeosun (2020) contend that Ubuntu can serve as a foundation for a critically reflexive and decolonial approach to SFD, one that actively challenges notions of the 'Other' and the marginalization of local perspectives in diverse Global South settings (Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2020). Said differently, Ubuntu holds the potential to promote the uptake of safeguarding local cultures within diverse settings (Zvomuya & Mundau, 2023). However, despite its potential, Ubuntu remains underexplored and has yet to be critically applied and/or explored within SFD programming (Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2020).

3.4 Current Policies and Gap in the Literature

Domestically, changes in legislation, policies, and current practices have been driven by the need to understand and engage with children's and youth's rights (Lang & Hartill, 2014). To address the issue of maltreatment and to mitigate the adverse effects that children and youth in sport face, many policies and initiatives have been developed, including (but not limited to) the following: International Safeguards for Children in Sport, CHILDREN Pillars, Child Safeguarding in Sport, SSI International Safe Sport Principles, and UNICEF's Review of Violence against Children in Sport *(*Brackenridge et al., 2010; Rhind et al., 2017; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Specifically, the International Safeguards for Children in Sport

is a prominent safeguarding policy document that will be further examined in the findings chapters (Chapters Seven and Eight) of this thesis. For context, in October 2014, the International Safeguards for Children in Sport were launched as an international and global policy that reflect declarations by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, government guidance, etc., for organizations to safeguard children and youth from abuse and maltreatment (UNICEF, 2016; Rhind et al., 2017). The policy is composed of eight safeguards, which include: 1) Developing your policy; 2) Procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns; 3) Advice and support; 4) Minimizing risks to children; 5) Guidelines for behaviour; 6) Recruiting, training and communication; 7) Working with partners; and 8) Monitoring and evaluating. These safeguards are intended to be applied by organizations to strengthen their programming to create robust and effective safeguarding systems (Rhind et al., 2017).

Even though the policies and frameworks mentioned above identify the adverse consequences that abuse can have on a child's or youth's health and development (Brackenridge et al., 2012), they often ignore the social and cultural contexts of Global South regions, lack 'country-specific' requirements and dismiss 'geography' with its relation to sport and violence (Brackenridge et al., 2010; European Union, 2022). Furthermore, these policies aim to develop new frameworks or programs (e.g., International Safeguards for Children in Sport and Child Safeguarding in Sport) or introduce current initiatives developed by the Global North with the intention of raising awareness about the urgency of a coherent global child protection system (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Despite the similarities (e.g., globalization) and distinctions (e.g., geography, political systems, cultures, traditions) between the North and South, the evidence to support the need for children's and youth's safety in sport within Western contexts cannot be applied homogeneously to Global South regions, as their meaning and relevance is ambiguous (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Brady, 2005; Rhind, 2020). Furthermore, many of these policies use the terms 'safeguarding' and 'child protection' interchangeably or as synonyms, which leads to the lack of

implementation of 'safeguarding' policy into practice (see Chapter Two and Table 2.0; see also Lang & Hartill, 2014; Willson et al., 2022). The gap in the literature can be attributed to the power disparities between the Global North and South, the sustainment of colonial discourses, the prevalence and reinforcement of Western-centric frameworks and policies, and the lack of collaborative knowledge production between the Global North and South (Amara, 2010; Ratna & Samie, 2017; Saavedra, 2009).

As formerly highlighted, the existing body of research on this issue (i.e., the lack of examining safe sport practices within SFD programs that operate in the Global South) is limited, as the research typically focuses on individual countries within Europe and the Global North (Rhind et al., 2017). In turn, several scholars have (and continue to) highlight the lack of research done within the Global South to address the maltreatment of children in those regions (see Brackenridge et al., 2010; Brackenridge et al., 2012). Furthermore, the current research that does work to address this lacuna (see Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020; Wilson & Rhind, 2020) often ignores the social, cultural, historical, and political demographics of Global South regions where policy is being (or lack of) implemented (see Rhind et al., 2015). Moreover, policy recommendations made by such scholars and academics also lack the factors mentioned above (i.e., lack country specific requirements, overlook geography and social and cultural factors in relation to violence). In addition to the implementation of Western-centric frameworks, Global South scholars point to the clear gaps in current research and outline several reasons for such disparities, including: 1) power imbalances between the Global North and South; 2) the (re)production of colonial discourses; and 3) the lack of collaborative knowledge production and sharing (Amara, 2010; Ratna & Samie, 2018; Saavedra, 2009).

Based on this literature review, it is evident that there is an opportunity to: 1) better understand how social, political, colonial, and cultural factors contribute to the lack of implementation of safeguarding policies; and 2) develop policies or frameworks that *consider* the geographic and demographic contexts

of Global South regions, which also shape the implementation of safeguarding policies. My master's thesis research project attends to these issues by engaging in conversations with SFD NGO staff members to better understand the contextual factors – social, political, historical, geographical, and cultural – that influence how they operate and implement safe sport practices and programs. Furthermore, these conversations are complemented by a document analysis of each SFD NGO's safe sport policies. Following a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this study, these methodological approaches (e.g., interviews and document analysis) will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter offered an overview of the related literature and concepts that inform this study, including sport for development, safe sport, the 'Global South,' the human rights framework and 'vernacularization' (Merry, 2015). This literature review illustrated how 'safe sport' and sport, more generally, can take various forms in diverse contexts (e.g., the Global South). Further, this chapter underlined the gaps in the literature in relation to research on safe sport in/through SFD initiatives. The chapter concluded by briefly outlining the limitations in current safe sport policies and frameworks that (cl)aim to effectively address the safeguarding needs of children and youth living in Global South regions.

Chapter Four: Theoretical and Epistemological Foundations

This chapter outlines the epistemological underpinning of this research, grounded in constructivism, before discussing the theoretical framework (decolonial feminist theory). The chapter explains its relevance and compatibility with the study's aims to explore how SFD NGO staff members within Global South contexts conceptualize safe sport, decolonize knowledge production, and address intersecting issues of gender, race, and class within, through and around their programming for children and youth. In addition, the chapter explores the relationship between constructivism and decolonial feminist theory while critically examining potential tensions between these two perspectives. The chapter concludes with a reflexive commentary on my own positionality as the researcher within this study.

4.1 Epistemology: Constructivism

Epistemology is concerned with two central questions: 1) how do we know what we know? and 2) what is the nature of knowledge? (Gastaldo, 2011). Constructivism, as an epistemological perspective, focuses on how knowledge is shaped and formed by individuals through their experiences and interactions with the world (Olssen, 1995). Taken together, a constructivist epistemology posits that 'knowledge' is not fixed or universal but rather constructed and interpreted differently across individuals and social groups. As Hinchey (2010) explains, knowledge can be defined and conceptualized in multiple ways depending on one's context and standpoint. Specifically, and as Hinchey (2010) reminds us, 'knowledge' does not exist independently within the world; rather, it comes to fruition when an individual interacts, examines, and assigns meaning to facts, data, etc. A constructivist epistemology then is focused on where and how meaning is constructed by human beings through their interaction(s) and interpretations with the world (Crotty, 1998). In turn, a constructivist paradigm situates reality as dynamic, where knowledge is co-created between a researcher and participant (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

A constructivist epistemology positions knowledge as 'transactional,' where knowledge is produced through various interactions between a researcher and a participant (Mills et al., 2006). Further, constructivists embrace antifoundational thinking to reject permanent, 'foundational,' or universal understandings of the 'truth' (Lincoln et al., 2018). Within this paradigm, the researcher is considered a co-creator of knowledge with the participant (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2018). Throughout my thesis research, I positioned myself as a co-creator of knowledge and meaning, recognizing that my positionality as the 'researcher' contributed to shaping knowledge produced in conversation (i.e., through the semi-structured interviews) with the participants.

A constructivist lens was similarly suitable for the policy analysis undertaken within this study (Barbehön, 2022). As Penny and Evans (2004) state, "where one stands, or is positioned in the policy process, will determine one's experience and interpretation of policy" (p. 35). A constructivist approach emphasizes that researchers, policymakers, and organizational actors (e.g., SFD NGOs) experience and interpret policy actions and discourses differently. Guided by this perspective, I analyzed how SFD NGO staff interpreted and negotiated meanings and conceptualizations of safe sport practices and policies from their respective standpoints. It is essential to recognize that a researcher's position within the policy process is not neutral; it involves identifying gaps, questioning assumptions, and critically examining how 'problems' are constructed within policy frameworks. My analysis of SFD NGO safe sport policies was thus shaped by ongoing reflexive engagement, particularly in considering how 'safe sport' is conceptualized and enacted across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

In this study, constructivism was used to investigate how NGO staff members construct and implement 'safe sport' practices and safeguarding policies aimed at protecting children and youth within, through, and around their NGO's SFD programming. A constructivist approach also emphasizes the importance of understanding the specific cultural and historical contexts in which people live and work

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 60). As will be demonstrated in proceeding chapters, while SFD NGO staff apply 'safe sport' in strategic and context-responsive ways, the findings highlight that safe sport policies are often framed through an institutional or corporate lens, frequently motivated by the need to secure adequate funding and align with donor expectations.

Throughout this research process, I employed a constructivist epistemology by conducting semi-structured interviews to engage participants and explore how the environments in which they live and work shape their understandings and implementations of 'safe sport' practices. By integrating a constructivist epistemology with a decolonial feminist approach, this study also foregrounds how individuals challenge and resist Western and Eurocentric ways of knowing and knowledge production. This was especially relevant to my thesis research, as I examined the extent to which SFD NGO staff members engaged in decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs (see Research Question Two).

4.2 Decolonial Feminism

Decolonial approaches offer critical insights to help better understand the historical and political underpinnings of society from non-dominant perspectives and paradigms (Curiel, 2022). These approaches challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies by highlighting how colonialism, capitalism, and Western modernity are deeply intertwined. That is, a decolonial approach puts into perspective "the relationship between Western modernity, colonialism, and capitalism and thus putting into question the narratives that are present in official historiographies and showing how social hierarchies have been formed" (Curiel, 2022, p. 43). As a theoretical approach, decolonial feminism has been taken up widely across the literature to center the act of decolonizing or decolonial theory in a variety of contexts, including gender (and gender-based violence), colonialism and imperialism, Indigenous studies, etc., (see Abu-Lughod, 2024; Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2010, 2014; Manning, 2010; Tlostanova, 2010).

Decolonial feminism is a "critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social" (Lugones, 2010, p. 746). In turn, decolonial feminist scholars, such as Federici (2004), examine gender through a lens that emphasizes the reproduction of gender relations and the oppressive forces that shape women's lives, particularly through the intersections of historical avidity and capitalism. In contrast, radical feminist scholars often define and categorize gender as a function of domination characterized by a binary power structure, which is comprised of the 'powerful' (i.e., men) and 'powerlessness' (i.e., women) (Allen, 2005). Thus, radical feminist scholars conceptualize gender by noting the differences in status between women and men, which has ultimately been reinforced by social, cultural, and economic modes of production through capitalist laws (Spain, 2000). Ultimately, the difference in status and social positions between men and women gave rise to 'gendered spaces,' which seclude women from knowledge used by their male counterparts, to reproduce and produce power and privilege (Spain, 2000).

Often, gender is defined or represented by a binary and dichotomous system, which reflects women/man and female/male and excludes the possibility of 'gender diverse' populations and individuals (Lindqvist et al., 2020). In this context, decolonial feminism is essential to understanding intersectionality, which in the case of this research study, is examining how gender, race and class intersect to impact the (safe) sporting experiences for child and youth participants. Thus, this research study draws from Crenshaw's (1989) 'single-axis' thinking framework defined as the "dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantaged occurring along a single categorical axis" (p. 140). In other words, the single-axis framework refers to the idea that oppression and discrimination are the result of a single, isolated factor, such as race, gender or class, rather than examining these factors through an intersectional lens to understand their impact on various identities. Yet, by integrating a decolonial feminist approach, it views colonial powers not as creating oppression but argues

that colonialism is the very foundation that has produced gender, race and class as intersecting factors, ultimately constructing local realities (see Lugones, 2010). Thus, it is necessary to understand how colonialism serves as a foundation for gender, race and class to co-create lived realities and sporting experiences for young participants (see Chapter Nine).

Additionally, as the theoretical foundation for this study, decolonial feminist theory is particularly appropriate for various reasons. First, this research is grounded in Global South contexts, which are spaces that are often labelled or framed by Western discourse as the 'Other' or 'in need of saving' through Western-centric interventions. Decolonial feminist theory actively critiques such representations, interrogating how Western colonial power has continuously shaped and sustained dominant knowledge systems (Manning, 2021; Said 1978). Second, this study is concerned with examining *how* knowledge is produced, conceptualized and implemented by SFD NGO staff members (i.e., pertaining to safe sport) operating programming within Global South contexts. Decolonial feminism thus provides a framework through which to better examine the geopolitics of knowledge, which recognizes the pluralization and alternative forms of knowledge (Manning, 2021; Reiter, 2018).

To further unpack the nuances associated with knowledge production, this study engages with Quijano's (2000) 'coloniality of power' and Quijano's (2007) 'coloniality of knowledge' concepts to visibly underline how colonial and Western imperialist powers created power structures to exercise their dominance, reinforce and sustain *their* knowledge across the globe. Third, decolonial feminist theory highlights and recognizes the erasure and silencing of underrepresented and/or overlooked voices when it comes to engaging in dialogue on contested concepts (in this case, of safe sport) that shape and make this research study possible (Abu-Lughod, 2024). Importantly, a decolonial feminist approach points to how decolonization is not a metaphor (see Tuck & Yang, 2012). Rather, to decolonize means to acknowledge, in the case of this research study, how the safety of children and youth in Global South contexts is linked

to colonialism, and how 'safe sport' itself can be seen as a colonial tactic by perpetuating Western-centric notions of safety. A decolonial feminist lens adds to Western-centric notions of 'safety' by questioning *who* has the right to be safe and if children and youth living in politically unstable regions (i.e., Global South) have the right to safety and protection.

In the study of sport, decolonial feminism seeks to challenge assumptions that preserve patriarchal, (neo)colonial, Western/Eurocentric dominance in global sport (for development) policy agendas (Joseph, 2024; Kamyuka, 2024; Nachman, 2025; Ratna, 2024) and requires a critical approach to the policy analysis. Decolonial feminism "places the theorizer in the midst people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing resisting relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression" (Lugones, 2010, p. 747). As such, decolonial feminists prioritize understanding the real, lived experiences (and struggles) of people that navigate society by challenging and resisting systems and events of oppression, including colonialism, discrimination, etc. Further, decolonial feminists go beyond 'studying postcoloniality' by prioritizing anticolonial thinking, foregrounding resistance, shaping development, criticizing colonial relations and actively dismantling them (Lugones, 2010; Oxford & Spaaji, 2019).

Given these distinctions, it is essential to clearly differentiate between decolonial feminist, postcolonial feminist, and anti-colonial theoretical approaches. As previously discerned, decolonial feminism is primarily concerned with dismantling and overcoming colonial structures and dominant knowledge systems by recognizing the intersecting forces of race, class, gender, and geopolitics (Lugones, 2010; Manning, 2021). In contrast, postcolonial feminist theories critically examine how colonial discourses and ideologies related to race, class, and gender have produced and sustained oppressive conditions, particularly in formerly colonized societies (McEwan, 2008). A postcolonial feminist approach considers how colonialism has shaped gender and access to sporting opportunities, and how

participants navigate Eurocentric discourses (McEwan, 2008). On the other hand, anti-colonial theory, as conceptualized by Frantz Fanon (1961), focuses on how acts of resistance can dismantle colonial practice and powers.

For the purposes of this research project, a decolonial feminist approach was most suitable in investigating safe sport policy and SFD, as it challenges Western/Eurocentric *assumptions* of how SFD NGO staff members operating in Global South contexts conceptualize 'safe sport.' Indeed, this theoretical framework was essential in helping me to better understand how neocolonial and postcolonial dynamics are embedded within SFD programs, and how participants or so-called 'targeted beneficiaries' (e.g., children and youth) are negatively impacted by ongoing (neo)colonial structures and practices (Hayhurst et al., 2021). Using a decolonial feminist approach is also useful for challenging Eurocentric discourses pertaining to sport, race, colonialism and gender, and helps to uncover "[hidden] histories of alternative forms of physical culture and bodily practice that generate different meanings to those of the dominant competitive sports cultures of the West" (Carrington, 2015, p. 111). For these reasons, I chose to employ a decolonial feminist approach to this research to understand how Western-centric initiatives (i.e., safe sport policies) can perpetuate colonial ideologies and to re-centre safe sport discourses (and in turn interventions) to reflect the lived experiences of children and youth living in Global South contexts.

Moreover, a decolonial feminist approach is concerned with emerging issues of Eurocentrism and power (Vergès, 2021), and how oppressed communities constitute resistance against social organizations of power (Lugones, 2010). As such, this approach provided a robust theoretical platform through which to better understand how colonial practices have shaped (or constrained) social processes and SFD staff to embed safe sport policies into practice (Lugones, 2010; Oxford & Spaaji, 2019). A decolonial feminist lens also provided a framework through which to address the complex experiences that children and youth in SFD programming face by engaging in the development of 'safe spaces' for those who live in

vulnerability and marginalization (Rowman & Littlefield, n.d; Yang & Lawrence, 2020). Perhaps most importantly, a decolonial feminist lens points to the diverse ways that children and youth living in global South regions are 'human beings' and not the 'other' (Jiwani, 2011).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that this study exclusively focuses on gender primarily in relation to cisgender children and youth (namely, those identified as girls and boys). While I recognize that gender is non-binary and continues to be shaped by complex, fluid, and culturally specific understandings, the scope of this research reflects the ways in which gender was represented and operationalized by SFD NGO staff and within the key policies analyzed. Despite employing a decolonial feminist framework, one that actively seeks to unsettle colonial and Eurocentric constructions of gender and identity, the findings of this study are limited by the binary gender frameworks used in the policies and programming under investigation. I acknowledge the exclusion of gender diverse and non-binary children and youth in this research and recognize this to be a limitation. For future work, and in line with a decolonial feminist lens, I am committed to deepening my engagement with non-binary and trans-inclusive approaches in future research and aim to continue to challenge normative gender constructions in SFD policy and practice.

4.3 A (Brief) Overview of Constructivism and Decolonial Feminism

This section examines the interconnectedness of constructivist epistemology and decolonial feminist theory, emphasizing how their integration supports a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to knowledge production. In this study, I focused on understanding the safe sport perspectives of SFD NGO staff members within, through and around their programming, and through an integrated lens of constructivism and decolonial feminism, which provided me with ample opportunity to understand the local realities of children and youth in various Global South regions. Further, it was critical that I not only focus on *how* SFD NGOs are conceptualizing 'safe sport,' but also on whether participants are going

against dominant and global forms of 'safe sport' knowledge. Additionally, this integrated approach provided an opportunity to better identify safeguarding policies that challenge colonial and Western-centric ideologies embedded within SFD programming (Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2020), and to address the oppressive situations, systemic relations of power (rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy) and structural inequalities impact and place children and youth in precarious positions in the first place (Diptee & Trotman, 2014). Furthermore, pairing constructivism with decolonial feminism enabled me to understand how children and youth bring diversity and unique lived experiences into sporting and SFD-related spaces and can become oppressed and face difficulties due to various forms of systemic inequities (Rowman & Littlefield, n.d.).

4.4 Positionality, Contradictions and Care

It is important that I acknowledge my social position – "the position one currently occupies vis-à-via other people within a social context" (Rigoli, 2025, p. 170) – in relation to the thesis work presented herein, especially due to the focus of this study on Global South contexts. As a second-generation heterosexual South-Asian (visible) Muslim female, I acknowledge the beliefs, biases and prior knowledge I bring when discussing social and cultural issues unique to Global South countries. And, as a South Asian woman, I closely understand and resonate with some of the complexities of navigating cultural and social spaces that are molded by gendered obligations. Today, I continue to challenge these gendered spaces that have been socially constructed and cultivated by my ancestors and passed down through generations. Being a visible Muslim woman (i.e., Hijabi) and a person of colour comes with numerous challenges; yet, I acknowledge that I still hold several privileges, some of which I would like to share below.

First, I currently hold citizenship in three different countries, which undoubtedly shape how I approached this research study. I was born in the United States and then later immigrated to Canada with my parents. As a settler to the land and a non-Indigenous person, it is important for immigrants like me to

recognize that immigrant communities can reinforce and (re)produce a colonial system instigated by While settlers (Saranillio, 2013). For me to engage in the 'act' of 'decolonizing,' it is imperative that I recognize my role and social position in reinforcing colonial narratives. For example, I live in a house that is constructed on Indigenous land, and I benefit by using colonial transportation infrastructure (i.e., the TTC) that has also been built upon Indigenous land. In addition to American and Canadian citizenship, I also hold Pakistani citizenship, even though I have only visited occasionally, but not resided in, Pakistan. As this study examines the sociocultural and political context of Pakistan, where one of the SFD NGOs participating in this study is based, it is important to acknowledge that my prior knowledge and awareness of the country's current demographics influence how I interpreted the findings and engaged with discourses related to that context.

Second, as a person living in a Global North country and conducting research and completing her education at a Western-based academic institution (e.g., York University), it is important that I critically consider how my positionality may present apprehensions relative to the goals of this research. While my thesis research advocates for moving beyond Western-focused 'safe sport' frameworks and producing more inclusive, diverse and contextually specific safe sport approaches, my residence within Canada, a powerful Global North and G7 nation, and engagement with various SFD NGOs across the Global South may seem imbued with tensions and contradictions. My goal was to raise questions and concerns with reflexive humility, which refers to critically engaging in self-awareness to recognize inherent power dynamics at play, with a clear sense of how power relations and privileges across topographical borders shaped my interactions with interviewees and documentary analysis. Overall, the tensions that I have described in this section have informed how I navigated and engaged in this research study as a researcher. The types of reflexive approaches and methods that I utilized to ground myself throughout this research process will be further discussed in the 'Rigour and Reflexivity' chapter (Chapter Six).

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the research study's epistemological underpinning (i.e., constructivism) and described the theoretical framework (i.e., decolonial feminist theory). Both approaches and frameworks are compatible with the study's objective to explore how SFD NGO staff members within Global South contexts conceptualize safe sport, decolonize knowledge production, and address intersecting issues of gender, race, and class within, through and around their programming for children and youth. The chapter concluded with a reflexive commentary on my own positionality as the researcher within this study, which was put forth to respond to the tensions between decolonial feminist theory and constructivism.

Chapter Five: Methodology

This fifth chapter outlines the methodological framework and analytical approach, Bacchi's (2012) "What's the Problem Represented to be" approach (WPR), which guided this research. In this chapter, I provide an in-depth overview of how I utilized this analytical tool to policy analysis and its compatibility with the theoretical framework chosen for this study (i.e., decolonial feminism) and offer a rationale and justification for employing the WPR approach. I then also briefly outline the key strengths and limitations for each method.

5.1 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) Approach

Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be" approach (WPR) is a tool that is used to underpin the critical analysis of public policies (Bacchi, 2012). The goal of a WPR approach is to analyze policies to uncover the underlying problems they aim to address (Bacchi, 2012). The WPR approach especially encourages the user to read policies by analyzing how the 'problem' (i.e., what needs to change) is represented and challenge this 'problem representation' with critical inquiry (Bacchi, 2012). Accordingly, a policy is not represented as a method to *solve* a problem but rather, policies can *produce* problems that can affect what does (or does not) get done and how it may impact people's lives (Bacchi, 2012). Additionally, the WPR approach may be used to guide participant interviews and analyze interview transcripts (Bacchi, 2021). In the context of my thesis research, I employed Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach to evaluate and analyze problem representations within SFD NGOs safe sport policies (n=10) as well as the responses to questions asked in semi-structured interviews with SFD NGO staff (n=15).

Importantly, and as others have noted (Hilberer, 2024; Laursen, 2020), the WPR approach is compatible with a decolonial feminist theoretical framework. The WPR framework is particularly useful for investigating and exploring power dynamics and paying attention to forms of knowledge (i.e., colonial, Western/Eurocentric) that underlie SFD NGO safe sport policies (Bacchi, 2012). By applying Bacchi's

WPR approach, this study uncovered how SFD NGO policies construct problem representations related to safe sport. When combined with a decolonial feminist lens, this framework allowed for a critical examination of how (neo)colonial logics are embedded within SFD NGO programs – shaping not only how 'safe sport' is defined but also how issues such as physical and sexual abuse, and broader inequities related to race, gender, and power, are addressed. Moreover, using the WPR framework enabled me to explore the challenges that SFD NGO staff members face in their efforts to safeguard children and youth – challenges that are often shaped by institutional constraints, cultural complexities, and donor-driven accountability frameworks.

I used Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach to 'get at' and uncover hidden discourses and 'problems' that may underpin existing organizational and safe sport policies, potentially hindering the safeguarding of children and youth in sport and SFD contexts. In this approach, 'problems' are not treated as pre-existing issues that policies address and/or 'fix.' Rather than assuming problems exist independently of policy, Bacchi (2012) argues that policies actively construct and shape certain issues as "problems" through their language, assumptions, and framing. Drawing on this approach, I examined how SFD NGO staff members conceptualized 'safe sport' and child/youth protection by analyzing the underlying presuppositions and assumptions in their responses – many of which often remain unexamined (Riemann, 2023).

The WPR approach was particularly useful for analyzing interview data, helping to illuminate how assumptions about safe sport intersect with broader issues of race, gender, and class, as well as how decolonizing knowledge production is (or is not) taken up in organizational policies and practices. Further, the WPR framework helped to uncover and 'get at' how problem representations related to safe sport emerged during the semi-structured interviews, and how these representations have been constructed, circulated, and communicated to the SFD NGOs' audiences (Bacchi, 2012). Overall, then, the WPR

approach enabled a critical analysis of what is "problematic" within SFD NGOs' safeguarding policies, especially through the lens of how safe sport knowledge, terminology, and discourses are translated and applied in practice.

To guide this analysis, I adapted Bacchi's (2012) six guiding questions to align with the objectives of this research. These questions – applied to both policy documents and interview data – are answered in the findings chapters (Chapters Eight and Nine) and are as follows:

1. What is the 'problem' represented to be in SFD safe sport policies?
2. What assumptions underpin this problem representation of SFD safe sport policies?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' emerged? Specifically, what colonial, gendered, racialized histories shape safe sport policies and SFD NGO safeguarding practices?
4. What is left unproblematic? Where are the silences within SFD NGO safe sport policies, and what is obfuscated? For instance, are local realities reflected when creating SFD NGO safe sport policies? Are SFD NGO staff members applying policy to practice? What language and terminology are used in SFD NGO safe sport policies?
5. What effects are produced by this problem representation? How do the construction and implementation (or lack thereof) these policies shape understandings of what constitutes 'safe sport' and how it is enacted?
6. How have these problem representations been produced and disseminated – and how might they be challenged?

As part of the WPR approach, researchers are also encouraged to apply these questions reflexively to their own problem representations (Bacchi, 2012; Bacchi, 2018; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). In other words, the framework calls for critical reflection on one's own positionality and assumptions in relation to the phenomenon under study. According to Bacchi (2012), the first question is the starting point of analysis,

aimed at identifying and clarifying how a particular 'problem' is represented within a given policy (see also, Bacchi, 2022). In applying this question to my analysis, I remained attentive to the multiple and intersecting problem representations that emerged across both the policy documents and interview transcripts.

For example, in addressing the first question, I asked SFD NGO staff members questions such as:

- "When did your NGO create safe sport policies and why?"
- "Does your organization have a current or existing safe sport or safeguarding policy in place?"
- "Has your NGO created policies that specifically address gender inequity or racism in/through SFD?"

These questions allowed me to better understand and further probe how the SFD NGO staff member(s) conceptualized safe sport, what they viewed as priorities, and whether their organizations translated policy into practice in context-specific ways. Further, these questions enabled me to explore if they had implemented safeguarding measures and, if so, try to 'get at' how they addressed gender inequity and racism, within, through and around the broader terrain of their SFD programs.

Question two focuses on identifying the underlying or 'hidden' premises in the representation of the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2012). This question adapts Foucauldian understandings to investigate the assumptions that establish unexamined ways of knowledge within a particular policy (Bacchi, 2022). To address this question, I focused on asking the participants questions related to their understandings of 'safe sport' such as: "Are you aware of the term 'safe sport'?" Following-up questions included: "If so, how do you conceptualize or define the term?; What does it mean to you?"; and "What would a safe sport environment in SFD look like to you in the context of the country you work in?" Through these questions, I was able to explore the participants' understandings and assumptions of 'safe sport' and the types of practices implemented by staff members to create safe environments.

Question three focuses on understanding the types of processes and practices through how the problem representation emerged and how it can be understood (Bacchi, 2012). To address this question and to understand the (colonial, gender and radicalized) histories that impact understandings of safe sport, I asked the following questions: "When did your NGO create safe sport policies and why?"; "Can you describe or outline the process of creating, and delivering, these policies?; and "What challenges did you encounter in implementing such practices?" If the NGO did not have safe sport policies implemented, I asked the following: "Can you outline the reasons for not implementing such policies?"; "What factors restrict the implementation of such policies?"; and "Would you consider implementing safe sport policies in the future?". Through reviewing the responses of SFD NGO staff members, I was able to understand key relevant factors that shape a country's current social, cultural and political landscape and how that effected the creation and implementation of safe sport policies. For instance, when reviewing responses pertaining to the processes of creating safe sport policies, I paid particular attention to whether SFD NGO staff members mentioned adapting Western-oriented safeguarding frameworks (e.g., UNICEF, UN). By doing so, I was able to better understand and get at *what* the problem representations were and *how* they came to be.

Question four allows for critical reflections on the limits and gaps of the identified problem representation and creates space for thinking critically about possible alternatives (i.e., solutions) (Bacchi, 2012; 2022). In other words, this question focuses on what is *not problematized* within the identified problem representation (Bacchi, 2022). To address this question, I asked SFD NGO staff members the following: "Do you think the policies that you have in place are sufficient?" and "Are you willing to implement new perspectives in improving your existing policies?" If the NGO did not have any policies in place, I asked: "Do you think the absence of safe sport policies is sufficient to protect your participants?" By asking these questions, I encouraged the participants to engage in critical thinking to explore ways in

which the ‘problem’ representation could be addressed to better safeguarding child and youth participants and whether the staff members were open to implementing new perspectives (i.e., adapting inclusive language) address the silences and gaps within current safe sport (and organizational) policies.

Question five draws attention to the types of effects (i.e., discursive, subjectification, and lived) that are produced by the problem representation (Bacchi, 2022). Furthermore, this question focuses on how the identified problem representation can shape people’s perspectives and understandings of themselves and the issue at hand (Bacchi, 2012). To address this question, I gathered demographic and geographic information regarding my participants and the region(s) they operate in and asked the following: “Can you tell me more about yourself? (e.g., age, race, gender, ethnicity, etc.)”; “How did you get into your current role”; “What are your responsibilities and duties at this NGO?”; and “Can you tell me more about the region you’re in?” By asking these questions, I came to understand how staff members roles can impact their capacities to ensure the safety of the child/youth participants, and how the context of a particular country can shape problem representations and lived experiences, and understandings of ‘safe sport.’

Lastly, question six overlaps with question three and examines the practices that authorize and justify the identified problem representation (Bacchi, 2022). Also, this question pays particular attention to how the problem representation has been contested, produced and disseminated (Bacchi, 2012). To address this question, I asked the following: “Do you think the policies that you have in place are sufficient?” and “Do you think the policies you currently have in place addressing sexism and racism by your organization do enough to ensure a safe and supportive sport environment for child and youth SFD participants?” By reviewing participant answers to these questions, I was able to understand how gender and race are being addressed within an NGOs safe sport policies and whether the policies effectively safeguard child/youth participants within, through and around the SFD program. Furthermore, the WPR

approach allowed me to analyze problem representations associated with policy language and how language itself can erase non-Western knowledge systems and continue to marginalize children and youth.

Besides the strengths of the WPR approach, it comes with limitations and challenges. One of the major limitations of the WPR approach is that it can challenging for the researcher to be reflexive by navigating the guiding questions. However, in this research, I adapted the seventh step/question in the WPR approach as articulated by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016): "Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations." By employing this question, I was able to recognize my own biases and continuously engaged in self-reflexivity, as I navigated the guiding questions to examine and identify problem representations within SFD NGOs safe sport and organizational policies. Another limitation and challenge that researchers may encounter when using the WPR approach is navigating the overlap and intersection between its guiding questions. As Bacchi (2021, p. 19) points out, the WPR framework can sometimes "neglect the interconnected mode of thinking at work in WPR." To address this limitation, I remained reflexive throughout the research process and refrained from treating the questions in isolation. Instead, I made explicit reference to which WPR questions I was engaging with at each stage of the analysis, to maintain coherence and transparency (see Bacchi, 2021).

5.2 Compatibility with Decolonial Feminism

There are several reasons why the WPR approach aligns well with the decolonial feminist framework guiding this research. As previously noted, the WPR approach is designed to uncover hidden discourses and problem representations embedded within organizational policies – discourses that can, often unintentionally, hinder efforts to safeguard children in sport. This made the approach particularly useful for examining how 'safe sport' is constructed, framed, and implemented within SFD NGOs. Specifically, the WPR framework enabled me to explore what SFD NGO staff members considered to be problematic by analyzing the underlying (and often unexamined or underexamined) presuppositions and

assumptions regarding safe sport and child/youth protection in their organizations (Riemann, 2023). It also enabled a critical investigation of how 'safe sport' knowledge, language, and terminology are translated into policy and practice within SFD NGOs. Moreover, the WPR approach supported my analysis of staff responses in semi-structured interviews, particularly in relation to how assumptions about race, gender, and class, as well as knowledge production shaped their understanding and implementation of safe sport. This included exploring how problem representations were constructed and communicated within and beyond the organization, especially to the children and youth who are the intended beneficiaries of these policies (Bacchi, 2012).

Decolonial feminism was particularly valuable in tailoring the six guiding questions to meet the objectives of this research; indeed, these core tenets of Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach are congruent with decolonial feminism. By using the WPR framework to uncover problem representations within SFD NGO policies, a decolonial feminist approach enabled me to examine how colonial and Western imperatives and logics are involved in SFD NGO programs, which affects how 'safe sport' is constructed to address various forms of abuse (i.e., physical and sexual maltreatment, etc.), as well as broader inequities related to race, gender, and class. A decolonial feminist approach supported the identification of *how* and *why* particular problem representations are constructed within SFD NGO policies and provided a framework for interrogating the power dynamics that underpin them. In particular, a decolonial feminist approach allowed for a deeper analysis of the language used in safe sport policies in/through SFD NGOs, highlighting how certain terms and discursive choices can invoke, perpetuate, and (re)produce colonial ideologies, while simultaneously erasing or marginalizing non-Western knowledge systems and gendered perspectives.

In short, while the WPR approach offers a methodological tool to reveal problem representations in SFD NGO policies and interview transcripts, the decolonial feminist framework enriches this analysis

by foregrounding the historical and political dimensions of how those representations are formed and maintained. Moreover, a decolonial feminist orientation questions *how* and *if* (neo)colonial factors are at play that can (in)directly place young participants in precarious and vulnerable positions. Taken together, then, using a decolonial feminist lens with Bacchi's WPR and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provided a solid analytical foundation for this study. This combined framework allowed me to investigate *if and how* safe sport is constructed through the language used by diverse SFD NGO staff within their policies – particularly as a strategy to address physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment. Moreover, this theoretical platform was valuable in assessing whether, and in what ways, SFD NGO staff use safe sport frameworks as a means to confront broader structural inequities related to race, gender, class, and the decolonization of knowledge within ongoing colonial contexts. The decolonial feminist lens also supported the identification of problem representations through the WPR approach, while offering space to (re)imagine and create alternative discourses that amplify, reconstruct and reorient local realities (Ferreira-Marante & Veiga-Seijo, 2023). Ultimately, then, these conceptual threads and were essential for better understanding how safe sport and SFD programming intersect with systems of power and difference, particularly as they relate to the lived experiences of children and youth in relation to race, gender, knowledge production, sexuality, and class.

5.3 Framings

The concept of 'framings' has been widely used in qualitative research to support discourse analysis, particularly for identifying normative discourses and illuminating problem representations – both of which are central to this study's WPR approach (Alexander, 2009; Entman, 1993; Rein et al., 1991; Tannen, 1993). Within discourse analysis, framings function as mechanisms for representing and conveying forms of knowledge (Minsky, 1977). In this study, the diverse ways SFD NGO staff conceptualized 'safe sport' required an approach that could capture this complexity. The concept of framings was used in conjunction with the concept of vernacularization (Merry, 2006, 2015) to: 1) reflect

the varied, textured and context-specific interpretations of safe sport; and 2) to better get at how the discourse of 'safe sport' was taken up and localized across different organizational, socio-cultural, and political contexts (Merry, 2006).

In analyzing interview transcripts and SFD NGO policy documents, I adapted Entman's (1993) method of creating frames. This process involves *selection* and *salience*. First, I identified elements in the data, whether from interview responses or policy texts, that pointed to a specific problem definition, theme, or discourse (i.e., safe sport) (Entman, 1993). I then interpreted these selections and emphasized their salience to reflect the broader discourse, that is, the degree to which a piece of information was made prominent, noticeable or meaningful (Entman, 1993). In Chapters Seven and Eight, I present an in-depth explanation of the identified frames and discuss how they reflect broader discourses related to safe sport within the context of SFD.

5.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological framework and analytical approach, Bacchi's (2012) "What's the Problem Represented to be" approach (WPR), which guided this research. This chapter provided an in-depth overview of how Bacchi's (2012) WPR was employed and its compatibility with decolonial feminism. This chapter offered a rationale and justification for employing the WPR approach and highlighted how I navigated tensions and challenges with using this approach. Then, the chapter concluded by describing the process of 'framings' to support discourse analysis.

Chapter Six: Methods of Data Collection

In this chapter, I outline and justify the data collection tools and methods used in this study to better understand the perspectives of SFD NGO staff and how safe sport policies for children and youth are constructed in various Global South contexts. These methods included semi-structured interviews with fifteen (15) SFD NGO staff members and a documentary analysis of ten (10) safe sport and organizational policy documents produced by SFD NGOs. Next, I outline the participant sample and provide relevant demographic and geographic information regarding the SFD NGOs and the Global South contexts in which they are situated in. Then, I offer a detailed account of the data analysis process and conclude with a description of my approach to reflexivity and rigour.

6.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for participants included SFD NGOs operating within Global South contexts (e.g., South Asia, South-East Asia, the Middle East, South America, Oceania, Central-Latin America, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa) that have child/youth programming, with participants who are between the ages of 6-18 years. I recruited SFD NGOs with (and without) sport policies or any form of safeguarding measures to capture a broader range of organizational experiences, challenges, and approaches to implementing safe sport in diverse contexts. This allowed for comparative insights into how safeguarding was understood and practiced, even in the absence of formalized policies. Furthermore, the NGO must have been operating programming in the abovementioned Global South regions. If an NGO was situated within the Global North, but conducted programming in the Global South, they were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria included SFD NGOs that operated specifically within Global North contexts and did not provide child/youth programming. Each SFD NGO was able to contribute one to two staff members to participate in the semi-structured interviews, which were conducted via Zoom for 45-60

minutes. Participants were required to understand and communicate in English, be an original SFD safe sport policymaker or have knowledge of safe sport policies for their SFD NGO, including programming staff, safeguarding officers, etc.

6.2 Participant Recruitment

Prior to commencing data collection, I received approval from York's Research Ethics Board (see Appendix F). Initially, I had planned and proposed to recruit 7-10 SFD NGO staff members from the following Global South regions: South Asia, the Middle East, and South America. However, because of the strong interest in participating in the research, I expanded the regions of interest to also include South-East Asia, Oceania, Central-Latin America, the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Recruitment resulted in fifteen (15) SFD NGO staff members from the following Global South countries: South Asia (including South-East Asia), the Middle East, South America, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

My recruitment methods employed a multi-pronged approach, including a targeted social media campaign (primarily via LinkedIn), purposive (i.e., targeted e-mails to selected SFD NGOs), and snowball sampling (Gelinas et al., 2017; Kirchher & Charles, 2018; Palinkas et al., 2016). The social media strategy was not simply about visibility; it was intentionally used to leverage professional networks within sport, development, and safeguarding communities. To conduct a social media campaign, I submitted an ethics amendment application, as this recruitment method was not included in the initial ethics application. Recruitment through social media was not included in the original ethics application because I was solely focused on recruiting participants through targeted emails (see Appendix A), which did not yield a high response rate. I had created two posters that outlined the research objectives, nature of the project and participant inclusion criteria (see Appendices D and E), which were posted on my personal (but public) LinkedIn account. LinkedIn was selected as the primary social media platform to recruit participants because since I had the goal of targeting SFD NGO staff members who are policymakers, directors,

program facilitators (e.g., coaches), safeguarding officers, executive members (e.g., CEO), etc., LinkedIn's algorithm allowed me to reach a wide range of audiences and networks, which other social media accounts (i.e., Instagram) do not have the capacity to do (Liu et al., 2016). The social media campaign attracted many interested participants who emailed me directly, sharing their willingness to partake in the study. There were a few (n=2) interested participants that I had to follow up with via LinkedIn direct message (DM) as that was the best form of communication with them. While LinkedIn provided numerous practical benefits to this research study's recruitment methods (i.e., network exposure), it did pose a significant limitation as LinkedIn caters more towards Global North/Western audiences and reinforces many of the core tenets of Western, neoliberal ideologies, especially in relation to individualism, market logics and self-optimization (Okonkwo et al., 2023; Pinho et al., 2019; Sharone, 2017). Through my decolonial feminist lens, I remained critically reflexive and attuned to the power imbalances associated with using LinkedIn as a platform to conduct a social media recruitment campaign. Although LinkedIn expanded the reach of my recruitment materials, it also reinforced the very colonial logics under critique in this study. It invoked algorithmic biases that may have shaped visibility – privileging groups such as white men and English-speaking communities (Härtel et al., 2024).

Given these limitations in visibility and reach, I employed purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon of interest – safeguarding children and youth in sport (Palinkas et al., 2016). This approach allowed me to specifically recruit policymakers, safeguarding officers or programming staff (e.g., SFD NGO staff, board of directors, coaches) within the selected NGOs operating in the Global South. Furthermore, purposive sampling enabled me to select SFD organizations that either publicly shared or did not share their safe sport practices and policies on their websites (Palinkas et al., 2016). Purposive sampling is a well-accepted and rigorous approach to qualitative research for exploring context-specific, and underexamined phenomenon, such as

safe sport in SFD NGOs that operate in the Global South (see Etikan et al., 2016; see also Patton, 2002). Further, purposive sampling allowed me to gather "information-rich cases" by selecting individuals and groups with prior knowledge and/or on-going engagements with safe sport (see Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). Some contend that this recruitment strategy raises apprehensions around 'cherry-picking' – also understood as selecting specific individuals and/or groups that align with a certain narrative (i.e., safe sport), and can be viewed as a limitation (see Etikan et al., 2016). To address this concern, I established well-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined above, which focused on the role and capacities of the participant, rather than their personal narratives.

Next, I employed snowball sampling, a technique in which existing participants refer the researcher to additional potential interviewees, which proved beneficial for expanding the participant pool in this study (Kirchher & Charles, 2018). Indeed, four participants disseminated the recruitment materials (i.e., recruitment poster) to their networks to increase and enhance engagement. As mentioned above, while I did face difficulties in contacting potential SFD NGOs that operate in the Global South, the social media campaign helped to bolster and increase user engagement and exposure (Gelinas et al., 2017), resulting in a higher response rate than initially anticipated. Given the scope and time constraints of a master's thesis, I was unable to include all individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study (see section 6.7 for further explanation). The recruitment period concluded in early February 2025, after determining that data saturation had been reached. All participant data were kept confidential in a password-protected folder accessible only to the student researcher (i.e., myself) and my supervisor. In this thesis, and in any future publications, and participants' names, organizational roles, and names of their NGOs are anonymized, with pseudonyms used in place of legal identifiers. Lastly, these recruitment methods (e.g, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, social media campaign) were selected with the

intention to illustrate the ideas and perceptions of the participants in relation to the study's objectives (i.e., safe sport in SFD), which Chapters Seven and Eight further elaborate on.

6.3 Semi-Structured Interviews and Participant Demographics

I selected semi-structured interviews to gather data for the research study, as this method of interviewing incorporates both open-ended and theoretically driven questions, which can be advantageous in eliciting data grounded in participant experiences (Galletta, 2013). The purpose of semi-structured interviews is to gather information from participants who have personal experiences, attitudes, beliefs, etc., to the phenomenon of interest (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The use of semi-structured interview guides provides structure and flexibility, which is beneficial to novice researchers, such as myself (Roberts, 2020). Furthermore, semi-structured interview guides can evolve and change over the research process to "include new concepts or areas of interest communicated early on within the interview process by research participants that are relevant to the study and/or may require further exploration" (Seidman, 2013 as cited in Roberts, 2020, p. 3192). Lastly, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility to adjust and rearrange the interview questions as needed, and to tailor and modify them according to the participant, allowing for probing when necessary (Roberts, 2020).

Before conducting the interviews with SFD NGO staff, the participants completed a consent form (see Appendix B), which was stored in a password-protected folder on my computer. I conducted semi-structured interviews (n =15) via Zoom, with SFD NGO staff that work in different Global South contexts. I interviewed a total of twelve (12) SFD NGOs (i.e., 15 SFD NGO staff members) operating in multiple country contexts (n=2). During the interviews, I took reflexive 'field notes' and immediately after the completion of the interview, I took theoretical and abstract notes on a notepad (see Appendix G). Interview audio was recorded using the Voice Memos app on my iPhone, then immediately uploaded to a secure, and password-protected folder and deleted from the device. Before deletion, the Voice Memos app

generated an automatic transcript of each interview. These transcribed interviews were edited for accuracy and clarity after re-listening to the original audio recordings. Additionally, the transcripts were sent to the participants to check and, where necessary, correct the interview contents (i.e., member checking; see Birt et al., 2016).

To capture a diverse, geographical representative sample (to the extent that was possible in this master's study), I interviewed one to two staff members per SFD NGO and limited the sample to one to two NGOs operating within the same Global South country context. For example, if there were two SFD NGOs operating in Pakistan and both showed interest in participating in the study, they were included in the study. To clarify, NGOs that operated in the same country context were interviewed separately. This decision was informed by a decolonial feminist perspective, as I strived to include and value different forms of knowledge to gain greater insights into how 'safe sport' is conceptualized across and within a shared country context. Further, if there was an NGO that operated in more than one Global South country, they were also included within the study.

The use of semi-structured interviews with SFD NGO staff members helped me better understand how they were (or were not) practicing safe sport or safeguarding children and youth in, through and around their programs. Furthermore, it provided me with new insights as to how SFD NGOs operating in Global South regions articulate the concept of 'safeguarding' for program participants. Indeed, one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews was the ability to more deeply explore the participants' thoughts and experiences, through the method of 'probing' (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Probing was especially beneficial to help me 'get at' SFD NGO staff members' responses to the questions I posed, allowing for new insights to emerge.

Despite the strengths of semi-structured interviews, there are also limitations. One of the most common challenges with semi-structured interviews is that they are time-consuming and labour-intensive,

especially when analyzing the interview transcripts (Adams, 2015). Because of the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer must be "knowledgeable about the relevant substantive issues" that may emerge during the interview process (Adams, 2015, p. 493). Further, conducting virtual interviews presented an additional challenge. Since I conducted interviews with participants across a range of Global South contexts, I practiced reflexivity and acknowledged that NGOs may not have stable connection (due to challenging and precarious economic, social and political contexts) and/or have access to a functioning computer or technological source (Lobe et al., 2022).

Furthermore, during the interviews, I encountered some participants who appeared uncomfortable discussing instances of abuse or maltreatment involving children and youth in their programs. This discomfort was evident through the participants' hesitancy to answer the question(s) and efforts to redirect the conversation (e.g., participants would acknowledge what was being asked but then redirect the conversation to topics they are comfortable discussing, such as safe sport practices that their organization implements). To navigate these moments ethically and respectfully, I adjusted my questioning to avoid sensitive and personal topics. While this approach prioritized participant well-being, it had analytical consequences, limiting the depth of insight into certain issues being explored within this research. However, for those participants who did choose to disclose sensitive information related to abuse, I expressed appreciation for their transparency and openness. I provided a list of mental health and support resources, which they could consult at their discretion (see Appendix H).

Overall, semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method for addressing my research questions, particularly when used in conjunction with my chosen analytical approach – Bacchi's 2009 WPR framework. By deeply exploring how SFD NGO staff members conceptualized 'safe sport' and understood the intersections of race, gender, colonialism, and class within contexts marked by unstable

power dynamics, I was able to critically examine the effectiveness of SFD organizations in upholding the safety and rights of children and youth in sport.

6.4 Participant Demographic Information

Demographic and background information was obtained at the start of the interviews with SFD NGO staff members (n = 15) where participants were asked to share their age, race, gender, ethnicity, etc., the region in which they worked, and their roles and responsibilities at their respective organizations (see Appendix C). To clarify, I did not conduct a demographic survey; instead, I gathered demographic information from the participants' responses (Dobosh, 2018; Hughes et al., 2016). Table 3.0 below provides detailed information about the participant sample. Also, given the scope of this thesis, it is important to provide brief geographical context for each country in which participants were based and conducted programming within. This contextualization supports a clearer interpretation of the findings in the chapters that follow and can be found in the Appendices (e.g., Appendix I).

Table 3.0. Interviewee and Participant Profiles

Region	Country	Number of NGOs	Name of SFD NGO (i.e., NGO#)	Number of Staff Members	Name of Staff members (*pseudonym)	Position at NGO	Safe Sport policy sent to researcher (Y/N)
South Asia	Pakistan	2	NGO 1	1 each	Rahim	Communications and Public Relations	Y
			NGO 2		Umer	Founder and CEO	Y
	India	2	NGO 3	1 each	Suman	Monitoring and Evaluation/Safeguarding and Director of Coach Education	Y

			NGO 4		Mona	Human Resources and Menstrual Hygiene	N
	Bangladesh	1	NGO 5	1	Paps	Co-founder	Y
Southeast Asia	Laos, Philippines and Cambodia	1	NGO 6	2	Cole	Director	Y
					Danni	Partnerships Coordinator	
The Middle East	Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan	1	NGO 7	1	Sarah	Global Programs Manager	Y
	Turkey	1	NGO 8	2	Nancy	Co-founder	Y[1]
					Emma	Project Coordinator	
Sub-Saharan Africa	South Africa	1	NGO 9	2	Phantom	Project Manager	Y
					Alex	Chief Executive Officer	
	Kenya	1	NGO 10	1	Ari	Safeguarding Officer	Y
South America	Peru	1	NGO 11	1	Dan	CEO	N
Oceania	Fiji	1	NGO 12	1	Tom	Participation and Pathways Manager	Y

6.5 Documentary Analysis

In a similar vein to other qualitative research methods, documentary analysis requires that the data be analyzed, examined, and interpretated to stimulate meaning, gain understanding, and develop knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Policy documents are produced within political and institutional arenas and are used to inform and regulate a wide range of disciplines, including sociology, education, economics, history, etc. (Cardno, 2018). Policy document analysis relies on sociological principles to examine the

[1] English translation of NGO 8's policy document analyzed.

causes and consequences of policies (Dunn, 2015). It is also a valuable tool used for investigating issues related to fairness, ethics, security, and liberty, and for generating policy-relevant insights and solutions (Dunn, 2015). As Cardno (2018, p. 624) notes, documentary analysis can "tap into policy history" and provide critical insight into how a policy was constructed. Furthermore, a documentary analysis better positions the researcher to evaluate whether a policy is effectively achieving its intended outcomes. Through this framework, I conducted a documentary analysis of SFD NGOs' safe sport and organizational policy documents-corresponding to the participating organizations (see Table 4.0 on the types of policy documents received). Using this approach to data collection, I was then able to analyze safe sport and organizational policies (one for each NGO) of the selected SFD NGOs in Global South contexts to better understand the nature, perceptions, and complexities of safe sport policies for children and youth program participants. To obtain the SFD NGOs safe sport and organizational policy documents, at the end of interview I asked participants if they would be comfortable in sharing their safe sport policy documents for analysis. Initially, I aimed to receive fifteen policy documents for each NGO; however, I ultimately only received ten policy documents (see Table 3.0) due to several factors. First, two of the SFD NGOs that participated in the semi-structured interviews did not provide their organizations' safe sport policy documents. Even though these NGOs had verbally agreed to sending me their policy documents at the end of the interview, after multiple follow-ups (i.e., three follow-ups for each respective NGO via email), the staff members did not respond to my emails or send me their policy documents. Second, it is possible that these SFD NGOs did not have safe sport policies and when consulting their organizational websites, I was unable to locate any relevant material. Additionally, the participant pool consisted of SFD NGOs (n=2) that operate in multiple country contexts (see Table 3.0). In this case, I used the safe sport policies they provided to examine their implementation of 'safe sport' across multiple Global South contexts.

After receiving the ten safe sport policy documents, which ranged from codes of conduct, safe sport guidelines/frameworks, organizational policies, child protection policies, and sexual exploitation policies, I was able to analyze how SFD NGO policies constructed and represented specific "problems." This step was essential for effectively applying Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach. By conducting a documentary analysis of safe sport policy documents from SFD NGOs, I was able to identify the underlying problem representations, as outlined in Bacchi's WPR approach. This analysis enhanced understandings of how safe sport policies were implemented – or not implemented – to create secure environments for child and youth participants.

Despite the strengths of documentary analysis, there are also limitations. One of the major challenges involved in using documentary analysis is locating available documents (Bowen, 2009). As mentioned previously, I faced challenges in acquiring two policy documents from SFD NGOs in which I was not successful (see Table 3.0). This resulted in analyzing ten SFD NGO policy documents instead of twelve. To address this issue, I directly identified in the findings chapter, which NGOs policy documents were being analyzed. Further, as Bowen (2009) notes, documents do not always have full details and may be vague. I did come across this issue of vague SFD NGO policy documents but overcame such disparities by cross-referencing the interview data back to the documentary analysis data to see where the gaps could be filled. Table 4.0 below illustrates the types and nature of SFD NGO safe sport and organizational policy documents that I received by SFD NGO staff members.

Table 4.0. SFD NGO 'Safe Sport' Policy Documents

Region	Country	Number of NGOs	Name of SFD NGO (i.e., NGO#)	Safe Sport policy sent to Researcher (Y/N)	Type and Nature of Policy Document

South Asia	Pakistan	2	NGO 1	Y	Organization policy document that includes the following elements: overview of the program (e.g., purpose, mission statements), in-depth objectives of the programs with associated activities, and reference to safeguarding frameworks.
			NGO 2	Y	The policy is called the "Safe Sports Policy," which is "designed to ensure a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all participants involved in [NGO 2's] sporting activities" (p. 1).
	India	2	NGO 3	Y	The policy is called, "[NGO 3] Child Safeguarding Policy," which provides guidelines for staff members on how to interact with children in ways that reduce and minimize abuse and harm.
			NGO 4	N	N/A
	Bangladesh	1	NGO 5	Y	The policy is called "The Child Protection Policy." NGO 5 created this policy "in recognition of its responsibility and commits to work with

					its partners to prevent and respond to any child exploitation and/or abuse" (p. 4).
Southeast Asia	Laos, Philippines and Cambodia	1	NGO 6	Y	The policy is called, "Child Safeguarding Procedures," which provides guidelines on how to work with young participants, provides an overview of safeguarding procedures and outlines reporting measures if needed.
The Middle East	Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan	1	NGO 7	Y	The policy is called, "Safeguarding Policy and Procedures," which outlines NGO 7's commitment to safeguarding by outlining reporting measures, staff training guidelines and safeguarding standards (e.g., monitoring, evaluation and learning – p. 15).
	Turkey	1	NGO 8	Y	The policy is called, "Child Protection and Participation Policy Document." The aim of this policy document is to "be considered as one of the steps to establish sports/movement areas where abuse and neglect do not occur" (p. 2).

Sub-Saharan Africa	South Africa	1	NGO 9	Y	The policy is called, "[NGO 9] Child Protection Policy," that has the goal to "strengthen the developmental childcare and protection system" (p. 1).
	Kenya	1	NGO 10	Y	The policy is called, "Safeguarding Policy Extract," which aims "to safeguard all children and young adults involved in [NGO 10's] activities from harm, abuse and neglect" (p. 1).
South America	Peru	1	NGO 11	N	N/A
Oceania	Fiji	1	NGO 12	Y	The policy is called, "Safeguarding Policy," and states, "[NGO 12] strongly believes that everyone has the right to participate in rugby in a physically and emotionally safe environment because this is the foundation of a life-long positive and high-quality experience of our sport" (p. 4).

6.6 Data Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis

In alignment with Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, I also drew on Fairclough's (1989, 1995) and McGannon's (2016) critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze data from both semi-structured interviews and the documentary analysis. CDA is a useful tool for policy analysis and can be defined as

"a movement or perspective of multidisciplinary discourse studies that specifically focuses on the discursive reproduction of power abuse, such as sexism, racism, and other forms of social inequality, as well as the resistance against such domination" (van Dijk, 2016, p. 466). Similarly, Fairclough (1993) offers an in-depth, two-fold definition of CDA:

> By 'critical' discourse analysis I mean discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (p. 135).

In other words, CDA focuses on how language and discourse can (re)produce notions of power, abuse, racism, class inequalities, etc., which is compatible with the objectives of this study. Provided the definitions of CDA above, CDA is a fitting analytical tool to be used with WPR. Both CDA and WPR focus on understanding the political and social practices that underpin discourses. In the WPR approach, Bacchi (2018) highlights that knowledge is a political contested site where "all forms of knowledge are linked to power and politics" (Bacchi, 2018, para. 3). Likewise, Fairclough (1989) suggests that power, language and knowledge have an interconnected relationship: "The exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language" (p. 2). To further unpack the nuances of CDA, in the discussion chapter I refer to the Foucauldian theory of governmentality (Foucault, 1991, 2000), power and knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1980), to advance the discussion on how power operates through policy(ies), discourses, and within, through and around SFD.

However, and importantly, WPR and CDA are also distinct in many ways. While Bacchi (2018) acknowledges the similarities and complementary elements of CDA and WPR, she notes that: "in WPR, discourse refers, not to language or language use, but to knowledges, which Foucault (1994) describes as 'unexamined ways of thinking'" (para. 2). Through this lens and in identifying problem representations, the WPR approach provides opportunities to explore those 'unexamined ways of thinking' rather than understanding *why* 'things' 'are the way they are' (Richardson, 2017). On the other hand, CDA according to Fairclough (1995) is more focused on understanding "what is wrong with a society" (p. 8) and examining:

> The effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs, and in particular on discursive aspects of power relations and inequalities: on dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements (p. 9).

Taken together, CDA and WPR both complement each other and emphasize the critical role that language and discourse play in challenging and critiquing the sociopolitical order (Richardson, 2017). Within this research study, WPR and CDA will be used in tandem to illuminate problem representations and *why/how* the problem representations 'come to be' within society. Specifically, CDA built on the identified problem representations, as outlined by the WPR approach, to offer significant insights to better understand: 1) how SFD NGO staff members shaped and understood 'safe sport'; and 2) why Western conceptualizations and frameworks of 'safe sport' are problematic given local and contextual realities of the Global South.

A key limitation of CDA is that researchers may bring their own biases and subjectivities into the texts they analyze (Wall et al., 2015). Indeed, and as Kendrick and De-Poli (2024) state, CDA can be viewed as "paternalistic way of doing research, inferring 'epistemic privilege,' in which researchers are able to discern deeply hidden ideological messaging within texts that only those trained in CDA can see" (p. 3). To overcome these challenges, I not only continuously reflected on my own social position and

biases in relation to this research but also recognized how my own subjectivities can influencethen meaning behind the texts. While conducting CDA, I foregrounded the voices of my participants first, understood how they applied meaning to safe sport, and then continued to analyze how their insights contribute to the overall research objectives. In the next section, I outline how I employed WPR and CDA together to analyze the data from the documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews.

6.6.1 WPR and CDA: Documentary Analysis and Semi-structured Interviews

In this section, I explicitly outline and restate my rationale for analyzing the data using Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach and Fairclough's (1989, 1995) along with McGannon's (2016) CDA frameworks, aiming to clarify the data analysis process.

To analyze the data and how SFD NGO staff members constructed discourses pertaining to 'safe sport' from the interview transcripts (n=15) and the documentary analysis (n=10), I used Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach. Through this approach, I analyzed key safe sport policies provided by each respective SFD NGO to uncover hidden discourses, 'problems' and assumptions that may underpin existing policies, which can hinder the safeguarding of children and youth in sport for development contexts (Bacchi, 2012). The WPR approach helped uncover taken-for-granted assumptions about 'safe sport' and illuminated how these assumptions were structured by dominant discourses related to race, gender, colonialism, and class. By uncovering problem representations in SFD NGO policies, I applied Bacchi's WPR approach alongside a decolonial feminist lens to interrogate how colonial imperatives may underlie SFD NGO programming. This combination of frameworks helped reveal how notions of 'safe sport' are constructed in ways that respond to various forms of abuse (i.e., physical and sexual maltreatment) and intersecting inequities related to race, gender, class and other social factors. Furthermore, a decolonial feminist approach to WPR allowed me to focus on the gendered, racial, class and colonial assumptions that underpin the 'problem' representation and identify silences and subjugated knowledges of children and

youth within the policy data. After identifying these problem representations, I then employed CDA to further analyze the data – specifically, interview transcripts and policy documents – building upon the insights generated through the WPR framework.

CDA is a form of discourse analysis developed as a problem-oriented research program, with the goal of examining the social and political context in which discourse is produced and maintained (McGannon, 2016). I then used critical discourse analysis to examine the text and language of the SFD NGO policy documents through a decolonial feminist lens (Lugones, 2010). This approach allowed me to explore how SFD NGO staff construct and negotiate the meaning of 'safe sport' in relation to protecting children from abuse, while also attending to the broader colonial, gendered, and racialized power dynamics embedded in policy discourse. As mentioned previously, this study used Fairclough's (1989, 1995) theory of CDA to analyze key SFD NGO safe sport and organizational policy documents (Cummings et al., 2020). Specifically, I implemented the three stages of Fairclough's (1989, 1995) model, including: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation) (Egan & Caulfield, 2024; Janks, 2005). By utilizing this discursive approach, I uncovered biases and claims in systemic and structured ways that reveal discourses of marginalization, oppression, etc. (Cummings & Seferiadis, 2020). The first stage of Fairclough's (1989, 1995) model, text analysis (description), includes two key complementary approaches to analysis: linguistic analysis, which focuses on analyzing a texts grammar, vocabulary, semantics, etc., and intertextual analysis that shows "how texts selectively draw upon orders of discourse (i.e., the configurations of genres, narratives, discourses)" (p. 188). Further, in this stage CDA contends that text should be analyzed in relation to the broader social and cultural processes and practices (Fairclough, 1995). In this stage, I analyzed the texts from both interview transcripts and policy documents to identify how social and cultural understandings of 'safe sport' were illustrated through grammar, language, and vocabulary. Here, I paid close attention to *how* 'safe sport'

was being configured (i.e., what types of narratives were being employed or highlighted) within the interview transcripts and policy documents.

In the second stage of Fairclough's (1989; 1995) model, processing analysis (interpretation) emphasizes the processes involved in how the object (i.e., text) is produced and received (i.e., writing, speaking, listening, reading, etc.) by society (Janks, 1997). Through this stage, Fairclough refers to the situational context and intertextual context as the focus points for interpretation (Janks, 1997). In this stage, I asked SFD NGOs to describe their local and/or situational contexts where they operate child and youth programming. Further, in this stage, I analyze the types of policy documents I received and how SFD NGO staff members 'produced' their understandings of 'safe sport.'

Finally, in the last stage, social analysis (explanation) Fairclough (1989; 1995) refers to the socio-historical and sociopolitical conditions that govern the texts. In tandem with the 'interpretation' stage, in this stage I analyzed the interview transcripts and policy documents in terms of the NGOs country's socio-cultural/political histories. For example, when a policy document stated, 'creating safe environments for children and youth,' I would contextualize this within the country's terrain of on-going conflicts, infrastructure accessibility and political tensions.

In addition to Fairclough (1995), I also utilized the three tenets of CDA as depicted in McGannon (2016), including: 1) discourse and language are constructed and constituted; 2) self-identity is a discursive construction; and 3) discourses are (re)produced in social practices and institutions (p. 231-232). Accordingly, three stages of CDA are more central to exploring and understanding discourse analysis in sport and exercise research (McGannon, 2016). Further, by using both Fairclough's (1995) CDA model with McGannon's three sport and exercise research specific CDA tenets (2016), I was able to better identify the "taken-for-grants discourses at the individual and institution levels (i.e., sport

organizations)" to highlight issues of social justice and power, which impacts "marginalized or disenfranchised identities" (p. 233-234).

For example, after analyzing the text (i.e., interview transcripts and policy documents) using Fairclough's (1995) model of CDA, I applied McGannon's (2016) three-stage framework to examine how language constructs and maintains social meaning within SFD programming. In the first stage, I focused on how language is embedded within the discursive and social practices related to safeguarding children and youth from maltreatment. Then, in the second stage, I examined how the language in both policy documents and interviews functions as a form of social action – shaping meanings of 'safe sport' within the institutional and cultural logics of SFD. In the third stage, I examined how these texts reproduce broader social networks and power relations (McGannon, 2016). Specifically, drawing further on Fairclough's third dimension, I paid close attention to how Western and Global North conceptualizations of 'safe sport' are imposed or reinterpreted within Global South contexts, often reframing or silencing local safeguarding discourses and practices. In short, by using McGannon's (2016) dimensions of CDA and decolonial feminist lens, I was able to position the language being used (i.e., in the policy documents and interview transcripts) in relation to social practices, how safe sport was theorized as a product of SFD NGO staff interacting and navigating social and cultural discourses, and how (if at all), safe sport and child protection discourses are (re)produced within institutional practices (McGannon, 2016).

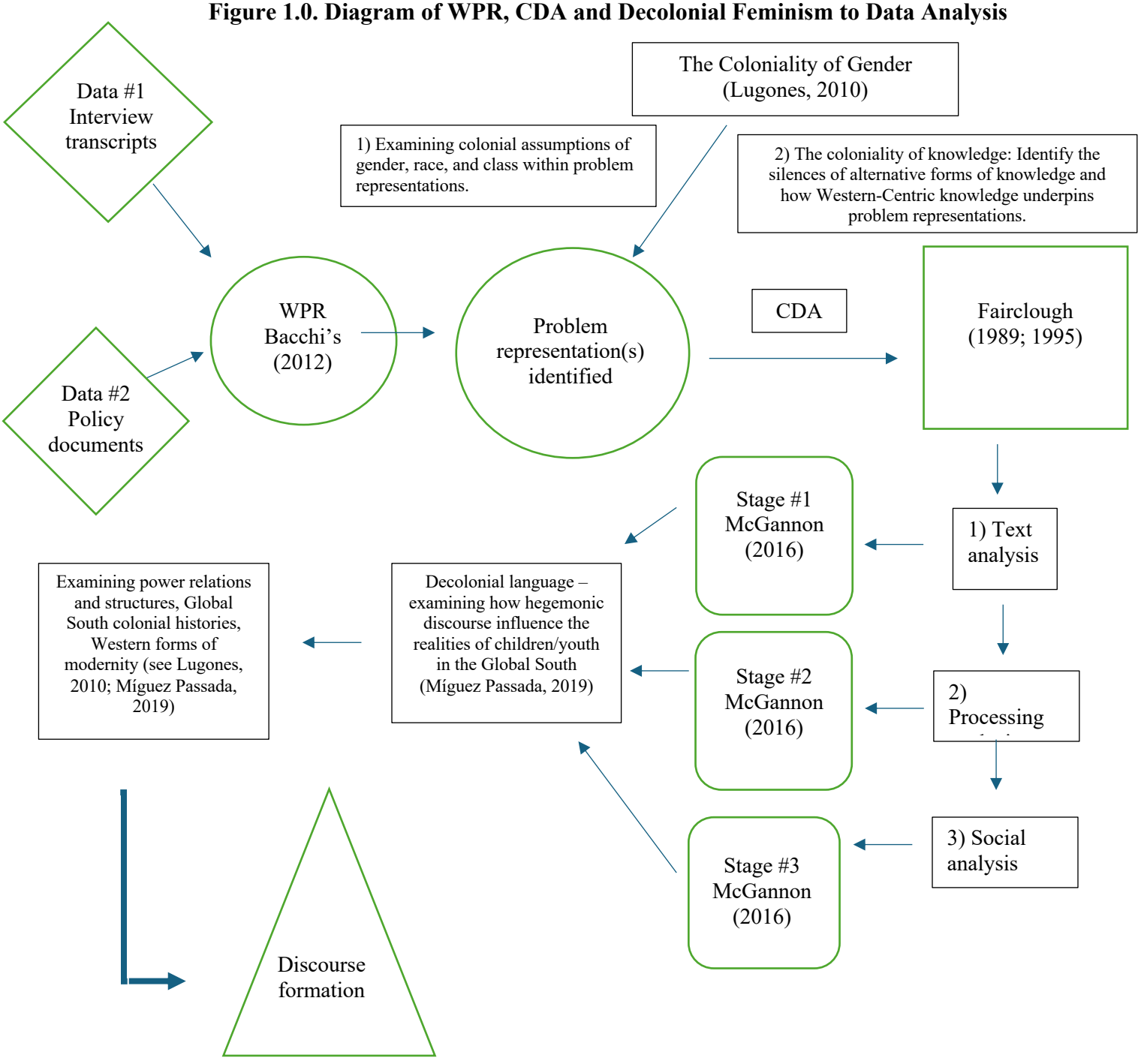
This critical interrogation of discourse (i.e., Fairclough (1989, 1995) and McGannon (2016)) was deepened by a decolonial feminist lens, which guided my attention to revealing hegemonic narratives within interview transcripts and SFD NGO policy documents (see de Melo Resende, 2018). Throughout discourse analysis, a decolonial feminist approach allowed me to understand colonial modes of knowledge production and transformation pertaining to the reinforcement of Western-centric concepts and applications of 'safe sport' practices, which was evident through problematizing discursive constructs

embedded within interview transcripts and policy documents (see Bacchi 2012; see also Lugones, 2010). Furthermore, a decolonial feminist approach illuminated how colonial knowledge systems shape 'safe sport' practices in relation to a young participants race, gender, and class. To this point, Lugones (2010) points to how colonial power relations have constructed knowledge around 'gender' (i.e., the coloniality of gender) by treating gender in isolation to race and class. To echo Lugones (2010), de Melo Resende (2018) states that "class, gender and race as factors in an intersectional matrix of analysis should be considered" (p. 34). Thus, the coloniality of gender has arguably created fragmented understandings of a young participants identity, which shapes how 'safe sport' is conceptualizes and then applied in diverse contexts (Lugones, 2010).

In turn, the integration of WPR and CDA enabled me to critically examine how these problem representations are produced, sustained, and legitimized within the institutional practices of SFD NGOs – and pinpoint to the broader social inequities related to safeguarding children and youth in sport and creating safe environments. Importantly, both CDA and WPR align with the decolonial feminist theoretical approach deployed in this study. By analyzing the talk, text, language and discursive constructions within the interview transcripts and policy documents, a decolonial feminist lens guided my understanding on the complex power dynamics and colonial ideologies that manifested within SFD NGO 'safe sport' practices and policies, and the impact that Eurocentric/Western frameworks can have on children and youth living in Global South contexts (see Ferreira-Marante & Veiga-Seijo, 2023; also see Lazar, 2007). Finally, a decolonial feminist lens helped to challenge the Western/Eurocentric knowledge as the accepted standard when it comes to (global) SFD safe sport policies more broadly, to which marginalized communities are (problematically) often expected to conform. In Figure 7.0 below, I visually map the analytical framework used in this study, illustrating how Bacchi's WPR approach, McGannon's (2016) and Fairclough's (1989;1995) stages of CDA, and a decolonial feminist lens (Lugones, 2010) were

integrated to examine how power, discourse, and coloniality shape the construction of 'safe sport' in SFD policy and practice.

Figure 1.0. Diagram of WPR, CDA and Decolonial Feminism to Data Analysis



6.7 Reflexivity and Rigour

Reflexivity is a form of critical thinking, which aims to articulate the contexts and perspectives that shape the processes of conducting research and partaking in knowledge production (Lazar & McAvoy, 2017). For a researcher to be reflexive and practice reflexivity within a study, it is essential for the researcher to consider their positions and perspectives (Lazar & McAvoy, 2017). Schulenkorf et al. (2020) remind us that reflexivity and reflection are especially crucial underpinning elements of qualitative SFD research, because "as 'conscious learners' in unknown territory to seek to engage and see things from other people's perspectives, SFD researchers are required to be both reflective and reflexive" (Schulenkorf et al., 2020, p. 61). Thus, throughout the research, I practiced continuous reflexivity through all the components by being mindful of how my experiences and social position shaped my understandings of the data collected from the participants.

As discussed previously, I kept reflexive field notes (see Appendix F) to navigate the tensions and barriers related to my positionality. Field notes are essential in qualitative research, as they allow the researcher to engage in critical interpretation of the data (Eriksson et al., 2012). After each interview, I recorded my reflections and interpretation of the conversation in a notepad. In this way, I was able to ground and 'keep track' and reflect on my own beliefs and preconceptions, creating a visual record of my positionality throughout the research process by keeping a 'visual' note. In doing so, I also engaged in two types of reflexivity: individualistic and collective (Eriksson et al., 2012). First, I used individualistic reflexivity to critically situate myself within the context of the discussions I had with SFD NGO staff, acknowledging how my social location and assumptions might shape the research encounter (Eriksson et al., 2012). Second, I also engaged with collective reflexivity, which focuses on how research groups and members within these groups produce collective meaning and knowledge (Eriksson et al., 2012). By

keeping field notes, I was able to position myself as a co-creator of knowledge and separated my prejudices from the insights shared by the participants.

As a visible Muslim and South Asian woman, I recognize that some participants may have felt more comfortable sharing gender-specific issues. For example, in my reflexive field notes (i.e., see Eriksson et al., 2012), I observed that female participants were likely to openly discuss issues surrounding reproductive and menstrual health. In contrast, the male participants did not speak about such topics, when questions regarding gender were posed to them. Additionally, conducting the interviews via Zoom may have impacted the social interaction I had with the participants. For example, participants who identified as Muslim openly greeted me with 'Salaam'[2] and employed Islamic vocabulary within our conversations. This could be attributed to two noticeable indicators via Zoom: 1) my name (Isra) has Arabic origins and Muslims are well-versed in the Arabic language; and 2) my presence on camera was a woman wearing a Hijab. In short, my identity influenced how I interpreted and received the data. Furthermore, I recognized that my positionality as a researcher may have influenced the responses I received from the participants (i.e., SFD NGO staff) due to the researcher-researched/participant relationship.

Next, it is important that I outline how I ensured rigour throughout this research study. Qualitative research involves a diverse range of empirical materials, including – but not limited to – case studies, interviews, visual texts, etc. (Johnson et al., 2020). As such, it is vital for researchers to take rigour and quality into account when designing and conducting qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2020). An important aspect of qualitative research is the concept of saturation, which is an indicator for discontinuing data collection or analysis (Rahimi, 2024). To ensure that my research study reached data saturation, I looked for specific indicators, which included the lack of new information and an occurrence of repeated

[2] Ghraoui (2023) states, that Salaam "means peace in Arabic. It reflects not just safety and peace of mind but also a state of being free from imperfections and harm. The word comes from the root meaning "to be safe," highlighting how deeply the idea of peace is woven into the Arabic language and culture" (para. 1).

themes during data analysis (Rahimi, 2024). The recommended number of participants in qualitative studies is a sample size of 12 participants to meet data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, as cited in Vasileiou et al., 2018). However, there are studies have reached saturation with a sample size smaller than 12 participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018). With this rationale, and as previously discussed, I initially planned to interview 7-10 SFD NGOs because this sample size would have been sufficient to reach saturation and will ensure that each discourse is also saturated (Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, when I reached 10 participants, I found that the data was not saturated and there as indeed room for more contribution. Given the high response rate, the decision was made to include 15 participants. By doing so, the data was saturated as any additional interviews were unlikely to yield substantially new information. Recent studies that conducted similar work (see Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020) reached data saturation at 32 participants. So, it is possible that with the addition of more participants from Global South countries that were not included in this research study, additional and valuable insights may emerge.

6.8 Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter provided a detailed outline regarding the methods of data collection used in this study including, semi-structured interviews with fifteen (15) SFD NGO staff members operating in Global South contexts and a documentary analysis of then (10) SFD NGO policy documents. Additionally, I highlighted how I employed a decolonial feminist lens to analyze the data through two complementary approaches, including Bacchi's (2012) WPR and Fairclough's (1989, 1995) and McGannon's (2016) CDA frameworks. Importantly, I outlined information pertinent to the participants (i.e., SFD NGO staff members), including inclusion and exclusion criteria, recruitment strategies, participant demographics and geographical information related to the participants' Global South region. Lastly, I concluded the chapter by illustrating how I exercised reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process and briefly

touch on how I ensured qualitative rigour. In the next few chapters – Chapters Seven and Eight – I provide an overview of the findings and results of this study.

Chapter Seven: Understanding Safe Sport

7.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines key findings and discourses relevant to the first research question: How have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' within, through, and around their child/youth programming in the Global South? To better contextualize the findings, and as mentioned previously, a discourse can be defined as "a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience" (Macey, 2000, p. 100). Further, the term discourse "signals the particular view of language," which can be considered "as an element of social life which is closely interconnected with other elements" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 3). Taken together, these definitions of a discourse inform the findings of this study, where the construction of discourses signals how SFD NGO staff members in the Global South understand and apply the concept of 'safe sport' in ways that align with their understanding of the lived experiences of children and youth participants. Many participants had different and unique understandings of 'safe sport' that stemmed from their local contexts, which were influenced and shaped by the social, cultural, political and geographical environments of their respective countries. In the sections that follow, I share the findings of this study to highlight the importance of understanding 'safe sport' as not a universal concept, but a practice taken up in diverse ways to support 'safety' given specific communities' lived realities and localities.

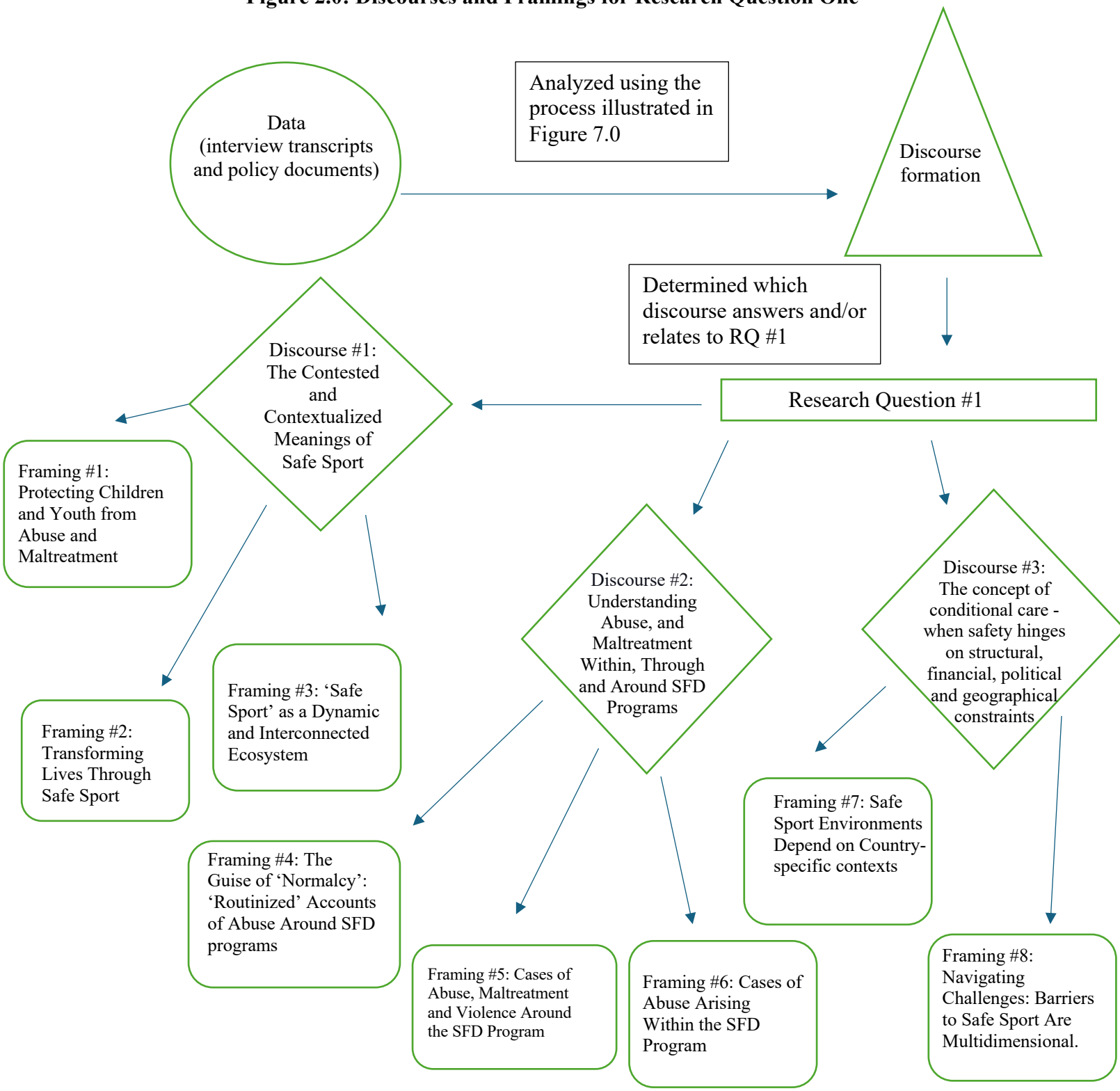
The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, I provide a diagram or a 'visual roadmap' that illustrates how the discourses and framings presented in this chapter were formed. Then, in the remainder of the chapter, I share data from the interviews and documentary analysis to highlight three discourses: 1) the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport; 2) understanding abuse and maltreatment within, through and around SFD programs; and 3) the concept of conditional care - when safety hinges on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints. Lastly, the documentary analysis of key SFD

NGO policies will be accompanied by the nature of those NGOs' policies, as outlined in Table 4.0 (see Chapter Six).

7.2 Visual Road Map

All three discourses presented in this chapter were formed and created through a three-fold approach to data analysis, including WPR, CDA, and decolonial feminism (see Figure 7.0) that represent the perceptions of the participants in relation to 'safe sport.' Each discourse is supported by interview and documentary analysis data and is accompanied by specific framings to support and illuminate problem representations (see section 5.3 and Figure 8.0 below). In the interview quotations and excerpts shared throughout this chapter, the […] signifies that the researcher (i.e., myself) added, modified, or clarified an idea within the quote. Conversely, in this chapter and Chapter Eight, the "..." indicates that I have removed words or phrases from a quotation or excerpt without changing its original meaning.

Figure 2.0: Discourses and Framings for Research Question One



7.3 Discourse #1: The Contested and Contextualized Meanings of Safe Sport

The first discourse was that there were competing definitions and diverse contextual understandings of what constitutes 'safe sport'. That is, the concept of safe sport was defined and conceptualized in myriad ways by SFD NGO staff members, who grounded the concept of 'safe sport' in their local contexts. Importantly, participants articulated three distinct framings through which they gave meaning to and engaged with 'safe sport' and related practices: 1) protecting children and youth from abuse and violence; 2) 'transforming' lives through 'safe sport'; and 3) 'safe sport' as a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem. This section explores these three framings, which, in many ways, pinpoint some key, contextually specific understandings of safe sport in Global South SFD initiatives, specifically the SFD programs referenced in this study, and as perceived by the participants.

7.3.1 Framing #1: Protecting Children and Youth from Abuse and Maltreatment

The first framing of the broader discourse, "the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport," relates to how SFD NGO staff implemented safe sport practices and policies to protect children and youth participants from abuse and maltreatment, which is consistent with the existing literature (Gurgis et al., 2022). However, this framing draws particular attention to how the staff members implemented and understood 'safe sport' as a way to protect children and youth from maltreatment in ways that are specific to their local contexts. To this end, six SFD NGO staff members (i.e., from five SFD NGOs) understood and defined safe sport as an opportunity to safeguard children from various forms of maltreatment and abuse, including localized and community violence, physical and emotional abuse, etc. For example, Cole (NGO 6, Philippines, Laos, and Cambodia) described safe sport as "…the things that you can do to reduce risks for young people and vulnerable adults." However, the ambiguity and vagueness in Cole's use of the word 'things' is problematic, as it does not specify *which* safe sport

practices are effective and necessary to protect children and youth participating in the NGO's program. Furthermore, Danni, also from NGO 6, said

> I think that safe sport, I would say, is a sport where there's a safe space for people to play…so making sure that they feel safe, they feel welcome, fair play or like, no bullying the team…and also reducing the risk and just to do no harm to them.

When analyzing NGO 6's child safeguarding procedures policy, the document does not reference the key attributes of safe sport that Danni emphasized, which include fair play, to feel welcome, and no bullying. Instead, the intent of NGO 6's policy is to: "Take a transformational approach to child safeguarding, meaning we seek to identify the root causes of violence against children in all their diversity, and actively address harmful social norms, attitudes, beliefs, and practices" (internal NGO document, 2024, p. 12). While this policy excerpt acknowledges the importance of addressing the root *causes* of violence and maltreatment, it does not clarify *which* harmful practices, beliefs, or norms place young participants in vulnerable positions within sport environments in the first place. Additionally, it is unclear whether 'bullying' is specifically included under the "harmful practices" umbrella (internal policy document, 2024, p. 12) and what, exactly, constitutes 'fair play,' as discerned by Danni. Indeed, the role and purpose of a policy, as defined by the Government of Canada (2021), "is a set of statements of principles, values and intent that outlines expectations and provides a basis for consistent decision-making and resource allocation in respect to a specific issue" (para. 1). Additionally, a 'good' policy – at the very least – will include "statements about how the institution will ensure policy is being followed" (Government of Canada, 2021). As per the nature of NGO 6's policy document, which is to provide practical safeguarding actions (see Table 4.0), the absence of including what constitutes harmful practices and beliefs goes against the very purpose of the policy.

Furthermore, Section 2 of NGO 6's child safeguarding procedures policy titled, "Roles and Responsibilities" (internal NGO document, 2024, p. 4) outlines the safeguarding responsibilities and accountabilities for each department, staff, partners, and representatives that operate in NGO 6, but it does not state *how* each department will actually *implement* safeguarding practices. Additionally, this section of the policy seems to *assume* that all staff members, representatives and partner organizations are 'well-versed' in safe sport; and yet, it does not clarify *what* safe sport practices involve.

Next, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) understood safe sport as "identifying the different types of abuse, different types of harm, and how can we make people better…what are the other laws? This is safeguarding, what is protection, what happens when somebody is being hurt?" Relatedly, NGO 12's safeguarding policy document also includes a 'pledge' or 'code of conduct' where staff members commit to ensuring safe and supportive environments. However, there is no formal definition of safe sport mentioned in the 'code of conduct,' nor does it include practical methods to foster safe sport that may be used to uphold safe and inclusive environments for children and youth. Rather, the document "outlines the standards of behaviour that [the organization, NGO 12] expects from all staff members and volunteers participating in any organised game or event" (internal NGO document, 2020, p. 1). Interestingly, the interviewee from NGO 12, Tom, did not discuss how the NGO tracks staff members following the commitments they make to uphold safe sport and related practices.

Moreover, Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) conceptualized safe sport as an "approach to protect the emotional safety of the children," and further contended that sport is a way for children to "build their identity." In comparison, NGO 8's child safeguarding policy included the terms 'emotional safety' and 'identity' when defining safe sport, yet the policy treats these concepts as separate and independent from each other. For example, the beginning of NGO 8's policy document provides a list of definitions and states that "abuse can take the form of physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse and neglect"

(internal NGO document, 2022, p. 3). Yet, towards the end of the document, the policy states: "we take into account the special needs of different groups of children; we take initiatives regarding the visibility of children by taking into account their culture, identity, age, socio-economic conditions and physical characteristics" (internal NGO document, 2022, p. 10). While these statements acknowledge multiple forms of abuse and draw attention to identity, the discursive 'talk-to-text' misalignment is problematic because the policy excerpts remain disconnected from any sustained engagement with emotional safety as a core aspect of safeguarding. It is thus critical to underscore that a child's or youth's emotional (in)security may be a response to their experiences with trauma (e.g., interpersonal trauma), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but also by structural violence and legacies of colonialism that disrupt identity formation and self-worth (Downey & Crummy, 2022). While safe sport policies are intended to address various forms of abuse and maltreatment to which a child and/or youth may be vulnerable to, from a WPR perspective, this signals a problem representation in which safeguarding is primarily framed through visible or measurable categories of abuse – while emotional safety – particularly in relation to cultural identity, gendered marginalization, and trauma – is left overlooked. By failing to recognize the connection between 'emotional safety' and 'identity,' within the policy, NGO 8 staff members may (in)directly (re-) harm or (re)-traumatize the children and youth participating in their programs. Importantly, the selective framing of safety mirrors and reproduces Western safeguarding logics by emphasizing behaviour-related frameworks (see Gurgis & Kerr, 2021) to safe sport, rather than the silent forms of abuse and harm that children and youth are internally exposed to (e.g., interpersonal violence/trauma).

Lastly, two participants (n=2) spoke to the importance of safeguarding children and youth around the SFD context. These participants (e.g., Suman (NGO 3) and Sarah (NGO 7)) perceived and understood how safety is related to the societal and environmental spaces that children and youth occupy during and after programming. In response to this, Suman (NGO 3, India) said

> We have community SAFE [which is a type of safeguarding policy] because we also talk about, of course, the child is safe in your session, in your coordination, but what about school? What about church? What about temple? What are those spaces where children go?

In a similar vein, Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine) conceptualized safeguarding young participants from abuse and maltreatment in relation to "the physical and mental and emotional wellbeing of the girls and the community." Suman and Sarah both highlighted that cases of abuse and maltreatment not only occur within the SFD program; rather, they underscored the importance of implementing safe sport practices in spaces where young participants navigate *outside* the SFD program (e.g., schools, places of worship, and the communities where the program operates). With regards to the documentary analysis, NGO 3's and NGO 7's safe sport and child protection policy documents reflected the organizational understandings of abuse, violence and maltreatment as community-related factors. NGO 3's and NGO 7's policy documents conceptualized safe sport in relation to the surrounding communities where young participants resided and included reference to 'community' (as discerned by Sarah) and related terms in their policies when discussing safeguarding and protective measures. The reflection of Sarah and Suman's verbal understandings of safe sport in relation to their organization's safe sport and child protection policy documents is important, as it illustrates not only how safe sport is understood, but also, how it is being implemented. The interviewee's 'talk-to-text' alignment signifies the multi-dimensional approach to safeguarding, one that engages with the spaces that children and youth occupy outside of SFD programs.

Overall, the findings outlined in this framing depict to how staff members implemented and understood 'safe sport' to protect children and youth from maltreatment in contextually relevant ways, such as in accordance with local laws (NGO 12), community spaces (NGO 3 and 7), reducing risk factors, such as bullying (NGO 6), and fostering emotional safety (NGO 8). Furthermore, by understanding the

nature of the regions and demographics in which these NGOs operate (see Appendix I), these conceptualizations of 'safe sport' are relevant to their young participants' everyday realities.

The next section of this discourse highlights how staff members perceived and applied 'safe sport' as a method to 'transform' the lives of young participants.

7.3.2 Framing #2: 'Transforming' Lives Through Safe Sport

The second framing of the discourse, "the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport," highlights staff members understanding of 'safe sport' as a context-specific practice where the participant's applied safe sport as a way to 'transform' children's and youth's lives, especially children and youth who are considered to be 'vulnerable,' 'at risk,' and/or 'in need of saving/rescuing' from precarious and vulnerable conditions. Three staff members, including NGO 1 (Pakistan), NGO 10 (Kenya) and NGO 4 (India) conceptualized safe sport as practices to *improve the lives* of 'stereotypically' disadvantaged children and youth (e.g., girls and 'street children'[3]) within their respective country contexts. In upholding a decolonial feminist lens, emphasizing diverse perspectives that challenge dominant understandings of safe sport is essential. As such, this framing of safe sport highlights *alternative ways of thinking about, approaching, and applying* safe sport practices.

To start, Mona (NGO 4, India)[4] advocated for implementing safe sport practices to protect young and adolescent girls within their communities from harm and to provide education about their bodies and awareness of reproductive health through sport. She noted:

> I just tell my coaches, don't think that this is a 90-minute session that you have to do with a girl. You are transforming a girl's life completely forever. And if you don't do it, nobody will do it.

[3] Also known as 'street-connected children,' Ng et al. (2022) define street-connected children as, "[children that] could live and/or work on the street full time, part-time, returning to stay with their parents at the end of every day, have infrequent or no contact with parents, or live on the street with street-connected parents" (p. 757).
[4] As NGO 4 did not share their safe sport policies, evaluation substantive support via documentary analysis was not feasible.

> Her mother herself is not able to do it. You are here and she's going to thank you that this education was given to me by this person.

Such statements reflect paternalistic framings of the transformative power of sport. These narratives construct coaches and NGO staff as central agents of change in the lives of girls, often positioning local families, particularly mothers, as lacking the knowledge or ability to educate their daughters. For context, NGO 4 works with young girls in India who live in what Mona referred to as 'slums' where there are high poverty rates and families face financial challenges. Due to financial hardships, young girls would often go into prostitution and sex work to earn income for their families, which Mona further explained during our interview. It is critical to note here that Mona conceptualized safe sport not necessarily to protect young girls from abuse and maltreatment per se; but rather, to use sport as a way to transform young girls' lives who lack awareness and education about their menstrual and reproductive health. The act of educating young women and girls about their menstrual and reproductive health in and of itself may be a form of safeguarding; to provide girls with education about reproductive health for them to later exercise their agency in safeguarding their own bodies from exploitation.

Similarly, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) described her organization's approach to safeguarding young participants as one that aimed "to use football as a tool to empower the girls and to encourage them to remain in school, to take charge of their reproductive health and to develop leadership skills so they can have some agency throughout their lives." It is interesting that both NGO 4 (India) and NGO 10 (Kenya) conceptualized safe sport as a way to educate young girls about their bodies, with the intent that by doing so, would enable them to take control and change their lives, ultimately allowing these girls to live and play in a more 'safe' and secure manner. Contrastingly, interview findings from NGO 10 did not support my documentary analysis. When Ari was asked how the organization creates safe environments for children and youth, she mentioned that the organization approaches safeguarding on three levels:

individual, community, and structural. However, when examining NGO 10's safeguarding policy (see Table 4.0), it did not mention how the organization implements safeguarding practices at the individual level. In the context of Ari's interview, safeguarding at the individual level would entail educating young girls about their reproductive and menstrual health, but this was not mentioned in NGO 10's safeguarding policy document. On this note, NGO 10's safeguarding policy document also does not mention *how* program facilitators, coaches, etc., – or those who work with young girls – can facilitate conversations about menstrual and reproductive health in culturally sensitive and contextual ways. For example, there was no mention of how conservative communities 'hide' conversations around menstruation from male figures (e.g., fathers, uncles, brothers), nor was there mention of the lack of accessible feminine hygiene products. By overlooking the cultural and contextual understandings around reproductive health and menstruation, NGO 10 may risk placing young girls in vulnerable positions.

In another light, Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) emphasized how the organization adapted and catered its programming to alleviate the 'burdens' faced by children and youth in low-income communities by introducing them to sport (e.g., street children). As he clarified, "street children face unique vulnerabilities due to their marginalized backgrounds. Many of them come from communities struggling with poverty, displacement, and social exclusion. These children often lack basic education, guidance, and protection, which makes them more susceptible to exploitation." However, Rahim's remarks did not support the documentary analysis of NGO 1's organizational policy document (see Table 4.0). While the policy included terms such as, 'street child,' and 'safeguarding,' it overlooked defining them, which increases the possibility of these terms being misunderstood in application. Further, NGO 1's organizational policy states that the organization seeks to build "an inclusive environment for street connected children through sports in Pakistan" (internal NGO document, n.d., p. 2) and has the goal "to improve the wellbeing of street connected [children] and disabled children via the transforming power of athletics" (internal NGO

document, n.d., p. 4). Despite the absence mentioning *who is defined as a 'street child'*; the policy document instead, the focuses on 'transforming' 'street children' to 'Khilari's.'[5] Furthermore, the policy does not illustrate *how* NGO 1 creates (or will create) safe and secure environments for young participants. Additionally, on page 11 of NGO 1's organizational policy document, it mentions "partnering with like-minded institutions to work together as change agents for protection initiatives," yet the policy does not mention the *types* of protection initiatives.

Taken together, the interview and documentary findings, as outlined above, contribute to the broader discourse of "the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport." This specific framing, "transforming lives through safe sport," was created to represent and amplify how the idea of 'transformation' – as a way to understand safe sport – is (in)directly presented through text and language. This framing will be elaborated further in the discussion chapter. The next framing highlights how the participants conceptualized safe sport as a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem.

7.3.3 Framing #3: 'Safe Sport' as a Dynamic and Interconnected Ecosystem

The third framing of this discourse, "the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport," relates to SFD NGO staff members' perceptions of safe sport as an ecosystem. Here, an ecosystem included members and leaders of the community, and external elements related to SFD contexts (e.g., social, structural, political and relational dynamics) that are also responsible for safeguarding young participants. For example, Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) highlighted that, to understand safe sport:

> We need to understand [what] the entire ecosystem around safe sport is and there is a number of components to it…whether it's the travel, even as far as the meals that are being provided, safety of the spectators, holistic development, just to ensure all the risks are identified and mitigated… but there's still a lot of work to be done.

[5] In Urdu, Khilari means athlete(s) or player(s).

In the excerpt above, Alex provided an interesting perspective pertaining to safe sport, suggesting that safe sport is *more than* protecting children and youth from abuse and maltreatment; it also included the provision of basic needs to child and youth participants. Another staff member from NGO 9, Phantom, understood safe sport as related to the country's political structures and said, "I also think it pertains back to how the country also sets or governs the law around the child rights and child policies as well." By placing the verbal conceptualizations of safe sport from Alex and Phantom in conversation with NGO 9's child protection policy (see Table 4.0), several discrepancies and problem representations emerged (Bacchi, 2012). To elaborate, NGO 9's child protection policy does not mention holistic development, child protection laws, or political governance, as stated by Alex and Phantom. Rather, the policy approaches safe sport as a 'package.' Specifically, subsection 3, "Policy Goals" of the NGO 9's child protection policy document stated:

> A package of quality appropriate, responsive protective services and programmes, as defined in this Policy, is available and accessed by all children in need of care and protection against all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation: that is to say, an intensive integrated package not only of primitive and preventative care but also protective services are provided to all children who are deprived of parental or family care and and/or experience violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation. This includes, but is not limited to, early identification and early interventions, which include alternative care, rehabilitative, therapeutic, child justice, reintegration, and reunification services (internal policy document, 2022, p. 2).

In the interview, Alex and Phantom described safe sport as an evolving and dynamic process, shaped by external factors, such as a child's or youth's surroundings and the broader contextual conditions of their environment. However, NGO 9's written policy reflects a more direct, static and individualized understanding of risk, focusing solely on direct threats to the participant. In doing so, NGO 9's child

protection policy frames safe sport as something commodifiable, to be purchased or provided as a product, as evidenced by the phrase "a package." As Bacchi (2012) and Fairclough (1989, 1995) would argue, the problem representation in NGO 9's policy stems from the discursive labelling of safe sport as a commodity. From a decolonial feminist lens, commodifying 'safe sport' reinforces the coloniality of power by propagating capitalistic ideologies and upholding Western knowledge production (Quijano, 2000). The misalignment between Alex and Phantom's verbal conceptualizations of safe sport as an interconnected ecosystem and written portrayals of safe sport as a commodity highlights critical concerns regarding the NGO 9's safeguarding practices.

In addition to political and governance structures, Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) mentioned how the communities within which the NGO operates in also plays a role in protecting children and youth. For example, he relayed

> Before we start any program, generally what we do is we sit with parents, religious leaders, educational, like teachers, and the local government representative to make sure like everyone is involved in this process [in creating safe environments for children and youth] to foster emotional and ground safety [ground safety refers to the physical environment].

Pap's understanding of safe sport as an interconnected ecosystem where parents, religious leaders, governmental officials, and others are equally responsible for fostering safety. Speaking further to social and societal influences, Dan (NGO 11, Peru)[6] defined safe sport as "a space where anyone is feeling safe…but I think it's about the relationships that are there." According to Sarah (NGO 7, Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq), treating safe sport as an ecosystem meant it was imperative to consider the social influences and norms that surround the communities where her NGO worked:

[6] As NGO 11 did not share their safe sport policies, evaluation substantive support via documentary analysis was not feasible.

> There's so many different kinds of abuse when it comes to women or gender-based violence…in terms of economic violence where women aren't heads of households or managing the money or making decisions. Just being restricted in that kind of freedom… or educational in the sense of not allowing girls to go to school in some cases and not have the same opportunities.

Sarah mentioned that young girls, in the communities where the NGO operates, are often restricted from educational and economic opportunities. In relation to NGO 7's safeguarding policy (see Table 4.0), the policy references economic justice in relation to the NGO's internal operations and staff involved in creating and implementing the programming, in which the policy states: "We are dedicated to achieving identity-based pay equity within our organization. We will conduct regular salary audits to ensure there is no gender, race, etc. pay gap and implement transparent compensation practices" (NGO 7, internal policy document, 2024, p. 23). However, the policy falls short of explicitly acknowledging how forms of "economic violence" or lack of "educational opportunities" that place young girls in precarious conditions, which were issues raised during the interview with NGO 7 staff member Sarah. Furthermore, NGO 7's policy fails to address *how* staff are expected to identify and respond to these vulnerabilities fueled by economic and educational violence.

While economic justice is a significant aspect of fostering a safe workplace (Harding & Simmons, 2009) it is equally important to include economic justice in the policies that support the targeted beneficiaries (i.e., child and youth participants) *and* the employees of a given SFD NGO. Importantly, the discrepancies in the verbal and written conceptualizations of safe sport may stem from colonial power dynamics (Veronelli, 2015). Indeed, the guidelines and information regarding safe sport written within NGO 7's and NGO 9's policy document align with Western forms of knowledge (e.g., perpetuating capitalist ideas of *who* is entitled to 'economic justice' and commodifying safe sport), which I will further discuss in Chapter Nine.

To conclude this discourse, while there are similarities in safe sport definitions between the North and South, there is a vast amount of research that conceptualizes 'safe sport' from Global North perspectives (see Gurgis, 2021), and a lack of research being done to understand how Global South SFD NGOs are engaging with the term safe sport. This discourse was informed by understandings of alternative forms of knowledge regarding safe sport and human rights (see Lugones, 2010; Merry, 2006). As made evident through the findings, interviewees diverse perceptions offered definitions of safe sport that went beyond Global North-driven frameworks (e.g., International Safeguards for Children in Sport) and those conceptualized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UNICEF, by offering culturally relevant examples of how the participants understood and implemented 'safe sport' within their own communities. The next discourses build on this section to further explore and unpack how the staff members understood abuse and maltreatment within, through and outside the bounds of their programs.

7.4 Discourse #2: Understanding Abuse and Maltreatment Within, Through and Around SFD Programs

Building on the insights from the previous section, the second discourse shifts from understandings of safe sport to the broader structural and cultural realities within, through and around SFD programs. In relation to the first research question, this section examines how SFD NGO staff understood and responded to the abuse and maltreatment embedded in their communities. These realities inevitably shape how safe sport was defined, applied, and experienced. To understand how staff implemented safe sport in practice, it is important to highlight how they described and perceived the prevalence and normalization of abuse within, through and around SFD programming contexts. Participants often perceived abuse not as isolated incidents, but as systemic, normalized aspects of life – rooted in colonial legacies, poverty, and instability – that affected both the delivery of sport and the very children and youth they serve.

Specifically, this discourse does not intend to frame Global South countries as innately violent. Rather, it reflects *how* the participants themselves described the difficult contexts in which they operate, using language and tone that revealed the emotional, political, and material challenges of safeguarding in settings marked by structural inequality. Further, and where appropriate, this discourse used the term 'normalized' not to characterize Global South countries as 'monolithic,' but rather to highlight how cases of abuse are not 'surprising' to SFD NGO staff members. This discourse also highlights that abuse and precarity do not 'just happen;' instead, accounts of vulnerability and precarity are produced and sustained by colonial structures (e.g, infrastructure, society and politics). This discourse will outline how the participants spoke to the various factors that influence abuse and maltreatment towards children and youth within and around their local and SFD-related spaces through three framings, which include: 1) the guise of 'normalcy': 'routinized' accounts of abuse around SFD programs; 2) cases of abuse, maltreatment and violence around SFD programs; and 3) cases of abuse arising within SFD programs.

7.4.1 Framing #4: The Guise of 'Normalcy': 'Routinized' Accounts of Abuse Around SFD Programs

When SFD NGO staff members were asked to recall the number and nature of abuse cases, only four participants directly shared incidences of abuse, and most incidences occurred *around* the SFD program for different reasons, including infrastructural, political and community-related factors. In response to this, Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) noted:

> Cases of bullying and abuse, unfortunately, do occur – whether among street children or even within regular school environments. Abuse is very normal also when children are playing with each other…they have the same issue with the coaches with the trainers, with the maids, which working for them, the drivers that are working for them.

Danni (NGO 6, Cambodia, Laos & Philippines) flagged how incidents of violence and abuse *around* the SFD program and *within community* contexts were often reported to her and her colleague Cole by both

participants and coaches. She explained: “We have received a – well, not a huge amount – but like a number of incident reports coming from players and from the coaches on abuse or violence that they experience in their community.” Similarly, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) emphasized that abuse is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the communities where his NGO works. He noted: “There are neighbourhoods with very high crime rates where we work, so for everyone going there, it probably is not safe. But at the same time, that [is] the reality for those communities.” Dan further elaborated that children and youth often disclosed experiences of abuse to coaches during the program, stating, “Sometimes we also get reports from children that something might be happening at home or like in their own context.” These excerpts perceived by Rahim, Danni and Dan depicted above connect to the broader discourse that underlines how, at least in the context being referred to here, abuse becomes ‘normalized’ in the everyday interactions between children, and youth participants, both in domestic and community-based contexts.

Next, Mona (NGO 4, India) relayed that during their girls’ programming, “there are men who play cards, who play those cards with cash. They are drinking right in front of the girls.” In essence, Mona’s account reveals how behaviours that evoke fear or discomfort among young participants, such as public drinking and gambling, are not only present but also treated as routine and unremarkable aspects of the program environment. Indeed, girls’ feelings of unsafety often appeared to be dismissed or absorbed into the everyday operations of NGO 4’s program. In some ways, then, the appearance of ‘normalcy’ often conceals the urgent need for safe sport policies that are culturally responsive to the various types of violence that shape young girls lived realities, which are frequently invisible or overlooked in everyday program settings.

7.4.2 Framing #5: Cases of Abuse, Maltreatment and Violence Around SFD Programs

While the previous framing highlighted how staff members considered abuse and maltreatment to be pervasive and ‘normal’ elements that occur around SFD programs, this framing presents specific cases

of abuse, maltreatment and violence that were brought to the staff members' attention. Interviewees mentioned how children and youth are vulnerable to various accounts of abuse, violence and maltreatment in the contexts around SFD programs. This framing underlines how many instances of maltreatment and abuse described by interviewees and in the analyzed policy documents are a result of (infra)structural, political and colonial factors that continue to place young participants in precarious conditions. Importantly, staff members noted how such cases of abuse often go silenced and unreported, which this framing will also briefly address.

To start, two participants highlighted the infrastructural dangers and the notable risks that young participants encountered in the contexts *around* the program, especially when they commuted to and from SFD programs. Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) pointed to the glaring challenges of infrastructural violence, emphasizing the unacceptable levels of vulnerability that children and youth faced when travelling as part of NGO's programming and activities. He explained: "They [children and youth participants] travel with clubs to different cities and even different countries. In that environment, there are more chances of such events [of abuse]." Similarly, Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) shared a tragic account of abuse that occurred after a young child left the program: "A young girl went to play netball and on her way home she was brutally raped…because the areas are so far apart and most of our children use public transport, and the systems are not good." These excerpts connect to the broader discourse of "understanding abuse, and maltreatment within, through and around the SFD program," as it illustrates how inadequate infrastructure, particularly transportation systems, may perpetuate violence against children and youth. While cases of rape are certainly not unique to Global South contexts and have been increasingly evident within Global North contexts (e.g., Canada; see OCRCC, 2023), the case shared by Alex illustrates the paradoxical nature of sport and unclear objectives of SFD, such as addressing and reducing gender-based violence. This paradox will be further unpacked in the discussion chapter.

Second, two participants (Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan) and Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey)) shared how political instabilities produced vulnerable and volatile conditions. Abuse may be perpetuated and understood as a reflection of current political structures and climates, outlining how broader systems of political governance, state control, and authoritarian ideologies largely shape SFD programming. For example, Sarah shared two different accounts where political climates exacerbated violence and placed NGO 7's young participants in Afghanistan in dangerous conditions:

> We have our biggest program [in Afghanistan] before the Taliban took over in 2021. We were in all five provinces with almost around a thousand participants… but then after the Taliban, because sports or any physical activity is made illegal for women…we don't have an office or physical infrastructure. We evacuated our entire team when the de-facto government came.

Sarah also recalled a similar account in Iraq, where NGO 7 also operates:

> So, there's always that instability and conflict that we have to deal with and operate within. So, it's a very fast, we're working and used to adapting very quickly. Even with the Israel-Palestine genocide, I would call it, Iraq was also disrupted because it's kind of crossfires and being caught in the region. So, there was security concerns.

In a similar vein, Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) reflected on how violent forms of state governance in the Turkish context permeate sport environments:

> There is [an] internal war in Turkey between [the] Kurdish and Turkish. So, the Turkish state is oppressing the Kurdish people, and the language is forbidden. So, when we talk about safety in sports, we always, always bring up the subject of the culture of safety of children. And we want to make spaces that are not hyper-nationalistic, so we always try to take away the flags, because it's a space to do sports, and it's a space to feel safe. So, you shouldn't feel oppressed by the state,

> especially by a state that is organizing violence against certain people because of their ethnical identity.

Emma (NGO 8, Turkey) further noted that the political governance of a given country also shapes how sport is executed within their particular context. Both Emma and Nancy highlighted that children and youth in Turkey had experienced abuse within SFD programs as a result of how sport was administered by staff. Nancy elaborated:

> In Turkey, sports is also a means for punishment. So, for example, a child comes late to the sports training, they [staff members] make them [young participants] do some push ups or something, you know. So, they are punished through sports.

In contexts where governments may engage in repressive practices, sport itself can become a site of both symbolic and physical violence, especially for marginalized groups. Taken together, these reflections underscore how abuse and violence in SFD programming could be perpetuated – and further legitimized – through the prevailing political climate and cultural practices within specific national contexts. This connection between authoritarian governance and harm in sport will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Next, two participants described troubling accounts of abuse around SFD NGO programming. These accounts revealed how abuse and maltreatment are entangled with structural, historical, and colonial forms of violence that perpetuate abusive and oppressive conditions that disproportionately impact children and youth. For example, Phantom (NGO 9, South Africa) explained that in his country:

> There is a big aspect of child trafficking through sport. It's not seen as child trafficking, but it is child trafficking, because, you know, a coach would go take a child overseas, then he doesn't make the team, and they leave him. But he has consent from the mother [for the coach to take the child overseas], right?

The excerpt from Phantom signifies the importance of the broader discourse, "understanding abuse, violence, and maltreatment within, through, and around the SFD program," emphasizing that child and youth maltreatment can manifest in multiple and complex forms (these forms will be further examined in the discussion chapter). One such form is child trafficking, which, as Phantom explained, not only occurs around sport in general, but also more specifically in the context of SFD programs. While child trafficking is widely criminalized and condemned in Global North countries, in South Africa, it appears not to be formally recognized as a crime (Walker et al., 2020). Rather, it may be interpreted as 'consensual,' particularly when children and youth travel abroad with parental or guardian permission, thus obscuring the coercive and exploitative aspects of the act. In a separate account, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) discussed how corporal punishment contributes to abusive conditions within SFD programming. As he explained:

> Corporal punishment is allowed even in our school system… so, to teach kids, you got to get a bell, and you go to get the stick. So that can be a cause for that in sports again, people like I've said, you know, when they don't go through safeguarding training. When they don't understand how to control their emotions and they are coaching, definitely the – you know – abusive words will come out. They will be using abusive words.

In reference to the framing and as Tom noted, one such colonial practice – corporal punishment – a colonial tactic, continues to be used in school systems in Fiji as a form of disciplining children and youth. Thus, this colonial practice reinforces and creates abusive conditions not only around the SFD program but within the program as well (e.g., through the use of abusive words). Certainly, to meaningfully contextualize abuse within SFD, it is crucial to examine the enduring legacies of colonialism in specific country contexts. Historically, colonizers deployed punishment as a colonial tactic to enforce subordination and discipline among Indigenous and colonized populations (Sherman, 2009). In the

discussion chapter, I further explore the relationship between colonial violence and abuse towards children and youth.

However, findings from the documentary analysis were inconsistent with NGO 9 and 12 interviews. For example, the types of abuse mentioned by staff during interviews, such as child trafficking, corporal punishment, etc., were not stated in NGO 9 or 12 safeguarding and child protection policy documents. The absence of clearly identifying the types of acts that can create abusive conditions within safeguarding policies may hinder SFD NGO staff from effectively recognizing and responding to context-specific forms of violence, ultimately contributing to and exacerbating the precarity experienced by children and youth.

Finally, three participants highlighted the silenced and often unreported accounts of abuse that children and youth faced *around* the SFD program. For example, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) stated plainly, "Reporting is a major, major issue for us." Similarly, Rahim from (NGO 1, Pakistan) noted, "If you look at the statistics on child abuse, bullying, and harassment, the numbers are deeply concerning. Unfortunately, these issues have been prevalent for years but often go unreported." Mona (NGO 4, India) relayed that the community where the NGO operates in one "where the girls mostly go into prostitution, which is not being told anywhere." These reflections and perceptions by the participants connect back to the broader discourse, "understanding abuse, and maltreatment within, through and around the SFD program." In many cases, abuse caused by exploitative or violent conditions remains hidden and silenced, especially in regions like India, where colonialism and power relations not only shape gendered spaces but also determine *whose* knowledge or story is recognized. Within these contexts, the narrative of 'silencing abuse' is not only normalized, but entrenched in broader systems of cultural stigma, gender inequality, and institutional neglect – a narrative that will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

Despite staff members disclosing or choosing not to disclose accounts of abuse, violence and maltreatment that occurred around the SFD program, I probed and asked participants how they responded to – or reported – maltreatment affecting children and youth *around* the SFD program. In turn, five interviewees described turning and reporting to formal authorities. These staff members – from NGO 4 (India),[7] NGO 3 (India), NGO 12 (Fiji), NGO 7 (Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan) and NGO 11 (Peru)[8]– explained that concerns were often addressed by involving child protection officers, police or other government authorities. However, these findings were not fully supported by the documentary analysis. In fact, policy documents from several NGOs revealed vague or underdeveloped protocols for reporting and responding to community-based abuse.

For example, NGO 12's (Fiji) safeguarding policy document (see Table 4.0) stated that "under this policy, a report about an incident or concern may be made about any behaviour, conduct, situation, decision, or event that relates to...the wellbeing and safety of anyone in our activities" (internal policy document, 2020 p. 7). Similarly, NGO 3 (India) child safeguarding policy (see Table 4.0) presented imprecise and confusing policy language that stated vague protocols for handling cases of abuse. One section read: "1) Coaches should deal sensitively with any child or young person who confides that they have been abused. How?; and 2) Coaches should report to Partner Programs any incidents of child abuse by other coaches. To whom?" (internal policy document, 2013, p. 5). The inclusion of unresolved prompts such as "how?" and "to whom?" reflects a lack of clarity and preparedness, placing the burden on children and youth to disclose abuse and on coaches to interpret and act upon incomplete guidance – especially if the alleged perpetrator is another staff member/coach. I further unpack the problematic nature of NGO 3's policy excerpt in the discussion chapter (Chapter Nine). On the other hand, while NGO 7's safeguarding policy document (see Table 4.0) included extensive details around their reporting measures, it failed to

[7] As NGO 4 did not share their policy document, documentary analysis was not feasible.
[8] As NGO 11 did not share their policy document, documentary analysis was not feasible.

address *how* staff should respond to cases of abuse occurring *around* the SFD program, particularly in community settings outside formal programming spaces. For instance, the policy document stated: "Report any instances of abuse, harm, neglect, violence or any kind of misconduct towards another team member, partner, participant or community member" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 18). Despite this broad instruction, there was no specific statement of involving law enforcement, child protection officers, or other external authorities – despite the staff member (e.g., Sarah from NGO 7) referencing the inclusion of such authority members during the interviews. Indeed, this stark disconnect between policy language and lived practice underscores the lack of clear guidance for addressing community-based abuse, particularly in high-risk contexts.

7.4.3 Framing #6: Cases of Abuse Arising Within SFD Programs

In the previous framings, SFD NGO staff members shared accounts of maltreatment that occurred around their respective SFD programs; that is, how abuse occurred *around* or is shaped *through* socio-political, economic, and infrastructural conditions external to the SFD program. However, this framing highlights how abuse can also emerge *within* SFD programs themselves. This is particularly striking – and alarming – *given that SFD programs, in and of themselves, are often positioned as safe spaces meant to protect children and youth from violence and harm* (Jones, 2021; Oxford, 2017). This idea will be elaborated further in the discussion chapter.

Staff reflections in this section illustrate how, when asked about instances of abuse that took place in the SFD program, despite 'good intentions,' SFD spaces are immune to reproducing the very power imbalances and abusive conditions they seek to challenge. Multiple interviewees provided accounts of children and youth participants who had experienced abuse *within* the SFD programs in which they were enrolled. For example, as Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) highlighted earlier, NGO 12 faced major reporting issues, which prevented staff from addressing issues of maltreatment and abuse. However, Tom also shared that,

"in 2023 we receive[d] more than 20 disclosures…comes in forms of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse." Tom elaborated, saying that the NGO mostly received disclosures from a particular program they conducted, which catered to beginner participants (i.e., children and youth) with no prior experience in the sport activity being offered and who wanted to learn more. Echoing this, Emma (NGO 8, Turkey) explained an account of abuse that occurred within their NGO and said, "so there was one coach in the club that we were working with last year and he would come and drink alcohol at the training, so being drunk during the training with the children, and also there were cases of violence, and that he was even prosecuted."

Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) also recounted an incident of sexual abuse within their NGO in another neighbouring region of South Africa. He said: "She [a child participant] went to play netball, got back, and one of the founders of the organization…impregnated a [age hidden for confidentiality] girl." Alex clarified that this incident happened several years ago and remains under investigation. While this case remained unresolved, the lingering delay in legal response can be an indication of structural and systemic issues of accountability within the SFD organization itself. Furthermore, this situation exemplifies the failure to translate human rights (and violations) into local contexts – also known as Four (see Merry, 2006) – in order to take appropriate and consequential actions. In this case, vernacularization refers to the absence and failure to translate child and youth human rights (e.g., right to justice and to be heard; see Canadian Foundation for Children and Youth Law, 2006), into locally enforceable and meaningful actions that not only reflect the lived realities for children and youth but also that reflect a regions local laws and regulations. To integrally protect children and youth from abuse and violence, it is critical that human rights and alternative ways of knowing about 'maltreatment' be contextualized to local realities.

Furthering the discussion on abuse and maltreatment within the SFD NGO, Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) disclosed another disturbing account of abuse: "For the last nine years there's one complaint against one of our youth leaders…his contract has been terminated before COVID and since COVID, there is no issue so far [in terms of abuse]. No complaint." Furthermore, Suman (NGO 3, India) shared that the organization created an 'anonymous box' where children and youth could relay their experiences of abuse, which was implemented during their 'safeguarding awareness sessions.' As Suman further shared, "when we started…this safeguarding session with the children, then the case is actually raised [number of reports of abuse and maltreatment increased]." This excerpt highlights the significance and need for accessible and user-friendly reporting measures, while also raising awareness about the precarity that children and youth face *within* SFD spaces themselves. Though Mona (NGO 4, India) did not share a specific account of abuse that took place within her SFD program, she did express that NGO 4 experienced cases of violence and abuse involving children and youth participants. She said, "Like I said, it's confidential and it [case of violence and abuse within the program] has [occurred]…but it is not at this level where we had to file in a report with the police."

Despite the staff members that shared accounts of abuse that took place *within* the SFD program (e.g., NGO 4, NGO 5, NGO 9, NGO 8, NGO 12), other participants (e.g., NGO 10, NGO 7, NGO 2, NGO 1, NGO 11, NGO 6) did not feel comfortable sharing such accounts of abuse. The participants who chose not to disclose accounts of abuse and maltreatment within the program often used the phrase, "it's confidential," or re-directed the conversation to talk about more broadly about abuse and maltreatment (e.g., Rahim from NGO 1 re-directed the conversation to talk about abuse within Pakistan's school systems).

Yet, in analyzing the participants' policies, documentary analysis revealed that SFD NGOs (n=10) had policies that did in fact underline and recognize that abuse and maltreatment towards child and youth

participants *does* occur within their programs. However, the policy positions within these documents varied. For example, three NGO policies (NGO 1, NGO 6, NGO 8; see Table 5.0 for country) placed the onus on the child and youth to report cases of abuse and to bring justice to themselves. Two NGO policies (i.e., NGO 7, NGO 12; see Table 5.0 for country) adapted the medical principle of 'first, do no harm.' Three NGO policies (NGO 3, NGO 5, NGO 10; see Table 5.0 for country) assumed 'true/false' cases of abuse or allegations. Lastly, two NGO policies (NGO 2, NGO 9; see Table 5.0 for country) did not have defined staff responsibilities when it comes to addressing abuse. The table below presents excerpts from the policy documents that outline the various policy positions SFD NGOs have taken, which will be further elaborated upon in the discussion chapter.

Table 5.0. Documentary Analysis: Participants' Policy Positions – Abuse Within the Program

Policy Position	**Name and country of NGO**	**Evidence and excerpts from SFD NGO policies**
Onus on the child/youth participant	NGO 6 – Laos, Philippines, Cambodia	*"By not speaking with children about child safeguarding, we risk continuing the culture of silence and shame, which emboldens the abuser to continue with the abuse" (p. 27).*
	NGO 8 - Turkey	*"Let's include children in discussions of appropriate and inappropriate ways to interact with participants and ensure that all participants are familiar with the Child Protection and Participation Policy and Code of Conduct, so they understand when their rights are being violated" (p. 6).*

	NGO 1 - Pakistan	*"Conduct a series of counselling sessions for juveniles on prevention and protection from all forms of abuses" (p. 13).*
First, do no harm	NGO 7 – Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine	*"Do No Harm: [NGO 7's] people, partners, program and related activities should not cause any harm to the communities we serve. Efforts to continuously monitor and assess risks should be made, and appropriate mitigation measures taken. In our attempt to improve or resolve current situations, we must ensure that our actions and involvement do not cause further harm" (p. 5).*
	NGO 12 - Fiji	*"This policy places the principle of "do no harm" at the centre of SFD NGO's activities" (p. 3).*
Labelling cases of abuse as urgent or non-urgent and determining true/false allegations	NGO 5 - Bangladesh	*"A non-critical allegation of child abuse is one which does not pose an immediate risk to a child supposing the allegation was true. These incidents may well be critical in nature but the time frame for responding to it is not as immediate as thought; an example is accessing child pornography" (p. 10).*
	NGO 10 - Kenya	*"BUT If in need of medical care, there shall be no need to report to MTG office but follow the guidelines of how to handle rape/sexual abuse or assault immediately" (p. 3).*

	NGO 3 - India	*"If the investigation determines that the allegation was false, the committee should take appropriate action, such as providing support to the accused individual and taking disciplinary action against the person who made the false allegation" (p. 4).*
Lack of defined protocol in addressing abuse cases	NGO 9 - South Africa	*"Best interests of a child: In all matters concerning the care, protection and well - being of a child the standard that the child's best interest is of paramount importance, must be applied" (p. 5).*
	NGO 2 - Pakistan	*"Zero tolerance for abuse, harassment, and exploitation" (p. 2).*

While the policy documents may be well-intentioned, discursively, each policy document can (in)directly place children and youth in precarious conditions through the implementation of harmful safeguarding practices. To highlight a major tension, the three excerpts that discursively placed the onus on the child and youth participant, through the use of phrases, such as "by not speaking with children," (NGO 6) "let's include children," (NGO 8) and to conduct counselling sessions for juveniles (NGO 1) suggest that young participants are at the forefront of being responsible to protect and safeguard themselves from abuse and maltreatment, rather than focusing on the staff members for creating safe environments. Additionally, the other policy positions, such as 'first, do no harm,' 'labelling cases of abuse as urgent or non-urgent and determining true/false allegations,' and the 'lack of defined protocol in addressing abuse cases,' reinforces the coloniality of knowledge and power (see Quijano, 2007) by perpetuating notions of *who* is 'worthy'

of safety, and that safeguarding protocol is conditional. These findings will be further discussed in Chapter Nine.

Taken together, the framings that are mentioned in the discourse, "understanding abuse and maltreatment within, through and around the SFD program," underline how instances of abuse can vary depending on the political, social, structural and community context of a country, which – as I further examine in the discussion chapter of this thesis – is subsequently influenced and exacerbated by colonial structures and histories. Importantly, the findings in this framing and overall discourse do not speak to how staff members understand or address abuse and maltreatment *through* the program itself. The absence of taking organizational accountability and awareness of how the program itself can contribute to feelings of unsafety and the cultivation of precarious conditions will be explored in the discussion chapter. The next discourse highlights the challenges that SFD NGO staff members faced when implementing safe sport practices.

7.5 Discourse #3: Conditional Care – When Safety Hinges on Structural, Financial, Political and Geographical Constraints

The third discourse was that safety was dependent on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints that tended to construct safe sport not as a stable, homogeneous or achievable goal; but rather, as something continually (re-)shaped, and often constrained by the effects of structural inequalities. For example, as interviewees noted, these inequalities were grounded in neoliberal funding structures, geography, and socio-political environments.

Indeed, some participants emphasized how SFD NGOs adapted and fostered unique ways of creating safe environments for their young participants. That is, the participants suggested that it was imperative to understand *how* they apply their understandings and conceptualizations of 'safe sport' while navigating political, cultural and social barriers (e.g., gender norms, political structures and governance).

It is also important, then, to focus on the challenges that staff members faced when creating safe and secure environments for participants. When asked how staff members worked towards creating safe, secure and inclusive environments, participants faced a wide range of challenges, including funding constraints, financial difficulties and issues with physical terrain (i.e., geography) when executing programming, which this discourse seeks to further explore. This discourse was shaped by two major frames, which included: 1) safe sport environments depend on country-specific contexts; and 2) navigating challenges: barriers to safe sport are multidimensional.

7.5.1 Framing #7: Safe Sport Environments Depend on Country-Specific Contexts

Based on unique understandings of safe sport, each participant shared diverse ways in which their organization employed safe sport practices to foster safe environments. Many of these methods are unique to the staff members' local contexts and populations that they serve. For instance, Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) spoke about how his organization created safe spaces for children and youth with autism by organizing "activities with the purpose of teaching some life skills and social and moral values..." Similarly, Cole (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines) explained how the NGO created a program called "[program name hidden for confidentiality] so that's an integrated rugby and life skills curriculum with a whole lot of tools and protocols around it measuring, you know, evidencing change in young people." Further, to create safe environments, SFD NGO staff taught young girls about their bodies as Mona (NGO 4, India) recalled, "whatever we are teaching them on the field, today I taught you about family planning and contraceptives. What do you know about it?" In a similar vein, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) stated:

> So, these are some of the things we work so hard to educate these children [girls] on their sexual and reproductive health. So, they know how to safeguard themselves from, you know, just dropping out [of school] because they were pregnant or just contracting diseases. So, once they understand…there are other avenues to explore instead of just moving in with the man.

Moreover, Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) mentioned how, in Bangladesh, there are certain communities (e.g., tribal/isolated communities) that have their fundamental human rights violated or taken away. As such, the organization works with these communities who are "struggling with their basic human rights, fundamental human rights." As Paps further explained, the NGO uses "sport as a medium to bring them [tribal/isolated communities] in the ministry, to organize events, to have fun…and to come outside of their society." While well-intentioned, Pap's interview excerpt may perpetuate harmful notions of sport being used as a tool to 'save' communities, thus reinforcing the 'saviour complex,' which scholars have highlighted to be problematic, especially within SFD initiatives (see Schulenkorf et al., 2014). Lastly, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) said that his NGO works with diverse communities (e.g., refugees and migrants) and sometimes the organization "includes things like dancing, music, food" into their programming with the intent of having a type of "cultural exchange." By doing so, the organization includes the traditional and cultural practices of diverse communities within their SFD programming to help migrant or refugee children and youth find a sense of belonging.

In the previous discourse, two SFD NGOs (e.g., NGO 7, NGO 8) noted how political climates can exacerbate abuse and maltreatment towards children and youth. To create safe environments in highly unstable political climates, staff members must be able to adapt quickly. Indeed, Sarah recalled various accounts of NGO 7 (Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine) needing to adapt quickly to the changing political climates:

> If there's external political situations then canceling or re-organizing, we've had a lot of that in Palestine in the West Bank, you know, southern road closures, sudden bombing, sudden things, sudden threats. It risks certain people's security and well-being for them to move from one place to the center, so we would cancel our postpone sessions.

In relation to the documentary analysis, NGO 7's interview findings were consistent with the organization's safeguarding policy, which informs staff members to "check weather conditions, local safety advisory, and monitor the overall political situation when planning for special events" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 33). On the other hand, NGO 8's child safeguarding policy (see Table 4.0) did not explain how the organization addresses and adapts to ongoing political instabilities in order to create safe environments for its young participants.

Certainly, as highlighted earlier in framing number five, two interviewees (e.g., Umer from NGO 2 and Alex from NGO 9) shared accounts of abuse that children and youth faced *around* the SFD program, attributing this abuse to a lack of adequate and safe accessible infrastructure. When Umer and Alex were asked how their NGOs create safe environments for young participants, they did not mention how their NGOs implement safe sport measures to ensure that young participants are safe when commuting home after the program ends. However, two staff members not mentioned in framing number five elaborated on how their NGOs adopted safe transport practices to ensure that young participants were safe coming to and from the SFD program. For example, Sarah (NGO 7) relayed that to safeguard girls in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, the "first thing we do is provide safe transportation to girls. So, we understand that this is not something accessible easily to everybody." Additionally, Sarah's interview statement was consistent with the NGO 7's safeguarding policy document, which stated: "Safe transportation: Drivers contracted to provide transportation to participants must be oriented on implementing good safeguarding practices" (p. 13). Additionally, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) explained that the staff try "to organize transport for the girls from one link field to another." Yet, the concept of 'safe transport' is not mentioned in NGO 10's safeguarding policy document. Through Ari and Sarah's excerpts, it is evident that safe sport is conditional and is largely shaped by the lack of accessible infrastructure. Safe transport is not a widely

adopted safe sport practice because each country has its own experiences with infrastructure, which justifies that the cultivation of safe (sport) environments is dependent on country-specific contexts.

On another note, safe transport was not only about the safety measures involved in the physical transport of children and youth from one place to another but also involved ensuring that young participants were safe after the travel. For example, one participant, Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) outlined that the NGO travels with children and youth to different cities for tournaments, but:

> Players [child and youth participants] do not stay in individual rooms; instead, they live in shared halls where their activities are monitored through CCTV cameras. This set-up not only ensures security but also fosters a sense of community among the children.

In this excerpt, surveillance was seen as a way to foster safe environments by keeping an 'eye' on young participants and any staff members who may interact with them. In NGO 1's organizational policy document, there was no mention of rules or guidelines to monitor young participants through CCTV cameras, as Rahim mentioned.

Also, two SFD NGOs (e.g., NGO 8 in Turkey and NGO 9 in South Africa) did not directly comment on how their NGO created safe environments for children and youth. Instead, they explained the types of programming the NGO offered, such as women and girl-focused programs (NGO 9) and programs for internally displaced populations (NGO 8). Through the documentary analysis, NGO 8's safeguarding policy document outlined a protocol for creating safe environments, but it did not indicate fostering such spaces for internally displaced populations. NGO 8's safeguarding policy took a generalist stance on creating safe environments and assumed that one approach will work for *all* children and youth despite their backgrounds and challenges. Further, NGO 9's child protection policy document pointed to creating "enabling environments," which is largely dependent on a child's or youth's needs. NGO 9's child protection policy document overlooked protocols on how to respond and create safe environments,

inclusive of a young participant's needs. However, the other SFD NGOs (n=9) interview findings (in relation to creating safe environments) were incongruent with documentary analysis findings, as those policy documents did not feature key content pertaining to either safe transportation and/or infrastructure or lacked specific protocols to guide staff on *how* to create safe environments given a country's social and political context. Also, it is worth noting that – while Cole and Danni (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines), did not mention safe transport in response to how their NGO fosters safe environments during their interview – the NGO's policy stated otherwise. NGO 6's policy relating to safe transport said: "Safe, appropriate and adequate transport arrangements for the event must be planned for and managed to ensure the safety of children appropriate to their age and physical abilities" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 26). This misalignment will be further explored in the discussion chapter.

7.5.2 Framing #8: Navigating Challenges: Barriers to Safe Sport are Multidimensional

SFD NGO staff members frequently encountered various challenges that prevented safety and security from becoming tangible realities for their young participants. Specifically, five participants recalled issues with securing donors and funding sources to support their programming and safe sport practices. For example, Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) expressed the challenges involved in having to secure financial support from global donors constantly:

> Despite our efforts, there is a lack of financial support from international donors. Many donors in Canada, the UK, France, South Africa, and the USA hesitate to contribute Zakat, Sadaqah, or Fitrana to sports for development programs, believing such funds should only go to traditional charitable causes. But a sports child can also be a deserving child…who needs support just as much as any other underprivileged individual.

Similarly, Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) said, "I think in the majority of sport for development programs are not sustainable because the funding is not sustainable and it's an issue around the world…It's difficult

and challenging to secure funding." Furthermore, as Cole (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines) recalled that if another source funds SFD programs, and if issues of abuse and maltreatment within the SFD program arise, there can be disparities and tensions in terms of who (i.e., the funding body or the SFD NGO staff) is responsible for addressing such situations. Echoing this point, Cole pointed out that:

> It becomes more complicated…if somebody reports an account of abuse or harassment in a federation activity that's not funded by us that then becomes a little bit more politically difficult because our position in that should follow exactly the same process because you have those processes in place. However, you have less influence in that situation, and that can be a challenge sometimes because we are seen as a neutral party in many cases.

To elaborate on Cole's response, when abuse and maltreatment towards young participants occur, donors are seen as 'neutral' and not responsible for addressing situations of this nature. Moreover, staff members faced challenges in implementing programs in under-resourced areas due to the lack of financial support. For example, Suman (NGO 3, India) said:

> It's a funding game. It's a different game altogether, but you have to be visible. And to become visible, you have to work in cities because then that's how funders give funding. But then, of course, they [NGOs] do work in the rural parts of areas…which is really challenging because funders don't give funds.

Another challenge that participants faced regarding financial constraints was hiring staff to increase the organization's capacity in preventing and addressing cases of abuse. Indeed, as Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) noted, due to financial barriers, the NGOs' database of registered sex offenders is not up to date. He said:

> Our department of social development should have a register of all offenders [e.g., sex offenders], you know, those that were working with children. But once again, due to a lack of capacity…that

> database is not, you know, it's not up to date. So, what you find is that a perpetrated that has done something in Australia as a coach at some school, finds its way to South Africa, it's convicted there, but it comes to South Africa…we find that…the cheques and balances have not been done because there's no proper reporting, there's no proper data filing, and no investigation and on the case file.

Another aspect where financial constraints may challenge SFD NGOs to implement safe sport initiatives is when donors do not provide *enough* funding for an NGO to successfully carry out a program. As Mona (NGO 4, India) discerned, "we tell our donors if you give us a project for just a year, it's just going to be 'hi and hello'…if you want transformation, the program has to be there for three years. The first year we are just assessing the community." Overall, the five excerpts shared above highlights how SFD NGOs face difficulties in sustaining and reinforcing safe sport practices due to a lack of financial support, which speaks to the overall discourse of this section, "conditional care – safety dependent on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints," which will be explained further in the discussion chapter.

Relating the interview findings highlighted in this framing back to the documentary analysis, four out of the five SFD NGOs (e.g., NGO 1, NGO 2, NGO 3, NGO 6) provided varying descriptions of donor relations and financial support. For example, NGO 1's organizational policy document mentioned that the organization will "capture the case stories of street-connected children" with the purpose of exposing "the nature of challenges, needs and priorities of street-connected children" (internal policy document, n.d., p. 18). Further, the policy mentioned that these case studies will be sent as "reference material" to "national and international donor agencies" (internal policy document, n.d., p. 18). In turn, it seemed that for NGO 1 to secure funding to carry out their programs, they need to continue sharing the precarity and vulnerability experienced by their children and youth participants. Problematically, this approach to securing donations and funding tends to reinforce the narrative of children and youth from the Global

South as ‘in need of saving’ or ‘rescuing’ (Ng et al., 2022). Similarly, NGO 6’s (Cambodia, Laos, Philippines) child safeguarding policy and procedures document reported cases of abuse to donors: “Relevant donors will be informed [of causes of abuse and maltreatment] at the discretion of the Executive Team, and in line with contractual requirements” (internal policy document, 2024, p. 35). Not only does this excerpt from the policy document reinforce Cole’s interview response (i.e., where donors are seen as ‘neutral’ and not responsible for addressing situations of abuse), but it also raises concerns about accountability and the number of cases that go unreported. Lastly, NGO 2’s and NGO 3’s safeguarding policy documents do not indicate any guidelines regarding donor relationships, nor how the organization receives funding.

Another challenge that staff members relayed during the interviews were difficulties with the physical terrain of their regions, which, they noted, often prohibited children and youth from accessing programs or placed them in vulnerable positions. For example, when participants were asked about the physical environment and geographical context of their regions, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) shared insights into the challenges his organization faced due to the landscape and geography where the program took place, explaining:

> I think that [geography] was one of the main challenges for us. Geography is very diverse…some of the projects had, like, some infrastructure, like a soccer field, some of them are just like, well, they also had that football field but was just like some sort of dirt in the middle of nowhere. Some of them were like, closed some of them were open spaces. I think that geography and infrastructure was something that we had to kind of consider in every project.

And, while Dan was hesitant to share a descriptive ‘picture’ of how the playing fields looked, his hesitancy may have been because he did not want to frame the SFD program as ‘bad’ – which I elaborate further on in the discussion chapter – he nevertheless said:

> I know we used to play like in spaces that maybe were, I know they had some broken glasses, and there was a school that is abandoned, or an industry that or a factory that has been abandoned…I mean, it's really not safe.

Similarly, Mona (NGO 4, India) underlined how physical spaces (i.e., playing fields) presented deep challenges for her NGO when conducting programming. Specifically, she expressed that some of the playing fields were polluted and unsanitary for children and youth. She recalled:

> We have some grounds…and the place where we work is full of garbage. We you know tried to clean once when the program started, and it was a huge amount to clean such a big area, but we did it. We did it, but what happens it just covers a small space and the other space are left so they [the community] again started dumping their own garbage there. So again, it became a garbage thing, and girls didn't want to step in.

From the excerpt above, it is clear that injustices to the environment can perpetuate violence to the bodies that use the environment (e.g., children and youth). In another light, Suman (NGO 3, India) spoke to how her organization faced challenges in accessing an area for programming, given various inaccessible locations, and said:

> There are villages where it's hard to like reach, there is no road. So, one of the organizations I visited last year, it's really hard to go. It's like I can feel all the dizziness, vomit, everything, because it's all mountains and round kind of things here.

Given the lack of infrastructure and accessible roads, children and youth living in communities adjacent to those Suman described were unable to participate in programs that operated in those areas. Furthermore, Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) commented on how children and youth experienced sport injuries due to the playing fields where the NGO conducted their programs, and said, "one of the pitches were running at this angle. How do you play netball running at an angle…so there are the injuries, the ankles that are being

twisted." Additionally, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) shared an overview of the Rugby fields his NGO uses: "I would say probably 90% of the ground in Fiji are not safe if you look, if you compared to some of the rugby field in Canada."

And yet, these aforementioned findings regarding the challenges in creating safe environments due to the physical and geographical terrain were inconsistent with several SFD NGO's policy documents (n=3), specifically, NGOs 3, 9, and 12. These three policy documents made no mention of mitigating environmental and terrain-related challenges that may place children and youth in unsafe conditions. Paradoxically, the policy documents from these three NGOs mention phrases such as 'creating safe environments,' but overlook the direct harms that the physical environment, *in and of itself*, may pose to participants' safety and well-being.

In framing number five, SFD NGOs explained how political climates and structures can exacerbate cases of abuse, which can impact the safety of children and youth participating in these programs. However, as participants shared, political climates and regulations can also *prevent* staff members from implementing safe sport practices, which not only affected SFD programming and design but also subsequently hindered the safety of child and youth participants. For instance, Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) described the current political nature of Turkey, which is largely shaped by colonial violence, and shared how the political atmosphere impacted the SFD program. She said:

> Sports resembles how the state wants to shape the citizens of the nation. Sports is a perfect space for this…very similar maybe to the Nazi… how to bring up the good citizen through sports. So, it's very much accompanied with the flag…and also in the schools, for example, the sports classes are built like the military… And the teacher is shouting things like they would do in the military…so this is why abuse, of course, is very flourishing in this type of context [Turkey].

In short, taken together, Nancy and Emma faced challenges in creating safe environments due to the government's influence on what sport is *supposed* to look like (e.g., resemble military values). Not only did NGO 8 highlight how the political climate of Turkey can exacerbate abuse in sport, but the staff members were also required to embed 'politics' within 'sport,' an idea that is further discussed in the discussion chapter.

Furthermore, NGO 8's and NGO 1's child safeguarding and organizational policy documents made no reference to how staff members are expected to navigate political challenges in creating safe environments for young participants. Notably, both sets of documents for NGO 8 and NGO 1 failed to acknowledge how the government may act as a significant barrier to ensuring the safety of children and youth participants in SFD programs. Indeed, and in relation to this, Suman (NGO 3, India) mentioned that the local government (in the community where the NGO operated) had different understandings as when to conduct programming for children and youth, which can impact their overall well-being:

> A government-led NGO conducts session on Sunday, and I know these children go to school Monday to Saturday because we don't have like Saturday off. It's Monday to Saturday school, then they'll come back, then they'll eat something, then the tuition time, then other activity…it was really hard for us to make them understand [that children need rest].

During the interview, Suman advocated that to create safe environments, providing children and youth with rest is equally important as finding a time to conduct the program. However, due to the governments differing viewpoints on providing children and youth with rest and 'down-time,' children and youth end up exhausting their bodies. Interestingly, the documentary analysis did not support Suman's interview response as there was no mention of providing children and youth with 'rest' in NGO 3's child safeguarding policy.

7.6 Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter provided a detailed account of findings and discourses relevant to research question one. Through the formation of discourses and framings, this chapter illustrated how safe sport is conceptualized and applied by SFD NGO staff members operating in various regions of the Global South. As I further elaborate in Chapter Nine, it is crucial to underscore the need to illuminate alternative narratives and understandings of safe sport, and to show how SFD NGO staff continuously shaped and applied safe sport in response to competing societal, political, structural and colonial factors within their local communities. The next chapter discusses the findings and discourses relevant to research question two.

Chapter Eight: Intersectionality, Decolonization and Safe Sport

8.1 Introduction

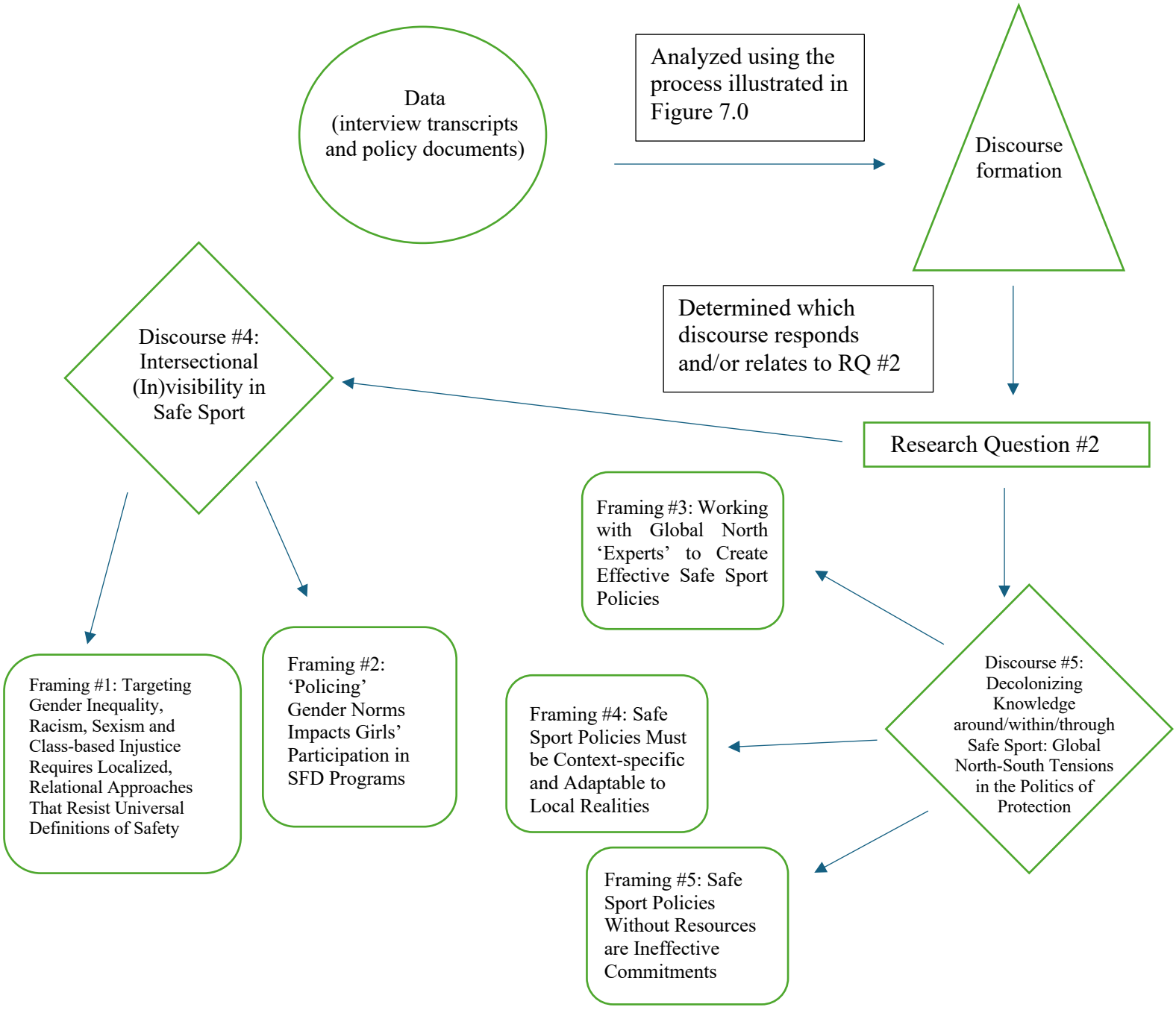
This chapter outlines key findings and discourses relevant to research question two: Have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs? If so, how? This research question builds further on Research Question One by elaborating on SFD NGOs' conceptualizations of safe sport to examine whether staff members address interlocking issues of gender, race, and class through their safe sport policies and practices. Furthering the discussion from chapter seven regarding alternative forms of knowledge, this chapter also explores how, and if, staff members challenge and resist Western-centric safeguarding frameworks.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, I provide a diagram or a "visual roadmap" that illustrates how the discourses and framings presented in this chapter were formed through the perceptions of the participants. Then, in the remainder of the chapter, I share data from the interviews and policy analysis to highlight two dominant discourses that structure how safe sport is understood and enacted, which include: 1) intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport; and 2) decolonizing knowledge around/within/through safe sport: global North-South tensions in the politics of protection. This section will explore these two discourses further.

8.2 Visual Road Map

In a similar vein to the data presented in Chapter Seven, the two discourses presented in this chapter were formed and created by analyzing the data through a three-fold approach to data analysis including WPR, CDA and decolonial feminism (see Figure 7.0). Each discourse is supported by interview and documentary analysis data and is accompanied by specific framings to support and illuminate problem representations (see section 5.3 and Figure 9.0 below).

Figure 3.0: Discourses and Framings for Research Question Two



8.3 Discourse #4: Intersectional (In)visibility in Safe Sport

The fourth discourse responds – in part – to the second research question by providing insight to how, and if, SFD NGO staff members addressed intersectional issues of race, gender and class through their safe sport policies and programs for child and youth participants. Interestingly, and overall, none of the participants (n=15) considered gender, race, class and colonialism as *intersecting* issues that shaped the implementation and conceptualization of safe sport. Rather, participants treated each factor (i.e., gender, race and class) as independent factors, which can risk placing children and youth in vulnerable positions and prevent the effective implementation of safeguarding practices. For example, as this chapter will demonstrate, participants treated gender as separate from other factors, which limited staff members' understanding of the vulnerabilities faced by certain identities (e.g., girls). Mona (NGO 4, India) relayed that young girls participating in NGO 4's program were constantly reminded of their gender and gendered responsibilities by community and family members through the phrase, "you are a girl." Discursively, this phrase was frequently used to discourage young girls from participating in sport and SFD-related initiatives.

Additionally, such phrases are also problematic as they overlook how gendered marginalization is not only a product of a child's or youth's gender but is also compounded by a young participant's racial background and socio-economic status (see Bacchi, 2012). The failure to consider how structural, racial and economic inequities can place children and youth in vulnerable positions risks reinforcing abusive narratives that can silence and restrict movement within SFD programs, resulting in precarity. To speak to the lack of intersectional awareness, this discourse draws from Lugones' (2010) discussion of the coloniality of gender to highlight that gender, race, class and colonialism are not isolated factors; and are indeed, crucial to understanding oppression and discrimination and how safe sport can be applied to various identities and social groups (see Chapter Four). Then, the discussion chapter (i.e., Chapter Nine)

elaborates on how colonialism is more than merely another 'link to oppression,' but rather highlights how colonialism acts as a structure and system that shapes how race, gender, and class interact to create oppressive environments. This discourse was shaped by two major frames, which included: 1) targeting gender inequality, racism, sexism, and class-based injustice requires localized, relational approaches that resist universal definitions of safety; and 2) 'policing' gender norms impacts girls' participation in SFD programs.

8.3.1 Framing #1: Targeting Gender Inequality, Racism, Sexism ,and Class-based Injustice Requires Localized, Relational Approaches that Resist Universal Definitions of Safety

When SFD NGO staff members were asked to comment on the demographics of their child and youth participants, many, if not all, participants said they cater to low-income or underprivileged children and youth or only girls. Often, this demographic reflected children and youth living in 'slum' areas, who are 'street children,' or who live in poverty. Furthermore, all SFD NGO staff members (n=15) referred to young participants as 'boys' or 'girls,' presumably heterosexual. However, and importantly, the staff members did not use the terms 'heterosexual' or 'cisgender' when referring to the gender demographics of their young participants. While the utilization of such terms was not expected from staff members, the absence of such terminology can reinforce the stigmatization of gender being limited to 'girls' and 'boys,' which overlooks diverse identities. Specifically, one SFD NGO staff member, Mona (NGO 4, India), commented on including gender-diverse youth within their programming, but throughout the conversation, mainly focused and directed the conversation to talk about presumably heterosexual 'boys' and 'girls.' Based on the interview questions related to addressing issues of gender inequality, class inequities, and racism in SFD programming, all participants (n=15) stated that their NGOs actively work to address these issues. However, a closer analysis of their responses revealed significant variation – and at times contradictions – in how these terms were understood and applied. That is, while some participants

perceived and framed inequality through structural or historical lenses, others relied on abstract or individual-level definitions that omitted colonial legacies, intersectionality, or accountability. For example, Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) said that his NGO "is an inclusive organization that serves all of humanity, regardless of race, colour, or background." Furthermore, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) stated that "everyone is invited to participate" in their program, verbally noting that this was also clearly stated in NGO 11's safeguarding policy [9]. In a related vein, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) explained:

> As an organization, we don't allow for discrimination on any level. Whether it's religious or based on gender and sex. So, the policy is very clear…we don't discriminate against anyone or any participant just because of their disability or however they identify sexually.

Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) said that his NGO's child protection policy is "working against all the things you mentioned [gender inequality, sexism and racism]." Lastly, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) said that the organization has "discouraged the word[s] racism and sexism" from their code of conduct, which is embedded into the NGO's safeguarding policy. While the excerpts shared above are vague, lack subsentence and treat gender, race, and class as separate, isolated factors, most participants did not mention race or class within their responses, which will be evident throughout this chapter.

On the other hand, nine staff members answered the interview question by describing *how* their NGO addressed concerns and issues regarding gender, race and class, only if such issues were relevant to their local contexts. For instance, Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) shared that his organization does not face issues of gender inequality; rather, due to the systemic issues of race in Pakistan, the NGO staff try to navigate such racial inequities within their SFD programs. He said:

> I think in our programs, there is no issue of gender equality or gender equity in many of our projects, we try to make sure that girls are equally participating…regarding racism, I think racism

[9] NGO 11 did not provide their safe sport policy document, so I was unable to verify the 'talk-to-text' alignment.

> is a bit different in a place like Pakistan. In Canada, it's different because people are from different countries, and the people are coming from different countries. In Pakistan, there is an issue of race and sectarianism, but in such activities, I think it doesn't interfere a lot.

For context, Pakistan has faced ongoing issues of racial and sectarian violence, often instigated by government and political structures, resulting in a divided society (see Haleem, 2003; see also Mujtaba et al., 2022). For instance, Haleem (2003) notes that racial and sectarian issues in Pakistan stemmed from the colonial period, where military and bureaucratic forces exercised their dominance over the development of Indigenous populations, creating societal divisions among various genders and identities. As Pakistan continues to face these issues, Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) stated that such issues do not 'bleed' into the SFD context. His remarks seemed to treat race and gender as separate, which is evident through his comments on the lack of gender inequality in his organization while openly acknowledging broader issues of race and sectarianism. Yet, NGO 2's safe sport policy document mentioned that the NGO is committed "to gender equality, inclusivity, and antidiscrimination practices in all activities" (internal policy document, 2015, p. 1). The commitment made in NGO 2's policy document to dismantle gender inequality indicated that the organization recognizes ongoing issues of discrimination and inequality within and outside of their programs. However, when comparing this finding to Umer's (NGO 2 staff member) interview finding (as noted above), it was revealed that Umer does not uphold the same commitment as he said, "there is no issue of gender equality or gender equity in many of our projects." Certainly, the misalignment highlights that tackling gender inequality cannot be achieved if it fails to be acknowledged by the staff members, who are responsible for delivering the program.

Similarly, Suman (NGO 3, India) mentioned that her organization chooses not to focus on gender equality. Instead, she noted:

> If you ask, 'what's your biggest challenge?' It's how to bring girls on the ground, still that challenge. But what I really like about our organization is that it forgets about gender equality for now. That's not the most important, you know, pressing point because even bringing the girl from the house is a big thing.

In the quote by Suman above, we see how gender equality is being reframed through immediate, context-specific barriers – such as 'getting girls out of the house.' This specific, situated prioritization of survival, access, and structural constraints (e.g., familial expectations, cultural norms) are noteworthy and – from a decolonial feminist lens – may be understood, in turn, as not a rejection of equality. Instead, seems more pressing to question how global SFD narratives often uphold universal benchmarks (e.g., using SFD to promote gender equality and empowerment), which may ignore colonial legacies and gendered restrictions on mobility, where transforming power relations, and focusing on agency, voice, choice and collective action, seem more pressing. In analyzing NGO 3's policy document, it stated: "Every child has the right to be treated equally irrespective of gender/abilities/sexual orientation, etc." (internal policy document, 2013, p. 1). This phrase acknowledges the equal treatment and protection of diverse genders and identities but contradicts Suman's interview finding of the NGO 'forgetting about gender equality.' Rather, this misalignment points to broader struggles of implementing policy to practice.

Speaking further to how participants perceived and addressed issues regarding gender, race and class Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) said, "if we work on behavioural change, both boys and girls, it will be much easier…young boys they will show respect in a different way on and off the field, you know. So, the girls [will show respect] as well." In relation to the documentary analysis, NGO 12's safeguarding policy stated: "Respect the rights, dignity and worth of others regardless of gender, abilities, culture, race, sexuality, or religion" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 11). This policy excerpt was included as a criterion in NGO 12's code of conduct, where staff members must pledge to uphold the items listed. While this policy

excerpt acknowledges gender and race as factors critical to safe sport implementation, it does not depict the organization's ability to dismantle gender and racial discrimination. Pledging to respect a young participants human right regardless of gender and race does not reflect targeting gender and racial inequities and can prevent the NGO from vernacularizing human rights (see Merry, 2006, 2015). Additionally, Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) mentioned that their organization has various programs that have different target groups:

> We have netball, karate, martial arts, skateboarding, rugby, and they are using these vehicles to drive social change and through that vehicle, they would have different target groups…some are targeting, maybe just women around SDG5 [Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality], around gender.

To address issues of gender, race and class, NGO 9 created targeted programs and initiatives with the intent of 'solving' such inequalities faced by young participants. NGO 9's child protection policy reveals a troubling and problematic approach to addressing gender, race and class-based issues. The policy stated: "Child's gender is only taken into account if a decision made 'significantly affects the child's gender'" (internal policy document, 2022, p. 4). The problem representation in NGO 9's policy indicates how gender is situationally relevant, rather than perceiving gender as a structural or socially constructed factor that continuously shapes the lives and sporting experiences of young participants.

In relation to these issues, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) stated that the organization tries to uphold gender equality and inclusion by identifying "a male champion in the communities who daily stand up and are ambassadors of gender equality within their communities." In turn, Ari noted that having a male advocate and encouraging girls' participation in sport was seen as a strategy to increase girls' participation and empower them to join their SFD programs. Ironically, though, SFD NGOs, such as NGO 10, relied on male figures to advocate for and promote gender equality – an approach that may unintendedly actually

reinforce hegemonic and toxic masculinities by upholding the idea that men are the powerful and authoritative figures within sport. In doing so, these efforts risked undermining the very goals of empowerment and gender equity through SFD that such organizations aimed to achieve. Surprisingly, NGO 10's safeguarding policy document, did not reference the practices that Ari mentioned during her interview. Rather, the analysis of NGO 10's safeguarding policy revealed vague and ambiguous approaches to target and address gender, race and class-based inequalities. Accordingly, the policy stated:

> Everyone must ensure that they do not unfairly discriminate against anyone based on any differences including ethnic origin, race, nationality, culture, religion or belief (or lack thereof), political opinion (or lack thereof), parental or maternity status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, disability, social class (internal policy document, 2024, p. 10).

In comparing Ari's interview reflections to NGO 10's policy excerpt above, it is unclear as to *what* practices are considered to be 'appropriate' when targeting and addressing issues of discrimination. Relatedly, it is also unclear as to *what* practices are discriminatory. Taken together, and as per NGO 10's interview and documentary analysis findings, are anti-discriminatory practices those that target gender, racial and class inequalities? Or are 'male champions,' as per Ari's interview comments, the *right* way to dismantle gender, racial and class inequalities? Lastly, Emma (NGO 8, Turkey) explained that her organization provided "trainings around gender equity" to staff members within the NGO and to various other clubs, suggesting an institutional effort to address gender issues, though the depth and content of such trainings remained unclear.

On another note, some participants discussed how their NGOs addressed concerns and issues related to gender, race and class, by sharing statistics and the rates of female participation. Danni (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines) shared that the NGO is doing vast work in relation to gender equality. She said, "We focus a lot around like gender equality…violence…avoiding discrimination and

things like that…so that kind of helps with the safeguarding work." Danni did not elaborate on how the NGO precisely focused on gender equality in relation to safe sport and rather assumed that through their programs and the advocacy for female participation in sport, they would 'solve' gender-based inequalities within their programs. Discursively, Danni reinforces the narrative and practice that by simply including and making space for girls within the program, will automatically alleviate gender-based issues. Danni's comments overlook how gender-based issues are structural and systemic problems, rather than surface-level concerns. Adding to Danni's point further, Cole from NGO 6 explained how – across the organization – they "had well over 50% [female] participation at players [child and youth participants] and coach level." Here, Cole justified the organization's commitment to gender equality by sharing statistics and numbers of female participation during his interview (i.e., 50% female participation). However, these numbers did not accurately capture young women's and girls' perceptions of safety while participating in NGO 6's program, and whether the NGO was, in fact, embedding safe sport practices to address gender inequalities, as Danni had mentioned. Though these numerical indicators of 'gender equality' were not reflected in NGO 6's safeguarding procedures and policy document. Instead the document stated: "Intersectional discrimination makes children particularly vulnerable to harm, abuse, and exploitation and requires consideration of GEDSI [10] programming across the prevention (attitudes and norms) and response (policy and systems, attitudes, and inclusive service delivery) continuum" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 19). NGO 6's policy document used the phrase "intersectional discrimination," which discursively indicated an intersectional lens. However, the NGO does not clarify nor define the term 'discrimination,' a finding consistent among majority of NGOs policy documents. The absence of defining such terms creates ambiguity and vagueness as to *what* the NGO considers to be discrimination (e.g., racial, gender) and *how* the NGO understand how such factors intersect.

[10] Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (NGO 6, internal policy document, 2024, p. 15).

Similarly, Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan) mentioned that the organization's "mission is to advance gender equity through the sport of running," which is consistent with NGO 7's safeguarding policy and procedures document. She then proceeded to share the number of participants across their programming sites (i.e., Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine). For example, in Iraq, the organization has over 700 young women and girls (aged 10-24) who are actively participating in the program. According to Sarah, these participation numbers vindicate how the organization successfully addressed gender inequalities. Additionally, NGO 7's safeguarding policy and procedures document stated: "[NGO 7] believes that every individual, irrespective of their age, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and other factors, deserves to live a life free of harm, abuse, violence and discrimination" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 3). While this policy excerpt does not include class, and is unclear whether the phrase "other factors" includes 'class' it does acknowledge how gender and race can intersect to create harm, abuse and violence.

Overall, when the interview findings and perceptions of the participants shared in this framing are considered in relation to the discourse of "intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport," it becomes clear that while SFD NGO staff recognized the importance of addressing gender inequality, they often overlooked how gender intersects with race, class, and other structural factors that influence a child or youth's sense of safety *within* SFD programs. Furthermore, a common pattern that was evident throughout this framing - and broader overarching discourse of "intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport," was that to target and address issues of gender inequity, NGOs heavily focused on the inclusion of girls within their programs instead of marginalized or 'at risk' boys.

Overall, the documentary analysis throughout this framing exposed that gender is frequently treated separately from race, with minimal mention of class-based inequities. Further, the NGOs' policies that mention 'race,' 'gender,' and 'class' together in the policy excerpt (e.g., NGO 10) simply stated these

factors and failed to acknowledge how they intersect, which relates to the overall discourse of "intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport." The next framing of this discourse illustrates how gender norms and gender-based stereotypes within the local communities impacted young girls' participation in SFD programs.

8.3.2 Framing #2: 'Policing' Gender Norms Impacts Girls' Participation in SFD Programs

This framing draws attention to how gender-based stereotypes were constantly reinforced by systemic, structural, cultural and community-based factors that prevent young girls from participating in SFD programs. This framing also highlights how the mobility of young women and girls is 'policed' in relation to their participation in SFD programs. In response to a series of interview questions related to gender, racism, sexism, class, etc., multiple staff members (n = 6) provided a wide range of responses that often underlined how young girls and women face challenges navigating SFD spaces. Additionally, participants shared how participation rates between boys and girls varied greatly, particularly in countries such as Peru, Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan – where girls often face restrictions on sport participation due to prevailing cultural and societal gender norms.

First, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) explained how his NGO used SFD practices to address a variety of social issues affecting children and youth, including gender-based violence and the challenges faced by neighbouring migrant and refugee populations. However, despite these efforts, girls within the local communities in Peru continued to encounter multiple barriers to participating in the program. Dan further relayed that girls often hesitated to participate in the SFD program because:

> They [girls] are going to get injured because football is for men, and she's like, not strong enough, which is a social barrier that we want to take break…so it's kind of a difficult way to go around

> that sometimes it's because they don't feel like safe as in, girls will be playing, and then there will be a lot of boys from the community around making fun of them too.

Besides boys making fun of the girls for playing, Dan elaborated by noting how Peruvian girls also encountered culturally specific gender-based issues. As he recalled, "sometimes it's because, usually they [girls] are chosen to stay at home and take care of younger siblings." Gender norms reinforced gendered divisions of labour, where girls were predominantly positioned as caregivers. These roles often imposed domestic responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, cooking, and cleaning – duties that are expected of girls in Peru (Oxford, 2021); and can significantly limit their time and opportunities to participate in sport and recreation (Oxford, 2017). Drawing further on domestic responsibilities, Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) explained that girls drop out of sport because:

> When they get, you know, like when they become a teenager, in the adult period, some parents don't want to allow them to play. Because it's also like cultural things like if they play… they will look manly…like nobody would marry her then it will become a burden for their parents.

Mona (NGO 4, India) elaborated further on the barriers that prevent girls from participating in SFD programs and mentioned that – despite active engagement of girls within the NGOs programs – they were still often perceived as responsible for carrying out domestic duties. She said, "they [young women and girl participants are never alone. They are carrying the siblings one on the shoulder, one in the hand, and while playing. Also, they are continuously being disturbed, on top of not having proper playgrounds, so already the girls do not get that safe space." The reflection shared by Mona illustrated how girls' safety within the program was compromised, as they were expected to fulfill gender-based norms and domestic responsibilities even within SFD spaces. Indeed, fulfilling domestic duties outside of the home context illustrates how girls are innately responsible for being 'caregivers,' which reinforces colonial patriarchal tendencies (see Federici, 2004).

Secondly, the 'policing' of gender norms was evident through the expectations that young girls must exemplify traditional notions of femininity, which may discourage or prevent them from participating in sport programs, including those within SFD (see Blazer, 2023). Indeed, in many of these countries – and in Global North contexts – sporting spaces are still widely perceived as male-dominated or 'masculine' and therefore inappropriate for girls (Cooky, 2009). Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) described this concern:

> In most of the sports clubs, it's a gender issue. The girls, they cannot, if they decide to, you know, have a different haircut, like, if they want to shave the sides and do something, this is forbidden. Because girls should have hair that is like girls.

Emma from NGO 8 also agreed with Nancy, noting that – within some local communities – young girls are prohibited from expressing their identity or exploring different 'fashion styles' that may differ from the 'norm' of 'femininity' or that are presented to be more masculine. Emma and Nancy's comments and remarks were consistent with their NGOs safeguarding policy document, wherein the policy defined gender discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on socially constructed gender roles and norms that prevents an individual from fully enjoying their human rights" (internal policy document, 2022, p. 5). This policy excerpt not only links gender roles and norms to broader human rights concerns – a connection that will be further examined in the discussion chapter – but also draws attention to how gender norms can perpetuate harm.

Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine) articulated, in the contexts where NGO 7 worked, it was "considered unorthodox" for women and girls to participate in sport "especially in public spaces" since sport and SFD-related spaces are "traditionally male domains." In its safe sport policy document, NGO 7 stated that it operated in areas "where the rights and liberties of women and girls are curtailed drastically," and can "pose a threat to the young women on [NGOs] team, who may be perceived as

defying traditional gender roles (as defined within their communities)" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 21). Interestingly, this policy excerpt ignores how defying gender norms may place young women and girl participants in NGO 7's programming in even greater precarious conditions and rather, highlights the impact defying gender roles can have on the staff members operating the programs. As mentioned in Chapter 7, it is important that such issues (e.g., race, class, gender) be addressed in relation to the young participants, and not only the staff members, as the policies are meant to protect the people they serve. In a similar vein, Danni (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines) shared a recent incident that transpired with her organization in Cambodia due to the strong male presence and representation on the board for the organization – a common challenge for many SFD NGOs (see Piggott et al., 2024) ─which reproduces the notion that rugby, and sport in general, is a 'male' dominated sport. As Danni said:

> Lots of young women who actually just finally got their first established club that they've been working so hard for in the past a few years, I think they kind of like got dismissed now because the new board they're all men in the board, no female…it's almost like a man-led sport federation, which is very sad.

NGO 6's safe sport policy reflects Danni's remarks. It highlighted the importance of cultural awareness in safeguarding practices, stating that staff, community members, and partners must "consider cultural context and social norms around gender/power/hierarchy" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 6). This excerpt from NGO 6's policy document builds on Danni's abovementioned anecdote, illustrating how staff members implementing safeguarding practices must be cognizant of how gender norms can hinder and prevent female participation. Building on Danni's reflection that sport is inherently "male," Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) recalled a personal account of advocating for girls' participation as part of his work with NGO 12. He said:

> When we introduced non-contact Rugby… I was branded as 'odd'. You know, you were bringing in a game that is not rugby. You are bringing in a game that is making people very weak. I was labelled with, or I am bringing in a game [e.g., rugby] which only poofta[11] play.

Tom noted that if staff members made modifications to a stereotypically 'male' sport, such as Rugby, then the staff members would receive backlash from local organizations and community members, which Tom himself had experienced as people around him called him a "poofta." NGO 12's safe sport policy document defines gender as "socially constructed norms defining how attitudes, behaviour and expectations are formed based on what society associates with being a woman or being a man" (internal policy document, 2020, p. 8). While this policy excerpt suggests a shift away from the socially constructed understandings of gender, it also reproduces a gender binary, which overlooks diverse identities and can place children and youth in harm's way.

Lastly, this framing (i.e., framing two) outlines how women and girls' movement within their communities and SFD spaces was 'policed,' which further impacts their participation in SFD programs. Speaking to this, Mona said, "when we are doing any [SFD] program it will always be in the community, because we don't want the girls to go somewhere else and play." To be clear, the boundaries of the community (in the case of NGO 4 in India) related to the physical area (e.g., city) in which the girls live in and are most familiar with. When probed regarding what constitutes 'boundaries' of a community, Mona relayed that her NGO operated programming for underprivileged girls in three communities within specific cities in India [redacted to preserve anonymity]. These three cities acted as boundaries for the communities NGO 4 worked with, and girls living in communities within these cities were not allowed to venture past the city boarders. Indeed, from a decolonial feminist perspective, the very idea that girls cannot or were not allowed to leave their communities stems from colonial understandings of gender,

[11] A derogatory term in Fiji that refers to 'gay men.'

which positions girls as vulnerable subjects when navigating their environments and limiting their mobility (Oxford, 2017).

Moreover, Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan) mentioned that families within the community where NGO 7 works were often hesitant to allow their children – especially daughters – to travel beyond their communities to 'unknown' or 'unfamiliar' spaces that were perceived to be unsafe. For example, she said, "in other cases, if we're not able to take them [the girls] out for whatever reasons…the community is not allowing the girls to leave that domain." While such restrictions are often framed as protecting, they can also be understood as limiting girls' mobility, placing their bodies under heightened surveillance, and reinforcing tightly governed gender norms. Indeed – and as I show in the discussion chapter – these elements of regulation contradict the fundamental and foundational aims of Western-driven conceptualizations of safe sport, which promote freedom, autonomy, empowerment, and access (see Gurgis & Kerr, 2021).

Finally, in connecting the findings in this framing to the overall discourse of "intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport," this analysis and section highlighted how staff members attempted to address gender norms, while also grappling with the culturally embedded challenges of doing so in their local contexts. Yet, these efforts to reflect often Western frameworks of gender and safety underlined a stark disconnect between policy language and the lived realities of staff and participants. In Chapter Nine, I will examine the misalignment between stated intentions and the actual policy implementation, and the lack of intersectional thinking, especially regarding localized and contextual understandings of gender norms and the colonial legacies that shape them. The next section of this chapter explores discourse number five, which responds to the second part of research question two: Have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and *decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs*? If so, how

8.4 Discourse #5: Decolonizing Knowledge around/within/through Safe Sport: Global North-South Tensions in the Politics of Protection

Decolonizing knowledge production is a key focus of the decolonial feminist framework employed in this research study. This discourse examines how, and whether, Global South SFD NGOs challenge colonial and Westernized ideologies and knowledge on safe sport and child protection. Specifically, this discourse highlights how, and if, SFD NGO staff members advocate for different ways of 'knowing' safe sport when collaborating with Global North 'experts' in creating relevant policies.

8.4.1 Framing #1: Working with Global North 'Experts' to Create Effective Safe Sport Policies

After probing staff on organizational and safe sport policies, a number of interviewees (n=5) underlined that there was a *need* to work with Western-led safe sport organizations, including the UN and UNICEF, more specifically. Further, since local governments in Global South countries often lacked the resources or capacities to collaborate with SFD NGOs, NGOs were frequently compelled to seek support from alternative sources. For example, and as Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) explained, "our policies are guided by an official safeguarding document from our UK office, which serves as the foundation for all our programs." He further added and said, "Our team, staff, and Field Management Team (FMT) in both the UK and Pakistan are actively working to ensure that our initiatives continue without dependence on government support." In his statements, Rahim mentioned that by working with the NGOs office in the United Kingdom – a Global North country – the Pakistan branch is able to access resources, such as funds, to be able to execute programming. Thus, the NGO did not depend on the local Pakistani government for support and leveraged, instead, its international networks for support. In a similar vein, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) stated that his organization worked with "different UN agencies, like UNICEF for example, and also we had to adapt and create stronger safeguarding policies." Further, Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) said that his organization's safeguarding policy was developed by trying to encompass *both* the "local policies

of government…and following the ideas of the UN." Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan) mentioned that her NGO's policy is built against "those eight international safeguards," referring specifically in this instance to the safeguards published by UNICEF (see Chapter 3). Phantom (NGO 9, South Africa) added and said that one of their partner organizations, "worked with FIFA…they [FIFA] guided some of them [staff from the partner organization] also [on] safeguarding [with] industry leaders within the space [SFD space] as well." In relation to the documentary analysis, safeguarding and child protection policy documents from NGO 1, NGO 2, NGO 7, and NGO 9 each included multiple references to Global North safe sport frameworks, including the UNCRC (NGO 1), the UN Declarations of Human Rights (NGO 9), 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (NGO 2), and the International Safeguards for Children in Sport (NGO 7), which support staff members interview findings. Discursively, the interview and policy excerpts pointed to the diverse ways that interviewees worked with Global North 'experts' to create effective safe sport policies. Yet, the *need* or obligation to adopt Western-centric safe sport policies stemmed from a variety of issues, some of which will be explained later on in this chapter and in the discussion chapter. However, through a decolonial feminist lens and Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, adapting Global North frameworks, such as the ones mentioned by the participants, sustains and reinforces Western-centric knowledge and hampers the acceptance of alternate forms of knowledge. This is problematic as it positions Western-centric knowledge on safe sport as the 'standard,' and when implemented in diverse contexts, such as the Global South, risks placing children and youth in harm.

Importantly, while some participants (e.g., NGO 3, NGO 5, NGO 6, NGO 10, NGO 8, NGO 12) did not openly share reflections on *needing* to work with Western-led safe sport organizations, their NGOs' safe sport policies directly referenced the importance of adapting their safeguarding practices to Western frameworks. For example, NGO 3's child safeguarding policy stated: "[NGO 3] policy is based upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (internal policy document, 2013, p. 1). NGO 8

followed the same approach where the organizations "policy document is based on international human rights documents, primarily the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child" (internal policy document, 2022, p. 2). Likewise, NGO 10 adopted similar Global North safeguarding frameworks, specifically when reporting cases of abuse and maltreatment. To this end, NGO 10's safeguarding policy mentioned: "The reporting procedure shall be backed by the Child Protection Legal Framework in Kenya within the spirit of the UNCRC [United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child]" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 2). These three policy excerpts indicated a reliance on Global North human rights frameworks to effectively uphold the rights and presumably safety of child and youth participants. In doing so, these SFD NGOs (i.e., NGO 3, NGO 10 and NGO 8) overlook the importances of vernacularizing international human rights to local contexts (see Merry, 2006, 2015). Although staff members from these NGOs may not be well-versed in the concept of vernacularization, the very idea that Global North human and child rights frameworks are seen as 'universally' applicable is problematic.

Next, NGO 5's child protection policy stated: "[NGO 5] promotes Universal and Olympic values of friendship, the joy of effort, fair play, respect, excellence, and balance of body, spirit, will and mind as well as interdependence, sharing, love, tolerance, equality amongst others" (internal policy document, 2023, p. 3). Similarly, NGO 12's safeguarding policy also adopted UNICEFs and the IOC values in which the policy stated: "…the development of this policy and all safeguarding work will be framed in international good practice including the International Safeguards for Children in Sport and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athlete Safeguarding Toolkit" (internal policy document, 2024, p. 3). Remarkably, the integration of Olympic values in post-colonial countries, as various Olympic movements were not only seen as a way to exploit Indigenous populations, but also to reinforce values of coloniality and modernity (Sykes & Hamzeh, 2018). However, as NGO 5's and NGO 12's policy excerpts illustrate, the use of Olympic safeguarding values to protect young participants is paradoxical.

Furthermore, the documentary analysis revealed that despite the integration of context-specific safe sport practices such as conducting community assessments to ensure safe environments, the acceptance of Western-centric language used in SFD NGO safe sport policies may be an attributing factor that caused staff members to experience difficulties in applying these policies to practice, which will be further explored in the discussion section.

Overall, this framing emphasized how various SFD NGOs operating in Global South contexts work with Global North 'experts' such as the UN, UNICEF, IOC and FIFA, to create their safe sport, and child protection policies (see Table 4.0 for reference on the nature of NGOs policies). Yet, these partnerships are not without tensions, and the next framing outlines the challenges that Global South SFD staff members had working with these so-called Global North 'experts,' which the next section highlights.

8.4.2 Framing #2: Safe Sport Policies Must be Context-specific and Adaptable to Local Realities

Three staff members (n=3) commented on the challenges they faced when working with Western entities (e.g., UN, UNICEF) – noting that, often, such organizations did not understand the importance of crafting contextually relevant policies. For example, Suman (NGO 3, India) said:

> I feel like there are so many Western organizations, I'll say, who want to have like big impact in the Global South…but they just don't understand. They just want a role like, you know, you have to do this, you have to do that, and you know…we have different challenges.

Next, Alex (NGO 9, South Africa) said that while working with Global North 'experts' can be beneficial for the NGO, safe sport policies must be "adapted to our context." Further, Cole (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines) mentioned that "a lot of the work that's being done now…doesn't look at what is an elite athlete in an emerging country or an emerging economy" and further elaborated that all the resources and supports to develop policies were predominately created in "powerful Global North economies." In fact, almost all interviewees (n = 15) emphasized that SFD NGOs operating in Global South contexts needed

policies that were grounded more deliberately in geographically and contextually relevant frameworks, and ones that move away from Global North ideologies (i.e., to vernacularize; see Merry 2006, 2015). Additionally, while only three few staff members openly shared their reflections in working with the Global North and associated challenges, it is important to note that their silences do not necessarily imply agreement, but can be a form of advocacy (cf., Nachman et al., 2023), which will be explored further in the discussion chapter.

8.4.3 Framing #3: Safe Sport Policies Without Resources are Ineffective Commitments

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many staff members reported feeling obligated to work with Global North experts. In this section, I highlight *why* staff members felt indebted to adopting Global North safe sport frameworks by sharing a few excerpts from the participants. Three participants mentioned that their organizations' safe sport policies function as formalities enmeshed with funding interests. Indeed, staff from NGO 6, NGO 12, and NGO 7 candidly mentioned that having a safe sport policy is often an eligibility requirement for financial support. In short, these policies were reduced to a 'checkbox' requisite to satisfy local and/or international donor agencies rather than to create meaningful initiatives to effectively safeguard young participants. This tension raised significant apprehensions as to whether SFD NGOs are using 'safeguarding' children and youth from abuse as a guise to acquire financial resources. In response to this tension, Cole (NGO 6, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines) noted how:

> A lot of the unions either don't have policy or have a policy that's being copied from somewhere else and has not been contextualized in anyway. Those that have had a policy because usually because they've historically had donor money coming into their union, so they've been required to have a policy, no evidence of practice of the policy.

After probing, Cole further elaborated on his response and said:

> You know, a number of donor governments are to blame for this. They've, you know, we work with [a Global North] government as an example as one of the, you know, one of the donors into some of the work that we do… and in order to fund national organizations, you need to have a safeguarding policy in place. And they [Global North-based donors] don't go beyond that. So, if you can send them the policy there, they can release the funds. So, no evidence of practice, nothing.

During Cole's interview, it was evident that SFD NGOs faced challenges not only in implementing their safe sport practices due to external factors (e.g., social and cultural norms), but also because staff members do not enforce policies. For example, Cole mentioned that a major reason as to why staff members do not enforce safeguarding policies in practice is because "people with power and money [are] encouraging really poor practice." In other words, Cole's remarks implied that staff members, in some cases, do not follow and may overlook proper safeguarding procedures. According to Cole, organizations create safe sport policies that align with Global North and Western conceptualizations of safe sport for the purposes of tokenism and to successfully secure funding to operate their local programs.

From a decolonial feminist perspective, Cole's abovementioned quotes demonstrate how such safe sport practices tended to reproduce colonial logics by reinforcing how Western forms of knowledge attempt to infiltrate into the policies of SFD NGOs in Global South contexts. Indeed, and in recognizing the limitations of this sample size of fifteen (15) staff members, it is important not to suggest that Global South SFD NGOs uniformly take up Western knowledge into their safe sport policies without resistance. And yet, as Western entities continue to tie safe sport policies to funding for Global South entities, SFD NGOs are pressured to adopt these externally imposed frameworks. This only reinforces hegemonic and colonial structures of control and governance. As a result, staff members are discouraged from developing context-specific policies or challenging 'safe sport' knowledge, especially when funding depends on compliance. Additionally, Tom (NGO 12, Fiji) said that his organization also faced issues of disparities

between the safe sport policies directing their work, and the programmatic practices 'on the ground.' Specifically, he outlined how "a safeguarding policy was there. But will always be a policy. It will be just collecting dust on the shelves. Until you bring it to life you know." Lastly, Sarah NGO 7 (Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan) lamented, "we've been doing a lot of safeguarding work without necessarily, like, the practice existed before the policy in a way." Sarah's remarks reveal problematic and harmful notions about her NGO's practice of 'safe sport' prior to implementing an official policy. In essence, her remarks suggest that 'policy' is seen as a structural formality – justifying the argument that safe sport policies are often created and implemented to acquire funding rather than to intentionally and evocatively protect children and youth from maltreatment.

8.5 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter provided a detailed account of findings and discourses relevant to Research Question Two and as perceived by the participants. Through the formation of discourses and framings, this chapter illustrated the absence of intersectionality and how safe sport was conceptualized and applied by overlooking how gender, race, and class intersect to shape the lived experiences of children and youth. In addition, this chapter underscores the hidden premises behind why Global South SFD NGOs adopt Western-centric safeguarding frameworks. The following chapter broadens the discussion by synthesizing the five discourses presented in Chapters Seven and Eight and addresses the 'so, what' of this research study.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

This study aimed to explore and investigate the relationship between safe sport and SFD initiatives that operate child and youth programming within Global South contexts. The purpose of this study was to examine how, and if, 'safe sport' was being applied within Global South contexts to protect children and youth from various forms of abuse, maltreatment and violence. Specifically, SFD programs were utilized to explore this idea further, in line with the objectives and (cl)aims of SFD (e.g., upholding safe environments, gender inclusion). Drawing on decolonial feminist theory and Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, this study explored the following two research questions:

1) How have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' within, through, and around their child and youth programming in the Global South?
2) Have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs? If so, how?

Through my analysis, I found that the participants constructed safe sport as a context-specific practice but was this perception not reflected in the SFD NGOs' safe sport and organizational policy documents. By applying the WPR approach and a decolonial feminist lens, I discuss the issues that arise when context-specific realities and practices are excluded from safe sport policies. I also examine how safe sport discourses are constructed as universal, overlooking local complexities. My analysis of the five discourses provides valuable insights into the perspectives of SFD NGO staff and policymakers, particularly pointing to how safe sport is underpinned by colonial logics, which continue to be overlooked. I argue that – by overlooking 'safe sport' as a colonial practice, and how colonialism has created adverse conditions within

the Global South - SFD NGO staff members continue to risk placing children and youth in positions of danger and vulnerability.

This chapter is divided into five sections that address and summarize the main findings from Chapters Seven and Eight, as perceived by the participants and in relation to the existing literature. The five discourses that will be examined in this chapter include: 1) the contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport; 2) understanding abuse and maltreatment within, through and around SFD programs, 3) conditional care – when safety hinges on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints; 4) intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport; and 5) decolonizing knowledge around/within/through safe sport: Global North-South tensions in the politics of protection. Lastly, I discuss the 'so what' of this study and further elaborate on how the findings herein offer new insights into the existing literature.

9.1 The 'One Size (doesn't) Fits All': Safe Sport as a Context-Specific Framework

The first discourse that the participants and documents produced was the "contested and contextualized meanings of safe sport." This discourse underlined diverse understandings and implementations of safe sport, which were often grounded in political, social, and cultural landscapes that shaped local realities. In turn, the first discourse responds to the research question one, illustrating how diverse SFD actors applied their understandings of 'safe sport' within, around and through their programming. Specifically, SFD staff members understood and implemented safe sport in three distinct ways, including: 1) to protect children and youth from abuse and maltreatment; 2) to 'transform' lives; and 3) to treat 'safe sport' as an ecosystem. While these three factors are consistent, in some ways, with the current literature (see Gurgis et al., 2022; Spaaji & Schulenkorf, 2014; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024), the first discourse emphasizes how staff members implemented and observed safeguarding practices in ways that are specific to their local contexts, which differ from Global North applications and ideas of protection and safety. Furthermore, while past researchers have found the need to create safe sport policies

and practices that are aligned with local socio-cultural norms and contexts (Kisakye et al., 2023; Tak et al., 2024; Solstad & Strandbu, 2019), this thesis study underlined the importance of creating safe sport policies that are respectful of – and in relation to – the textured, granular, local realities of children and youth and the geographical terrain (i.e., physical spaces) that they move and play in, which current global safe sport literature overlooks (cf., Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020 and Tak et al., 2024).

Using Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, I identified a range of discursive practices that positioned 'safe sport' as a concept and practice – one that can be applied evenly and effectively across different contexts, even while acknowledging the varying social, cultural, and political landscapes and climates of a country or region; thus, reinforcing the 'one-size-fits-all' narrative. Extending this analysis through Fairclough's (1995) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), researchers highlight how power relations and structural inequalities contribute to the production of "social wrongs" (p. 8). In turn, Fairclough (1995) describes ideologies as "meaning in the service of power," which shape representations of the world and ultimately help to "establish or sustain unequal relations of power" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 8). In this context, then, the persistence of a 'one-size-fits-all' approach enables Global North institutions (and countries) to maintain epistemic and political dominance, with prevailing Western and colonial ideologies surrounding safe sport and child/youth protection. As such, this discourse itself becomes a form of social harm and reflects Western and colonial ideologies (see Fairclough, 1995).

Current research by Tak et al. (2024) mentions that it is inevitably impossible for safe sport policies to be applied equivalently across the globe, as every regional context is socio-culturally and politically distinct, a finding supported by this research study. As this study demonstrated, in Chapter Seven, several participants' verbal (i.e., through the interviews) conceptualizations of safe sport and the implementation of safeguarding practices reflected their region's social, cultural, and political factors that tend to surround the local communities in which the SFD operates. For instance, staff members understood and alluded

'safe sport' as a way to protect the emotional, physical and mental well-being of young participants within their local communities and SFD programs. This conceptualization originated from the idea that surrounding communities are often unsafe due to political instability and the absence of child protection regulations, which can pose a threat to the well-being of children and youth (e.g., NGO 3, NGO 7, see Chapter Seven).

Other staff members (e.g., NGO 4 and NGO 1) positioned 'safe sport' as a means of transformative power, allowing young girls to exercise their agency to protect themselves from precarious situations (e.g., prostitution) and to use sport to improve the lives of children and youth facing poverty (e.g., street children). Additionally, other staff members understood 'safe sport' as an ecosystem where individuals outside of SFD programs – including community members, religious leaders, parents, etc. – are equally responsible for ensuring the safety of young participants. Furthermore, by featuring 'safe sport' as an ecosystem, staff members, such as Sarah (NGO 7, Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan), considered the social influences and cultural norms within the communities they operate in, including gendered norms and restrictions (e.g., limiting young girls from education and financial/economic freedom). The absence of contextual and local forms of 'safe sport' knowledge can stem from colonial ideologies of *whose* knowledge counts (cf. Kisakye et al., 2023). For instance, NGO 7's safeguarding policy and procedures document (see Table 4.0) overlooks how gendered norms and restrictions, such as economic injustice and the lack of education, can place young girls in vulnerable positions. In fact, NGO 7's document does reference these factors, particularly economic (in)justice, in relation to safeguarding the staff members who conduct the program themselves, rather than the recipients of the programs (i.e., young girls). The absence of context-specific factors in NGO 7's safeguarding policy, such as economic and educational injustices, is not only problematic (see Bacchi, 2012) but also reveals how Western power is sustained through language and text (see Fairclough, 1989, 1995) by upholding institutional bias that focuses on

protecting those in power (Burke, 2017). This in turn allows those in power to exert epistemic dominance (see Burke, 2017). As I will further summarize below, the data clearly pointed to the discrepancies between policy documents and interview data, in which Bacchi (2012, 2024) would describe it as an opportunity to examine who benefits and who is marginalized by specific problem representations. Further, Bacchi (2018) highlights how these inconsistencies can be an opportunity to examine the relationship between knowledge and power, and how power functions through policy discourses.

Furthermore, some NGO safeguarding and child protection policies, such as those of NGO 9 (South Africa), portrayed safe sport as a commodity (e.g., through the use of the word "package" when describing the aims of the NGOs child protection policy, see Chapter Seven), which can discursively perpetuate capitalist ideologies of *who* is worthy of protection. Using Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, the absence of contextually relevant policies suggests that NGOs did not consider it necessary to incorporate local forms of knowledge and beliefs into formal policies. Indeed, although – for the most part – staff did tend to recognize the omission of contextually relevant understandings of 'safe sport' as a problem in SFD, but indicated that policy might not be the best avenue to address context-specific issues, as policies are often seen as a formality rather than a practicality. The failure to include context-specific policies that reflect local safeguarding practices stem from the coloniality of knowledge and power (Quijano, 2000, 2007), where safe sport is seen as a way for Western and Global North powers to exercise and reinforce colonial power. This research study – and as this chapter will demonstrate – advocates for contextually relevant safe sport policies, specifically within SFD programs operating in Global South contexts, to dismantle colonial logics and to effectively safeguard children and youth.

9.2 Lived (Colonial) Realities and 'Safe Sport'

The second discourse that the participants and documents produced was the need to understand varying levels and cases of abuse and maltreatment within, through and around SFD programs, which also

responds to research question one. Specifically, the participants shared accounts of abuse and maltreatment within and around their respective SFD programs, rarely discussing how the program *itself* may produce and perpetuate precarious conditions for young participants (an issue to be explored further in the latter half of this chapter). Further, in sharing various accounts of abuse and maltreatment, participants considered abuse and maltreatment to be pervasive and 'normal.' This highlights how the everyday realities of children and youth living in Global South contexts are shaped by intersecting colonial legacies and contemporary socio-political and geographical conditions, which constrain their access to safety and leisure within SFD. To further the discussion on why safe sport cannot be considered universal, it is essential to consider how colonialism has created exploitative conditions for children and youth. Through Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, the analysis of SFD NGO policies revealed a significant reliance on Western-centric language, which overlooks how children and youth navigate community and sport-related spaces.

The disparities and inequities in the social, cultural and political contexts of Global South countries can be attributed to past and ongoing structures of colonialism. The 'coloniality of power,' as coined by Quijano (2000), brings bold attention to how colonial powers introduced and instilled various forms of political governance and social and cultural development within Global South countries. Drawing on this further, Edward Said (1978) noted that powerful colonizing nations have imposed their form and methods of political structure and governance, as well as social and cultural practices on colonized peoples, whom he refers to as the 'Orient' for the sole purpose of 'humanizing' them. However, decolonizing involves going beyond a discourse and metaphor (see Tuck & Yang, 2012). As Sultana (2019) affirms:

> Decolonizing development means disrupting the deeply-rooted hierarchies, asymmetric power structures, the universalization of Western knowledge, the privileging of whiteness, and the taken-for-granted Othering of the majority world. The challenges are to what extent those with power

> are willing to change and in what ways, if at all. Those in power need to let go of power and learn to embrace radical solidarity with Others, whereby Others' autonomy is respected, and power asymmetries are addressed. Decolonizing is impossible if it does not address issues of global capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of structural violence (p. 34).

The abovementioned explanation of decolonization from Sultana (2019) is especially important, as it draws stark attention to precisely *how* Global North-curated safe sport policies overlook how colonial legacies, geographic inequalities, political, social and cultural contexts combine to create different needs and everyday realities for children and youth living in Global South contexts.

The everyday lived realities for children and youth, and the misunderstandings that international human rights are linear across the globe, stems from colonial legacies where "the Global North assumes as it were a parenting role towards the Global South, where the 'adult North' can bestow rights and duties on the 'young South' and if the South fails to comply with these, can implement sanctions" (Pupavac, 1998; Valentin & Meinert, 2009, p. 24 as cited in Duramy and Gal, 2020). The lived experiences of children and youth are often directly shaped by their human rights and how these rights, such as the right to safety, are upheld in their local environmental, social, political and cultural contexts. Given that this study focuses on safeguarding child and youth participants in SFD programs, Merry's (2015) concept of "vernacularization" is applicable to examine how young participants' rights to safety can be obscured and violated by colonial ideologies. As mentioned previously, vernacularization refers to how international and global child and youth rights are, or are not, translated to local contexts to align with local customs and practices. Put differently, this concept illustrates how international human rights can be adapted or "vernacularized" to align with local social, political, geographical and cultural contexts of the Global South (Merry, 2015). Previous research conducted by Duramy and Gal (2020) highlighted a lack of research on understanding "child participation" – which refers to the idea that children have the right to

express themselves and make informed decisions in all matters that may affect their lives – from a Global South perspective. Duramy and Gal (2020) stated that the lived realities of children and youth in the Global South are indeed different than to those living in Global North contexts. In turn, Duramy and Gal (2020) suggested that – to better understand child participation and child and/or youth human rights contexts – future scholarship must "incorporate the lived experiences, understandings, and options related to meaningful participation that children living in the Global South have in their everyday lives" (p. 2). The findings of this thesis align with these statements.

As explored in Chapter Seven, staff members understood safe sport in a variety of ways, which often reflect local geo-sociocultural norms and understandings of abuse and violence. Many participants recalled cases of abuse where young participants were placed in vulnerable and precarious conditions, describing how sport, abuse and violence are experienced differently within Global South contexts (Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Fang et al., 2017; Ritterbusch et al., 2023). For example, NGO 3 (India) relayed that children and youth have exceedingly busy schedules, ultimately resulting in minimal 'down-time,' and rest, which creates an endless cycle of exhaustion and burnout that Western-centric safe sport frameworks (e.g., International Safeguards for Children in Sport) overlook. Also, participants from Turkey, South Africa, Pakistan, and India recalled cases of abuse stemming from environmental violence, child trafficking, rape, punishment, sexual, emotional and gender-based violence within and around the SFD program. Importantly, Chapter Seven highlighted the silencing of abuse and maltreatment around SFD programs, particularly about young girls, where sexual exploitation can be tied to gaining economic capital (Chadwick, 2019; Tokas, 2024). These findings are consistent with Tak et al. (2024) finding,s where Global North curated rights-based models that underlie safe sport policies can clash with "pre-existing geo-sociocultural norms of local contexts" (Tak et al., 2024, p. 1), where human rights are understood in different ways.

As Fairclough (1989, 1995) and McGannon (2016) argue, these findings reflect how colonial logics influence the everyday lived experiences of children and youth, especially in spaces (i.e., SFD) that (cl)aim to be safe and can render these policies ineffective. Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach is not only useful for helping to unpack how and why the 'universal' approach to safe sport is problematic, but WPR is also pertinent for pinpointing how assuming the homogeneity of geo-sociocultural norms across the Global North and South is harmful, especially when safe sport practices are disconnected from local realities. Furthermore, what remains unexamined and unproblematized within the data (i.e., the interview transcripts and policy documents) is how staff members perceived and navigated local child and youth human rights frameworks, and how such understandings were subsequently practiced.

The documentary analysis revealed a strong dependence on 'universal' Western-centric child protection laws and regulations, such as the UNCRC without referencing – in some cases – local frameworks of child and youth protection (see Chapter Eight). The absence of these criteria does not suggest that staff members purposely rejected local approaches, laws and regulations around child and youth, but rather suggests privileging universal understandings of protection, 'childhood,' and reinforces the 'universal child' narrative (see Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020). This is problematic, and as Bacchi (2012, 2021) mentions, the silences in problem representations are important and shed light on how dominant narratives (e.g., Western-centric child protection frameworks) can ostracize alternative forms of knowledge, at least in the context and scopes of this research study. Additionally, and problematically, without vernacularization, global child protection frameworks – such as those of UNCRC – are adopted in ways that overlook social and cultural realities of diverse local contexts.

9.3 The Struggle to Create Safe Environments within Enduring Colonial Legacies

The third discourse that the participants and documents produced was "conditional care – when safety hinges on structural, financial, political and geographical constraints," which also responds to

research question one. This section of the chapter highlights the struggles that staff members had in creating safe environments – particularly in relation to geography – for young participants, due to the lingering impacts of colonialism. As Dan (NGO 11, Peru) had stated in his interview, "I think that [geography] was one of the main challenges for us," highlighting that unsafe physical terrains and adverse geographic conditions prevented the adequate implementation of safe sport. Indeed, colonialism and colonial legacies have significantly impacted the geographic conditions of the Global South. These ideas are encapsulated by Edward Said (1993) in the quote below:

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle of geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, and forms, about images and imaginings (p. 7).

Here, Said (1993) refers to how colonialism, particularly settler-colonialism, has profoundly shaped and altered existing physical spaces, which places children and youth's safety into question as they navigate their environments (Hunt & Stevenson, 2017). In relation to sport and SFD, sport was employed as a colonial practice to construct Western modernity and values (Darnell et al., 2019). During colonial periods, sport was used as a tool to exploit and colonize nations in the Global South to extract their economic resources (Darnell et al., 2019). Additionally, using sport as a colonial tool was also enacted by the British Empire to gain power and sovereignty (Mangan, 2011). Not only does this colonial practice – using sport to exploit Indigenous populations – cause financial harm to under-resourced countries, but it also impacts a country's ability to create accessible infrastructure and decreases socioeconomic resources, including healthcare, education, legal enforcement, housing, etc.

As the participants noted, safe sport policies must incorporate context-specific practices, as safe sport varies depending on a region's social, cultural, political and geographical landscapes, which are distinct from those in Global North regions. Bacchi (2012) suggests that safe sport policies often overlook

protocol and guidelines to ensure safe environments and navigate challenges given the social, cultural, political and environmental instabilities of a region. Further, Bacchi (2012) highlights how the reliance on Western-centric frameworks is not only problematic but also harmful, as such frameworks often neglect the needs of diverse contexts and populations and devalue the importance of local knowledge systems.

Interviewees described a number of challenges they faced when trying to create safe spaces in unstable environments with uneven physical terrain. For example, NGO 9 (South Africa) recalled direct accounts of when geographical landscapes placed young participants in vulnerable positions. Alex from NGO 9 mentioned that uneven playing fields and unsafe physical terrains prevented the NGO from adequately safeguarding children and youth and recalled that young participants faced numerous sport-related injuries (e.g., twisted ankles) when playing in such areas. The cultivation of these unsafe playing fields is a consequence of colonialism. For example, in South Africa - particularly during the 'Scramble for Africa' (see Appendix I) – colonial powers imposed new borders and territorial divisions (Finlayson, 2019; Kulik, 2025). The rapid acceleration of urbanization by colonial powers led to significant landscape changes (see Iva, 2024), with ongoing effects that constrained the access of SFD NGO staff members to safe and adequate playing fields. While unsafe and uneven playing fields undoubtedly exist within Global North contexts and can lead to children and youth facing sport injuries, this thesis is concerned with how colonial practices created these precarious conditions in the Global South, at least within the scope of this study. Importantly, many countries in the Global South lack access to secure, safe indoor stadiums or recreational centers to conduct their programming. Many of these infrastructures, however, are widely available and accessible in Global North regions, such as Canada.

Additionally, Suman (NGO 3, India) recalled how narrow and physically unsafe transportation routes make it difficult to access playing areas for both the staff members and the young participants. Scholarship has continued to highlight the use of sport to ignite colonial violence in the forms of war and

conflict (see Laurendeau, 2024); and pointed to the use of sport to not only create social organization (Fanon, 1963); but also, to disrupt the geographic conditions and physical landscapes of the Global South. Ultimately, with resource extraction, violence, and the creation of 'new' spatial boundaries and borders, Global South countries were unable to rebuild their economies or physical spaces, a situation that remains evident today and hinders the creation of safe spaces within sport (see Bluwstein, 2021). What is imperative to underline here – in relation to the findings of this thesis – is that the geographical conditions of the Global South, shaped mainly by colonial legacies, prevent the adequate implementation of safe sport, which is consistent with NGO 9 and NGO 3's interview findings. A decolonial feminist lens points to the need to include the "geo-and body politics of knowledge, of the modern/colonial foundations of political economy analysis, and of gender" (Icaza, 2021, p. 29; see also Lugones, 2010a, 2010b) to rethink and reimagine safe sport policies that are inclusive of a country's diverse geography and the impacts it can have on young bodies.

While these conditions cannot only be understood as outcomes of geopolitical and economic processes; they may also be realized as gendered and racialized forms of environmental violence that disproportionately impact marginalized communities (Sultana, 2021). The participants shared how unsafe playing environments had become normalized for children and youth, particularly girls, who lived in under-resourced, high-risk areas. Indeed, Dan (NGO 11, Peru) articulated that children and youth living in communities with high crime rates often participated in SFD programs that were also located near or within high-crime areas, reflecting the everyday realities of these participants. In turn, unsafe playing fields were also created by the community through using such spaces as garbage collection sites, as articulated by Mona (NGO 4, India). Mona relayed that the NGOs playing fields were used as spaces for waste and garbage collection, which would result in the staff members physically removing the garbage themselves before conducting programming.

While the British Empire, during the colonization of India, introduced sanitation initiatives to combat the problem of waste and garbage, these sanitation initiatives reflected Western-centric solutions and ignored the effect that rapid urbanization would have on the country (Gattupalli, 2023). Today, in post-colonial India, outdated infrastructures cannot meet the needs of rapidly growing populations (see Gattupalli, 2023) and – as my thesis research demonstrated – playing fields are used as garbage dumping sites. A decolonial feminist approach helps to foreground how colonial and capitalistic structures can permeate the environments in which children and youth live and play, a finding that is consistent with the current literature (cf. Hayhurst & Iqbal, 2025). Thus, and notably, violence to the environment can perpetuate violence to young bodies.

A decolonial feminist lens allows us to critique not only how colonialism has created these geographical and environmental inequities, but also to question how these legacies continue to shape everyday experiences in gendered and classed ways. Further, a decolonial feminist lens draws sharp attention to how the physical neglect of sport spaces is not a failure of individual NGOs or Global South communities, but a manifestation of ongoing colonial structures and global power asymmetries. To be clear, the findings of this thesis should not be taken as placing 'blame' on Global South countries or SFD NGOs that operate in these regions for placing children and youth in precarity. Instead, the hope is that these findings foreground *how these ongoing colonial structures* contribute to – and exacerbate – geographic violence and its impact on safe sport and the creation of safe environments.

Indeed, colonialism has left enduring structural and spatial impacts, and as Crawford (2010) notes, "sports became the primary vehicle for reifying the Cold War" (p. 86). Indeed, several countries in the Global South referenced in this study – including Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, South Africa, Pakistan and Turkey – have endured, and continue to face, ongoing political instability and economic precarity (Wu, 2024). In many of these countries, active or recent conflicts with neighbouring states have directly

impacted the ability of SFD organizations to ensure the safety and well-being of their young participants. The use of violence through warfare, both past and present, stems from colonial histories in which imperial powers employed militarized domination to control colonized populations (Arneil, 2024). Currently, colonial powers use brutal forces of violence to control Indigenous populations, which is evident through the on-going Israel-Palestine conflict (see Appendix I).

As highlighted in Chapter Seven, a few participants, such as NGO 7 and NGO 8, spoke to challenges in creating safe environments given their country's political climates. For example, Sarah (NGO 7) that operates programming in multiple Middle Eastern regions, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine, recalled how the NGO responds to ongoing and evolving political tensions – such as bomb threats and violent airstrikes – by shutting down programming to protect children and youth from various forms of political violence. Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) recalled the challenges the NGO faces in creating safe environments provided the government's belief of instilling military values through all sport programs, including SFD programs (Coakley, 2011). Moreover, children and youth participating in NGO 8's program often faced 'military training' and harsh means of discipline and/or punishment. The justification for imposing military values on young participants stems from militaristic approaches to sport, used to transform children and youth into potential soldiers who would fight for their country (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2011).

From a WPR perspective, Bacchi (2009, 2012) highlights that SFD NGO safe sport and organizational policies, rarely problematize sport as a method to uphold violence, war and militarization, which is integral to 'safe sport.' Additionally, from a CDA perspective, Fairclough (1989, 1995) suggests that language can never be neutral, and in this case, war and safe sport are seen as isolated factors. Taken together, Bacchi (2012), Fairclough (1989, 1995) and McGannon (2016), highlight that the discursive omission of sport being used to exercise forms of colonial violence, is not framed as a 'problem' within

the social contexts and situations in which these safe sport policies are usually created (e.g., Global North contexts).

Importantly, my Master's findings do not take for granted that these situations are unique to countries in the Global South; rather, my aim has been to draw attention to *how* colonialism created these conditions (e.g., unsafe playing fields) and subsequently deprived countries in the Global South of the financial resources needed to address them in the first place. It is imperative to underline that despite the differences in the geographical, social, political and cultural landscapes between the Global North and South, colonial powers continue to develop safe sport policies, with the expectation that Global South countries will adopt them, overlooking the fact that these colonial powers marginalized these very contexts.

9.4 Intersectional Approaches to 'Safe Sport'

The fourth discourse constructed by the participants and policy documents was "intersectional (in)visibility in safe sport," which responds to research question two. This discourse highlights the various challenges that staff members faced in orienting safeguarding practices to account for intersecting factors of gender, race and class – which, taken together, shape the lived realities for child and youth participants. Scholarship that advocates for the use of intersectional approaches in sport-based initiatives – including SFD programs – suggests that if staff members, teachers, etc., understand the complex interactions between gender, race and class, they can create interventions that address these social issues. Such interventions can influence agency among young participants, particularly those from ethnically diverse backgrounds (Dagkas, 2019). However, as Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach and the findings revealed, interestingly, all fifteen (15) participants treated gender, race, and class as separate from each other, and while unintentionally, overlooked intersectionality with safeguarding children and youth. As Bacchi (2012) reminds us, the assumption that Global North-curated safe sport policies may be universally

applied to safeguard all children and youth, regardless of race, class, and gender, is problematic and thus reinforces the 'one-size-fits-all' narrative. Furthermore, the policies of each NGO (n = 10) also did not reflect the interview findings. Rather, as mentioned in Chapter Eight, there were misalignments between the stated intentions and the actual policy implementations around gender, race and class, which is problematic as it creates vague and ambiguous perceptions of how NGOs recognize the relationship between these socially constructed concepts (Bacchi, 2012).

Importantly, intersectionality and/or intersectional thinking should not be treated in isolation from decolonial feminism (Carastathis, 2016; Lugones, 2010). As mentioned in Chapter Eight, decolonial feminism draws attention to how colonialism acts as a structure that shapes how race, gender, and class interact to create oppressive environments, often overlooked by intersectional frameworks (Carastathis, 2016; Lugones, 2010). While this section of the chapter highlights the lack of intersectionality in safe sport policies and practices for the SFD NGOs interviewed/whose policies were analyzed, it does so by turning to the overlaps and interconnections between decolonial feminism and intersectionality (see Carastathis, 2016) to enhance safeguarding interventions (e.g., policies) and practices. A decolonial feminist approach suggests that SFD NGOs would benefit from examining cases of abuse and maltreatment related to gender, race and class by grounding safe sport initiatives and policies in the local realities of children and youth, rather than focusing on each factor in isolation. As the findings suggest, intersectional, decolonial feminist approaches would bolster safe sport practices within, through and around SFD because these lenses would draw attention to how colonial logics create and shape gendered, racial and class-based spaces and how such socially constructed spaces can marginalize and risk the safety of children and youth. For example, interviews with some participants, like Umer (NGO 2, Pakistan) explained that the NGO does not face issues of gender equality, but rather the NGO faced issues with race and racism. Umer's example, among many other interviewees' examples, noted that it was significant to

only address issues of gender, race and class, as applicable to their situation to safeguard young participants. Such remarks illustrated a profound lack of intersectional approaches.

Advocating for the use of intersectional approaches, Riki Wilchins (2020) notes in an interview that "gender norms never impact behaviour in isolation, they are always interacting with other factors like race, class, sex, ethnicity, gender, etc." Yet, many participants inadvertently applied the 'single axis thinking' concept by treating gender, race and class in isolation rather than examining how such factors can contribute to safe sporting experiences for young participants within, through and around the SFD program (Crenshaw, 1989). The participant, Suman (NGO 3, India) explained that they believed that addressing gender inequalities within the NGO was not important. Rather, Suman illustrated that she had a sense of responsibility to 'getting the girls out of their homes,' overlooking how economic and racial injustices can limit and restrict a girl's mobility in countries such as India.

Rather, SFD NGO staff members were heavily focused on 'gender' and addressing gender inequalities towards young women and girls. Indeed, a number of SFD scholars have emphasized the importance of understanding how intersecting forms of race, gender, and class can impact the lived experiences of children and youth, especially women and girls, who participate in sport and physical activity programs (i.e., SFD) (Hayhurst et al., 2021; Ratna & Samie, 2018). However, the lack of intersectionality stems not only from staff members' conceptualizations of gender, race, and class, but also from Global North policies (e.g., International Safeguards for Children in Sport) that overlook intersectionality in relation to safe sport. To be clear, I am not 'condemning' the participants for a lack of intersectional and decolonial thinking. Rather, I am trying to point to how SFD NGOs' safe sport policies – ingrained in Western frameworks – fail to consider how gender, race and class can intersect to create harmful practices that may place children and youth in vulnerable positions.

As the findings indicate, despite the lack of intersectional approaches to safe sport policies, staff were indeed aware of the issues and challenges related to gender that occurred within and around the SFD program. While not widely recognized, some staff members, such as Rahim (NGO 1, Pakistan) recalled issues that children and youth of low-income families faced in participating in their programs. However, staff rarely mentioned issues relating to a young participant's race. Despite the various forms of abuse and maltreatment that children and youth participants experience, there was an alarmingly high response rate regarding gender-related issues, particularly in relation to the social stigmas around young women and girls' participation within and around SFD programs. For example, staff members such as Dan (NGO 11, Peru) and Cole and Danni (NGO 6, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia) mentioned that due to social and cultural norms of the community (e.g., sport is for boys) girls were often prohibited from joining their programs. Paps (NGO 5, Bangladesh) mentioned how young girls are prohibited from joining the NGOs program to avoid being viewed by the community as 'manly.' Similarly, Emma and Nancy (NGO 8, Turkey) noted how young girls cannot cut their hair in ways that make them appear 'manly.' The need to uphold femininity and beauty standards stemmed from a broader concern that if young girls and women indulged in 'masculine acts,' they would not get married and be a burden to their families. The concern of 'getting girls married off' is not uncommon in Global South countries, and arranged child marriages are a customary practice (see Oxford, 2018). Indeed, the participation of women and girls in SFD programs was shaped by the number of domestic duties and obligations imposed on them by their families, which aligns with previous work on sport, gender and development (see Hayhurst et al., 2021).

Shehu (2016) suggests that SFD programs may often parallel Western agendas of modernity, and in this research study, such agendas may influence and shape the social and political positions and identities of young participants. Further, SFD programs, such as the type of programs mentioned in this study by the participants such as reproductive and menstrual programs for girls (offered by NGO 4 and

NGO 10) can perpetuate harmful notions of 'needing improvement' or 'empowerment' through regulating the mobility, and activities of children and youth (Shehu, 2016). These statements by SFD scholars, such as Shehu (2016), are consistent with the findings of this research study, where SFD programs themselves can (un)intentionally place young participants in harm. Yet, problematically, the findings indicate that staff members did not discuss how the programs themselves (i.e., through the SFD program) may potentially create abusive conditions for young participants (Bacchi, 2012). Indeed, while SFD initiatives strive to address issues of gender, race and alleviate class-based inequities, SFD programming may often (in)directly perpetuate hegemonic, masculine norms - especially when failing to account for the intersections of gender with race, class and colonialism (Saavedra, 2009).

To highlight a few examples of how SFD programs perpetuate notions of harm towards their young participants, Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) mentioned that the NGO teaches young girls about sexual and reproductive health. This form of education empowers girls to safeguard themselves from various forms of exploitation (e.g., rape, unwanted pregnancies, contracting diseases). Ari recalled that through this program, girls 'would understand' safe methods to nurture and safeguard their bodies. Ari also mentioned that the NGO recruits young girls through having a male figure to advocate for their involvement in the SFD program. Furthermore, Mona (NGO 4, India) explained that the NGO teaches young girls about contraceptives and family planning methods, since many of the young girls participating in the program go into prostitution to gain incomes for their families. While these programs may be well-intentioned, they reinforce gender norms, stigmas, and reproduce the notion that sport is inherently male (Cooky, 2009; Hayhurst et al., 2014; Saavedra, 2009). Although these organizations have a goal to provide education and awareness about culturally sensitive and taboo topics, placing young girls at the forefront of taking charge of their own reproductive and sexual health overlooks the very structures that can exploit young girls in these aspects (Sasser, 2017). In some ways, SFD NGO staff members discursively labelled young girls as

'sexual stewards,' who are (sexually) responsible, moral, and will bear children when the time is right (Sasser, 2017). However, these programs overlook male dominance and masculinist values within the environments that young girls navigate (Sasser, 2017). Thus, by placing the onus on young girls to become 'sexual stewards,' staff members may risk (re)harming young participants *through* their programs.

One interpretation of the findings pertaining to how participants can be harmed *through* SFD programs is that the staff members sought to safeguard the program from criticism and prevent the program from being labelled as 'bad,' and thus, avoided discussions about how the program itself can be improved (Fairclough, 1989, 1995). This discursive approach is shaped by the identified problem representation, donor relations, and institutional pressures where NGO staff members are expected to uphold the notion of 'sport for good' (Kidd, 2011). In many ways, Mona (NGO 4, India) and Ari (NGO 10, Kenya) were (un)intentionally placing the responsibility on young girls to safeguard themselves and to be sexually responsible. The absence of including these safeguarding practices within safe sport and organizational policies illuminates Foucauldian understandings of governmentality (Foucault, 1991, 200). Specifically, it illustrates how neoliberal ideologies are sustained through SFD programs, whereby placing the onus on young girls to safeguard their bodies is not characterized as a 'safe sport' practice, but is actually a system of governing women and girls with the intent of creating successful 'development' stories (Foucault, 1991, 2000).

Taken together, these problem representations emerged as a result of an absence of intersectionality and decolonial thinking, where instead of problematizing colonialism, colonial logics and legacies are sustained through power and knowledge (Carastathis, 2016). Additionally, rather than problematizing colonialism, the policy documents and interview excerpts, particularly the findings mentioned in this section, problematize 'gender' where young women and girls participating in 'development'-based initiatives (i.e., SFD) are placed at the forefront of dismantling and changing their

own lives (Bacchi, 2012; Fairclough, 1989, 1995). And, to be very clear, Global South SFD NGOs – at least the ones mentioned in this section – are at no fault for overlooking inequities perpetuated *through* their programs because they automatically assume that young women and girls living in these contexts 'need' this education as the West has continuously framed ethnic women and girls as the 'Other' (Ratna & Samie, 2017). Framing young women and girls in the Global South as the 'Other' is a form of colonial knowledge production and to move towards intersectional approaches it is crucial to "move beyond and disrupt the universalising and polarising metanarratives that are born out of racist and imperialist epistemologies" (Samie, 2017, p. 35; see also Ratna et al., 2017).

Additionally, the problematizing of 'gender' overlooks how class and race intersect to influence and shape gendered experiences. However, decolonial feminists argue that current understandings of intersectionality focus on how gender, race and class intersect to create oppressive conditions, especially for women and girls (Carastathis, 2016; Federici, 2004; Lugones, 2010). However, decolonial feminists argue that intersectional frameworks often overlook how colonialism – a pervasive form of knowledge and power – is not merely another axis of oppression, but is responsible for shaping factors, such as gender, race and class themselves. Lugones (2007) refers to the "colonial/modern gender system," which highlights how colonial legacies and violence constructed gender, race and class together not as interlocking forms of oppression, but rather as jointly fabricated realities. In essence, the absence of intersectional thinking and narrow focus around gender, staff members and their policy documents – at least the ones referred to in this section and overall thesis – tended to overlook how gender-based issues that girls and women faced within and around the SFD program are jointly fabricated realities. These realities have been built on 'colonial grounds' and sustained by colonial powers and knowledge systems, which are embedded within 'safe sport' policies

9.5 Is Decolonizing 'Safe Sport' Possible?

Finally, the fifth discourse constructed by the participants and policy documents was "decolonizing knowledge around/within/through safe sport: Global North-South tensions in the politics of protection," which responds to the second research question. Scholarship that focuses on decolonizing sport (Forsyth et al., 2023; Szto, 2024) suggests centering and understanding Indigenous experiences and voices in sport and how sport has been used as an active site of resistance. Similarly, in the case of safe sport and this study, centering the lived experiences and voices of native and local populations living in Global South contexts is critical in order to effectively safeguard children and youth from maltreatment. Although the findings of this thesis suggest that some staff members verbally resisted Western-centric forms of knowledge (see Chapter Seven), similarly, Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach highlighted how the participants did not view decolonizing knowledge as a necessary act, as there were consequences that came with doing so, which this section elaborates on by examining the policy to practice gap.

Foucauldian theory of power and knowledge examines how power influences discourses and knowledge particularly in terms of *whose* knowledge is considered appropriate (see Iqbal et al., in press; Foucault, 1972, 1980; Nicholls et al., 2011; Rossi, 2004). In the case of safe sport and this research study, many participants asserted that context-specific practices, which addressed the local realities and needs of young participants, were being employed within and around their programs. By using Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, it helped to identify how the lack of these practices within SFD NGOs' formal policies was not a concern. Rather, SFD NGOs' and their policy documents represented the creation of safe sport policies to sustain funding. The participants from NGO 6, NGO 12, and NGO 7 stated that safeguarding policies is often an eligibility requirement to receive financial support. This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature (e.g., see Kisakye et al., 2023; see also Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017, 2020). However, while these scholars do not directly mention the implementation of safe sport policies as a means to secure donor funds, they do acknowledge how a lack of financial support can hinder the implementation

of policies, especially in diverse, and underfunded contexts. Since SFD programs are underfunded, staff members faced difficulties in securing funds from international, private, or government donors (see Jones, 2008; Okada, 2018). The challenges for SFD NGOs operating in Global South contexts in securing funds are relatively more difficult compared to those in the Global North (see McSweeney et al., 2019). In response, SFD NGOs in Global South contexts create safe sport policies and tailor their organizational policies to appeal to funding agencies (Svensson, 2017). This idea was further supported by Cole (NGO 6, Laos, Philippines, Cambodia), who mentioned that SFD NGOs gain access to donor funds by having safeguarding policy(ies) despite a lack of practice.

Decolonial feminist theory critiques Western forms of knowledge, current colonial power structures and interrogates the geopolitics of knowledge (Manning, 2021; Reiter, 2018; Said, 1978). In similar vein, Fairclough (1989, 1995) asserts that the use of language within a given text holds an immense amount of power, which is often associated with colonial ways of knowledge. In this case, Western power is sustained through the need for funds and financial resources. In relation to the results – and as outlined in Chapters Seven and Eight – SFD NGO staff members operating in diverse Global South contexts felt obligated to work with Global North 'experts' in creating safe sport policies for their organizations. The obligation that staff members felt to adapt Global North curated safe sport policies reveals that Global North safe sport policies are the 'gold standard' and 'ideal' frameworks that will effectively protect children and youth and prevent them from facing precarity.

Furthermore, NGO staff emphasized an obligation or need to work with Global North entities due to financial constraints. Using Bacchi (2012) and CDA to analyze ten (10) SFD NGO safe sport policies, there was a heavy uptake – and adaptation of – Western safe sport frameworks observed within each NGO policy. The compliance and obligation with Western and Global North-centric safe sport policies indicate the dismissal of alternative forms of knowledge (see Reiter, 2018) and illustrate potentially unequal power

relations. Fairclough (1989) highlights how language "functions in maintaining and changing power relations in contemporary society" and notes how people can resist and change them (p. 9). The findings of this thesis support the idea of resistance, as in Chapter Eight, staff members noted the multiple challenges in working with Global North entities to create safe sport policies. For example, Suman (NGO 3, India) highlighted the challenges she faced when working with Global North entities. Specifically, she signified that Global North entities "just don't understand" the various challenges that Global South NGOs face. However, there were other staff members (see Chapter Eight) who chose to stay silent when discussing their working relations with the Global North. It is essential not to confuse these silences with defeat, but rather to view them as a form of resistance and advocacy (Nachman et al., 2023). Despite pushback and resistance from some interviewees, it appeared that the majority of SFD NGO staff ultimately adapted to Global North safe sport policies, as these policies were tied to their organizational ability to secure donor funds. The disconnect between safe sport policy and practice was thus evident not only in the need for donor funds but also in the glaring disparities in defining and implementing safe sport practices. Thus, decolonizing 'safe sport' is not possible as long as safe sport policies and practices are tied to colonial logics of funding and power, which I further explain in the following section.

9.6 So, What Does This All Mean? Answering the Research Questions and Conclusion

This section of the chapter synthesizes the key findings of this study and the contents presented in Chapters Eight and Seven to draw explicit answers to each of the research questions, which are: 1) how have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' within, through, and around their child and youth programming in the Global South?; and 2) have SFD NGO staff members (e.g., coaches, program administrators, board of directors) addressed intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and decolonizing knowledge production within their safe sport policies and programs? If so, how?

First, and taken together, the five discourses emphasized the need to move away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to safe sport and safeguarding children and youth in SFD NGO programming, particularly within diverse contexts where the risks and realities for young participants are different. Moreover, safe sport policies, such as the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, were primarily developed by experts from the Global North (e.g., UNICEF) and are underpinned by Western forms of knowledge (see Kisakye et al., 2023; Tak et al., 2024). It is possible that excerpts from UNICEF, for example, include individuals from the Global South who contributed to the creation of safe sport policies. However, the dominance of Global North actors within these organizations (e.g., UNICEF) entails that the theoretical and foundational understandings of 'safe sport' are largely influenced to reproduce Western-centric forms of knowledge. As mentioned in Chapter One, while Global North countries continue to struggle with implementing 'safe sport' themselves, in turn, this research study has questioned the reliability and validity of Western understandings of 'safe sport' across diverse contexts.

These policies are then expected to be applied and taken up by sport organizations, including SFD NGOs, around the globe. However, such policies are often ill-suited to address the complex social, cultural, and political contexts of countries in the Global South, where many SFD organizations often operate (Rhind et al., 2015). Through Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, the analysis of selected SFD NGO policies (n = 10) revealed a significant reliance on Western-centric language (e.g., "child protection," and "do no harm"). This suggests that Global North safe sport frameworks tend to: 1) overlook the cultural and social norms of Global South contexts (at least, in the Global South contexts represented in this study); 2) fail to incorporate country-specific requirements; and 3) tend to disregard the geographical context as it relates to sport and violence. Thus, the findings herein represent one of the first studies to explore the perspectives of SFD NGO staff and their policy documents in relation to how geographical diversity influences the implementation of safe sport policies. I argue, then, that SFD NGOs that continue to

implement policies that overlook factors of environmental and geographical violence (see Chapter Seven) risk placing children and youth in harm's way, which is the precise opposite of the majority of SFD NGO's mandates.

Previous literature has suggested that safe sport and safeguarding policies more broadly must be adapted to reflect the local realities and 'geography' (e.g., physical terrain, landscape) of diverse contexts (see Brackenridge et al., 2010; see also European Union, 2022). In addition, past researchers have underlined the importance of creating safe sport policies and practices that are aligned with local socio-cultural norms and contexts (Kisakye et al., 2023; Tak et al., 2024; Solstad & Strandbu, 2019). Yet, and as mentioned earlier, this thesis study underlined the importance of creating safe sport policies that are respectful of the often complex and local realities of children and youth and the physical spaces that they occupy. Also, this study extends the findings and work of Tak et al. (2024) that highlight the importance of incorporating geo-sociocultural norms of local contexts into safe sport policies.

To put the answers to each research question plainly, SFD NGO staff members conceptualized and applied the concept of 'safe sport' in relation to the local realities of children and youth living in local communities where the NGO operates. Yet, safe sport was only conceptualized and applied within and around the SFD program, and this chapter highlighted, there was an absence of recognizing *how the program itself can create abusive environments.* While staff members understood and applied safe sport practices in light of local realities (e.g., lack of education around menstruation, and lack of financial support for street children), the NGOs' policies did not reflect these practices. Then, in turning to research question two, and as discussed throughout this chapter, safe sport knowledge is constantly regulated by Global North powers through the reinforcement of funding and allocation of financial resources, which ultimately raises concerns around *whose* knowledge counts. In turn, participants were constrained from decolonizing knowledge production, despite their verbal acts of resistance. Further, staff members did not

adequately address issues of race, gender and class, and rather problematized 'gender' and overlooked how such factors are constantly shaped by colonial powers, which determines *who* gets to participate in SFD programs. This chapter argues that a decolonial feminist approach may be the first step in dismantling colonial powers and knowledge production, so that safe sport policies can better reflect lived experiences that are cognizant of race, gender and class. Thus, the question that now remains is whether decolonizing safe sport is even possible, which was briefly answered through discourse five.

To echo Global South scholars, decolonizing safe sport can be achieved if there is a shared, collaborative responsibility in knowledge production, alleviating North-South power (im)balances, dismantling colonial discourses and integrating a critically reflexive and decolonial approach to safe sport and SFD (Amara, 2010; Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2020; Ratna & Samie, 2018, Saavedra, 2009). Although staff members highlighted forms of resistance and called for a shift away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to safe sport, advocating instead for an inclusive paradigm that includes different forms of knowledge, local realities, geography and geo-sociocultural norms of Global South contexts, this discursive act (i.e., the verbal recognition of moving away from a 'one-size-fits-all' approach) functions as a form of decolonizing.

And yet, safe sport itself cannot be decolonized if the creation of safe sport policies is tied to colonial logics (e.g., funding). Therefore, I argue that safe sport operates as an extension of colonialism and colonial ideologies, where Global North powers are historically responsible for using settler-colonial violence to dominate the Global South. Consequently, these safe sport policies represent a daunting practice of safety and 'safe sport' upon the very regions they once colonized. This paradox of safe sport in/through/around SFD is troubling and reveals the ongoing and prevalent influences of colonial epistemologies and dominance. To create and envision a 'decolonized,' safe sporting environment,

colonial logics must be dismantled, which involves creating context-specific, geographically relevant, and intersectional policies.

The next chapter outlines the study's limitations and implications. I then provide policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders, including SFD NGO staff members, policymakers, academics in sport management, and practitioners in safe sport. Finally, I conclude the chapter and the overall thesis by outlining directions for future research.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion and Recommendations

In this chapter, I discuss the research implications and provide policy recommendations based on the results of this study and the existing literature. First, I outline the scholarly implications and key contributions that this study has made to the fields of safe sport, sport for development, policy studies and sport management. Then, I outline policy recommendations for SFD NGO staff members operating child and youth programming across the globe, policymakers more specifically, and relevant stakeholders responsible for upholding safe sport practices. I then identify some of the challenges and limitations involved in this study and suggest ideas for future research and methodological approaches in the field of safe sport and SFD more generally.

10.1 Scholarly Implications and Key Contributions

Methodologically, by using Bacchi's WPR approach, I was able to understand and investigate the underlying problem representations of SFD NGOs' safe sport policies by exploring how safe sport is implemented within, through, and around SFD programs. I demonstrated that safe sport policymaking is often viewed by SFD NGO staff as an avenue to pursue and acquire financial support, rather than solely focusing on child and youth protection. Through this research study and the discourses produced by the participants and their perceptions about 'safe sport,' I was able to provide key insights on safe sport policies and practices within SFD programs operating in a number of Global South contexts, which contributes to bridging the gap (i.e., lack of scholarship on safe sport in the Global South, especially within SFD) that scholars advocate for (Kisakye et al., 2023; Ratna & Samie, 2018; Rhind & Mori, 2020; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere; 2017; 2020; Tak et al., 2024). The discourses created contributed to demonstrating how the concept of 'safe sport' is applied and conceptualized in various countries in the Global South – at least the one's referenced in this study – where SFD NGOs operate.

Specifically, this research highlighted how geography, broadly understood as the physical, social, and political conditions of place, shapes the ways in which abuse and maltreatment manifest in sport (for development) contexts, especially within the Global South. That is, geographic factors such as unstable infrastructure, environmental degradation, urban overcrowding, and proximity to conflict zones are often overlooked in dominant safe sport literature, which tends to prioritize Global North frameworks. That is, I provided novel insights into how geography, in terms of physical terrain and landscape – as described to me by NGO staff members – can perpetuate the abuse and harm of child and youth participants. Issues of geography and examining its relation to sport and violence remain relatively overlooked and unexamined in the safe sport and SFD literature. Drawing on a decolonial feminist lens, this analysis strived to disrupt the assumption that safe sport may be universally applied to 'global SFD'; instead, this theoretical framework prioritized how colonial histories and spatial injustices differently affect children and youth in marginalized communities.

Throughout this study, I synthesized diverse understandings and definitions of safe sport offered by participants, underscoring how Global South perspectives challenge and reframe Global North conceptualizations by examining how colonial legacies continue to shape the everyday realities, social, cultural, political and geographic landscapes of diverse regions. Then, I highlighted the persistent gap between policy and practice, specifically pertaining to the absence of local forms of safe sport knowledge and practices, which is the case in the scope of this research, as safe sport policies are largely tied to acquiring financial support. I also drew attention to the dire – and stark need for – intersectional and decolonial feminist approaches that foreground the lived experiences of children and youth facing systemic violence rooted in gender, race, colonialism, and class-based oppression. Additionally, throughout this thesis, I provided new critical insights into how Western-centric frameworks generate policies that overlook the intersections of gender, race, colonialism, and class in defining 'safe sport,' and

how children's and youths' human rights are not universally understood or applied, speaking to the need to integrate the concept of vernacularization (Merry, 2006, 2015). Overall, the discourses revealed that international safe sport and child protection policies are often unregulated and inapplicable across diverse contexts, concurring with other studies (e.g., Tak et al., 2024).

These contributions were drawn from Bacchi's (2012) WPR approach, through which I critically examined how safe sport policies construct and represent problems vis-à-vis interviews with staff and NGO policy document analysis, revealing how colonial forms of knowledge are embedded in and perpetuated through these representations, ultimately hindering the adequate implementation of safe sport in diverse Global South contexts. In short, WPR enabled me to analyze not only what is said, but also what is silenced, and how such problem representations and constructions of safe sport are exported to the Global South. This was further developed through Fairclough's (1989, 1995) and McGannon's (2016) CDA framework, which provided a lens to examine the discursive mechanisms – language, text, and power relations – through which colonial dominance is maintained. Taken together, these frameworks were bolstered by a decolonial feminist analysis that drew attention to how seemingly neutral policies can perpetuate epistemic violence and systems of inequality. Lastly, this research study is – to my knowledge – one of the first to focus explicitly on safe sport in SFD programs operating in the Global South, through incorporating diverse voices of NGO staff members from a variety of Global South countries.

Theoretically, decolonial feminism made it possible to better understand how safe sport in the context of SFD is shaped and influenced by colonialism and how related practices can place children and youth in precarious conditions. At the same time, decolonial feminism was essential for unpacking how knowledge pertaining to safe sport is produced, conceptualized, and implemented by SFD NGO staff members operating programs within Global South contexts. Further, this theoretical framework enabled

the examination of the geopolitics of knowledge, which recognizes the pluralization and value in amplifying alternative forms of knowledge (Manning, 2021, Reiter, 2018).

10.2 Policy Recommendations and Implications

The policy recommendations and implications of this study were informed by the perceptions of the participants (i.e., SFD NGO staff members) and their observations and experiences with 'safe sport.' Substantively, this research study highlights several areas of improving safe sport policies within SFD programs operating in the Global South and within Global North contexts, specifically in areas that are underserved and marginalized. Furthermore, this research study underlines the importance of shifting away from creating 'universal' safe sport policies that fail to account for local contexts in which these very policies are implemented. Thus, my policy recommendations are two-fold.

First, Global North entities should refrain from imposing Western knowledge systems on the Global South and instead *work with* Global South NGOs to create context-specific safe sport policies. While I recognize this recommendation is 'easier said than done,' nevertheless, in doing so, there would be a better opportunity for Global North entities to uphold international priorities of protecting children and youth from violence and abuse, especially within sport contexts, which often remains overlooked by these very entities. Further, I suggest fostering stronger collaborative knowledge production systems across the Global North and South to bolster international and political relations. For instance, Global North bodies involved in creating international safe sport policies for the sport and SFD sector, such as the UN or UNICEF, would benefit from having mechanisms in place to strive for equal prioritization of Global South voices in ongoing conversations and policy-making decisions regarding safeguarding and child protection. Scholars have shown how collaborative knowledge production may be achieved through participatory action research frameworks and methodologies, where research partnerships can be established with Global South safeguarding practitioners and community members (Cornwall & Jewkes,

1995; Darby, 2017; Zurba et al., 2022). To clarify, I am not suggesting that collaborative partnerships between the Global North and South will automatically dismantle ongoing forms of colonialism; rather, I argue that these initiatives can provide important steps towards decolonizing knowledge and developing inclusive safeguarding policies.

Second, safe sport policies must be inclusive of the Global South's geography (e.g., physical landscapes and climates) and respectful of the socio-cultural norms and political climates of these diverse contexts, as echoed by the participants in this research study. By grounding safe sport policies in the social, cultural, and political climates of the Global South, the SFD, and policy sector may better understand how such dynamic factors shape the lived realities of children and youth. Integrating a region's geography into safe sport policies means, for example, accounting for – and upholding – clear, actionable guidelines on how staff members can adjust or alter their activities to account for a number of environmental factors, including: 1) uneven playing fields, 2) narrow and unsafe transportation route, and 3) unhygienic spaces. There should also be tangible and realistic protocols for staff members on how to address cases of abuse or maltreatment that are aligned with local understandings of gender, race, class, human rights, and child protection. Put differently, SFD NGO safe sport policy making requires – full stop – a meticulous understanding of local contexts and complexities that attends to doing accountable and transformational policy development and implementation that is justice-oriented, with careful and thoughtful intersectional approaches (Sultana, 2021). In relation to these policy recommendations, I have provided a brief outline of a safe sport policy that incorporates context-relevant approaches, voices from the Global South and diverse forms of knowledge.

10.2.1 Safe Sport Policy Framework

Inspired by the participant's perceptions and motivations of safe sport, I propose the utilization of a safe sport policy acronym or framework 'GROUND,'[12] that can provide to be beneficial for policy makers to create safeguarding policies tailored to meet the local realities of diverse contexts. GROUND should be treated as a framework or acronym that can be embedded into existing safe sport policies and includes six guiding pillars. This framework or acronym encompasses the data produced by the SFD NGO interviewees and document analysis and aims to address the gaps presented in the literature related to the absence of context-specific safe sport policies, particularly geo-sociocultural practices (i.e., geographical, social and cultural norms). The acronym GROUND stands for **G**eo-sociocultural norms, **R**elevant to lived realities, **O**riented to changing climates, **U**ser-focused, **N**avigating practice, and **D**ialogues. In the table below, I have provided brief descriptions of the importance of each pillar in Table 6.0 below.

Table 6.0: Safe Sport Policy Framework - 'GROUND'

Pillar	**Description**
Geo-sociocultural norms	Safe sport policies must be adapted and grounded in local geographic landscapes and adhere to social and cultural norms of diverse communities.
Relevant to lived realities	Policies and safe sport practices must be contextually relevant, where the lived experiences of children and youth – related to their gender, race and class – are considered.
Oriented to changing climates	Safe sport policies must be adaptable to changing political and environmental climates that can place children and youth in precarious conditions.

[12] The term 'GROUND' was inspired by Suman's (NGO 3, India) reflections on resisting Global North and Western-centric safe sport policies and frameworks. Additionally, Suman's reflections on Global North-South tensions have motivated the title for this research study.

User-focused	Policies must be inclusive and centre the voices of children and youth that participate in SFD programs. By doing so, safe sport can be inclusive of how children and youth in the Global South define safe spaces and can be explored in future research studies.
Navigating practice	This pillar refers to safe sport policies – including guidelines and practices that are achievable and realistic – to bridge the gap between policy and practice.
Dialogues	Safe sport policies must resist Global North and Western-centric approaches to navigating abuse and maltreatment within SFD programs that operate in Global South contexts.

I came to conceptualize 'GROUND' through the participants, particularly Suman's (NGO 3, India), reflections concerning the challenges in working with Global North safe sport 'experts.' The term 'ground' itself was taken from Suman's powerful remark during the interview where she had said: "We're the one's working on the ground, the 'real' ground,"[13] which signified how 'safe sport' cannot be a universal concept nor can it be treated in isolation from the context it is being implemented in. Discursively, the term 'ground' can be seen as a decolonial term that emphasizes and reinforces the importance of connecting to the land and is a step forward to (re)building 'safe' societies and sporting spaces that have been disrupted by settler-colonial violence exercised by Global North powers.

10.3 Limitations and Future Research Ideas

[13] This statement also informs the title of this research study.

A key limitation of this study was that it only focused on the perspectives of SFD NGO staff members, including coaches, safeguarding officers, etc. While this was the targeted population of the study, it would have been beneficial to gain the perspectives of the participants themselves, the children and youth who participate in SFD initiatives; since safe sport policies are meant to serve and protect young participants, it is critical that their voices be included in the policymaking process. Another limitation of this study was the participant sample. This study only included fifteen (n=15) SFD NGOs from certain Global South countries, and did not include other countries, such as the Caribbean, Latin America, etc., and could have benefited from a more diverse sample. Additionally, the study only included English speaking participants, which limited the sample size. It is important to note that English can be considered a foreign or second language to individuals and groups living in countries in the Global South. As such, the study could have benefited by including a linguistically diverse range of participants to examine how 'safe sport' and 'safeguarding' are conceptualized across different languages.

In addition, future research can investigate how children and youth perceive safe sport policies and how they foster their own 'safe spaces' within SFD initiatives operating in Global South contexts. Through community-based participatory action research, future research may consider creating a community advisory board (CAB), which includes voices of Global South safe sport practitioners, policymakers, and children and youth. Importantly, future research should focus on understanding safety from a child's and/or youth's perspectives, which moves beyond framing children and youth as being passive recipients of adult-formulated safeguarding policies (Moustakas et al., 2023).

10.4 "First, do no Harm": Concluding Remarks

I began this thesis with the medical principle of "first, do no harm" to foreground the significance of upholding this practice within the frameworks of safe sport. The medical principle originated in Western bioethics and humanitarian discourses. It suggests – in effect – that the best one can do is to minimize

harm, implying that some level of harm is expected or even, perhaps, tolerable. From a decolonial feminist lens, this baseline assumption of 'do no harm' may be challenged by asking: Whose harm is anticipated? Who defines what counts as harm? Who gets to measure or minimize harm? And most importantly, whose knowledge of preventive measures against harm counts? As a foundational principle in many professional fields – including medicine and global development – 'do no harm' has been used in SFD as a guiding principle to avoid exacerbating conflict or creating unintended consequences in vulnerable communities (Kay, 2009). Indeed, SFD programs have taken up the phrase within their safe sport policy documents, as illustrated in Chapters Seven and Eight. Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, while there is an intention to implement and uphold this principle, there are gaps and – as I have argued – the application remains deficient.

As the medical practice of "first, do no harm" becomes universalized, it is important to underline the need to localize and contextualize this principle, especially in reducing harm, abuse, and violence within local and diverse contexts. Through my research, I was able to virtually engage in conversations with a diverse range of people and organizations living and operating within Global South contexts. I strived to truly listen to their valuable insights on how safe sport is conceptualized and implemented within their local communities. Despite the participants including Westernized forms of safe sport knowledge into their policies – for the sole purposes of gaining access to financial resources – they also stated that safe sport is not a universal concept, but rather a contested one that is challenged by local social, cultural, political, colonial, and geographical contexts. In addition, as this thesis elucidated, safe sport must be approached through an intersectional and decolonial lens. A decolonial and intersectional approach to safe sport acknowledges various forms of knowledge and recognizes how intersecting factors, such as gender, race, and class, can impact children and youth within sport and SFD programs. I hope that the policy recommendations I offered can be explored further in future research and refined through hands-on,

participatory, action-oriented and collaborative policy work with SFD NGOs and their young participants in the Global South.

Furthermore, I would like to acknowledge and illuminate the tremendous work that SFD NGOs are already doing to provide safe spaces for their child and youth participants, as well as for being candid in the interview process and beyond. As I navigated this research study, I questioned my ability to conduct this work and how my own positionality and privilege played a role. However, I came to understand that my privilege and position in this world are the reasons why I should be conducting this work. As a settler and individual who is complicit in benefiting from colonial practices, it is my responsibility to actively dismantle and decolonize Western-centric forms of knowledge and to create spaces and value for alternative forms of knowledge, especially concerning child and youth protection.

Similarly to how medical practitioners and doctors take the oath of "first, do no harm," as practitioners, academics and researchers, we too need to take this oath. By doing so, we recognize and pledge to decolonize colonial practices and structures and appreciate the value of approaching safe sport through cultural sensitivity. As I conclude this thesis, let us all take this oath and make a commitment to foregrounding local voices and resisting the reproduction of harmful and abusive (safe sport) policies that are meant to protect children and youth. To be truly cognizant of safe sport, safety starts with us; with reflexive humility, a deeper accountability to colonial histories of harm, and an interest in co-creating justice, care and safety.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Email Template

Subject: You can contribute to 'Safe Sport' Research!

Hello,

My name is Isra Iqbal, and I am a Master of Science student at York University in Toronto, Canada and I need your help!

Currently, I am conducting a research study that is interested in exploring 'safe sport' policies in programming catered towards children and youth administered by sport for development (SFD) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Specifically, I am examining how (if at all) these 'safe sport' policies are effectively protecting children and youth from abuse and maltreatment within the sport for development (SFD) organization.

The goal of this study is to investigate how SFD NGO staff members, operating programs focused on youth and children in the global South, conceptualize and implement 'safe sport' practices, while addressing intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and contributing to the decolonization of knowledge production through their policies and programs.

This study will result in the creation of policy recommendations for SFD NGOs and the scholarly community to provide measures to effectively protect and safeguard children in youth participating in sport programming within global South contexts. These policies will include country-specific requirements, social, cultural and political factors of the global South region and address geography in relation to safe sport, which is often dismissed within current policies.

The objectives of this study can only be met with your support and participation. I am reaching out to a wide and diverse range of SFD NGOs operating children and youth programming across the global South. I am hoping to conduct virtual interviews with SFD NGO staff members, policy-makers, board of directors, etc., to engage in conversation around the implementation (or lack of) safe sport within programming.

If you would like to participate, please see the eligibility requirements below and what you will be asked to do:

- SFD NGO must be located in the global South or have programs that operate in global South countries (i.e., the Middle East, South Asia, South America).
- SFD NGO must provide child and youth programming from 6-18 years of age.
- SFD NGO does not have to have implemented safeguarding measures.
- SFD NGO will be asked to participate in a short interview (i.e., 30-45 minutes) virtually via Zoom.

If you meet these requirements, are interested in the study or would like further clarification, please respond back to this email.

Sincerely,

Isra Iqbal

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form Template

Date:

Study Name: Beyond the game: Exploring Safe Sport policies in Sport for Development (SFD) Initiatives to Protect Children and Youth Globally.

Researchers:

Supervisor
Dr. Lyndsay Hayhurst
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Purpose of the Research: We are doing a research project about how (if at all) Sport for Development (SFD) non-government organizations (NGO) operating within global South contexts are constructing 'safe sport' within, through and around their policies and programs offered to children and youth. According to the International Research Network on Violence and Integrity in Sport (IRNOVIS), up to 44% of children participating in sport are victims of violence at the hands of perpetrators (i.e., parents, coaches), bystanders, and even through the physical environment (IRNOVIS, 2020). The consequences of abuse and violence on the physical, psychological, and emotional health and development of children and youth remain understudied (UNODC, 2021). Furthermore, concerns (i.e., abuse, violence and maltreatment towards children and youth) have, in part, motivated the steady proliferation of safeguarding measures and research to ensure that children are protected from harm (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022;). And yet, global South countries remain under-represented in discourse pertaining to the prevalence of child and youth maltreatment in sport, despite the increasing public awareness, media scrutiny, and research

reporting the prevalence of maltreatment in sport Willson et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on safe sport and child protection in these regions remains sparse (Lang & Hartill, 2014; Rhind et al., 2020). As such, the objective of this study is to investigate how SFD NGO staff members, operating programs focused on youth and children in the global South, conceptualize and implement 'safe sport' practices, while addressing intersecting issues of race, gender, and class, and contributing to the decolonization of knowledge production through their policies and programs.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: We are seeking to recruit SFD NGO staff members, including policymakers, board of directors, program administrators, etc., that operate SFD programs in global South regions (i.e., The Middle East, South Asia, South America) and provide child and youth-based sport programming (ages 6-18) for virtual semi-structured interviews. Specifically, participants will be asked to partake in semi-structured interviews (30-45 minutes in length) via Zoom. The interview will be audio and video recorded. However, if you would not like the interview to be audio/video recorded, the interviewer will take notes instead. In the interview participants will be asked a series of questions and engage in conversation about their policies and sport for development programming. Furthermore, participants may be asked to elaborate on the implementation (or lack of) 'safe sport' policies that govern their SFD programs and strive towards safeguarding children and youth.

Risks and Discomforts: We anticipate minimal to low levels of risks for the participants The research focuses on interviewing 10 SFD NGO staff members to better understand their conceptualization around safeguarding children and youth from abuse and maltreatment within sport contexts. While no sensitive questions will be asked during the semi-structured interviews, discussion around safe sport and safeguarding in general may provoke emotional and psychological discomfort. If a participant recalls or shares a sensitive experience, which invokes emotionally or psychological discomfort, we have protocols in place to be able to support the participant. These are as follows: 1) immediately providing emotional support and a safe space without continuing probing or pressing for information; 2) providing a break to the participant (if needed) and if they can continue the interview, to proceed. If they are not able to continue the interview, we will then end the interview; and 3) directing them to mental health support services.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: By including SFD NGOs staff members who operate programming in global South regions, this study may contribute to SFD research by addressing the social, cultural, historical and political factors that influence abuse, violence and maltreatment towards children and youth. Furthermore, this research will create policy recommendations that include the social and cultural contexts of global South countries, and address country-specific elements and geographical concerns. The hops it that such knowledge will benefit the scholarly community they will be able to draw from the policy recommendations to inform future research in this field. Participants may not receive any direct benefits from their involvement in the project. However, since the participants will be engaging in discussion around safe sport and safeguarding children and youth, they may be able to gain knowledge about their own programming and ways to improve them. Furthermore, participants will receive results and conclusions of the research, will may help them inform their own NGOs safe sport policies if needed and better position themselves to protect the safety of children and youth. NGO staff will also be provided with a summary of the findings in an accessible format (i.e., infographics and digital platforms).

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or

to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the [treatment you may be receiving] [nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff] nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The principal investigator will keep a link that identifies you to your coded information, but this link will be kept secure and available only to the principal investigator and/or selected members of the research team. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential. Your data will be safely stored in a locked filing cabinet and a password encrypted Sharepoint file only accessible to the researchers indicated above. After December 31st, 2029, the online data will be destroyed via the deletion and overwrite of digital drives and hardcopy data will be destroyed via a cross-cut shredder. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of the semi-structured interviews prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Please note that at the end of the study, de-identified data may be deposited into one or more publicly accessible scientific repositories, such as York University Dataverse, so that data may be inspected and analyzed by other researchers. Please note that the survey is being conducted with the help of Qualtrics, a company not affiliated with York University and with its own privacy and security policies. There is always a risk during web-based transmission that data can be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers) and thus the confidentiality and privacy cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, teleconferencing/videoconferencing technology (via Zoom) has some privacy and security risks. It is possible that information could be intercepted by unauthorized people (hacked) or otherwise shared by accident. This risk can't be completely eliminated. We want to make you aware of this. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact Isra Iqbal (iisra@yorku.ca) for further information. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session."

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Lyndsay Hayhurst by e-mail (lhayhurs@yorku.ca) or Isra Iqbal by e-mail (iisra@yorku.ca). This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, York University (e-mail ore@yorku.ca). This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential. **Legal Rights and Signatures**:

I *(fill in your name here)*, consent to participate in *(insert study name here)* conducted by *(insert investigator name here)*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____ **Date**_____

Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

You must seek additional consent by including check boxes or requesting additional signatures for the following:

1. **Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. **Video recording**

☐ I consent to the video-recording of my interview(s).

I _____ consent to the use of images of me (including video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	☐ N	☐ Y
In print, digital and slide form	☐ N	☐ Y
In academic presentations	☐ N	☐ Y
In media	☐ N	☐ Y
In thesis materials	☐ N	☐ Y

3. **Consent to waive anonymity**

I, _____ consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

4. **Consent to use pseudonym**

Please fill in the pseudonym (name) you would like the researchers to use in the publications arising from this research: _____

5. **Consent to data deposit**

I understand that my de-identified data will be placed into an open research data repository. Y / N

6. Consent to use of quotes

I consent to the use of quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research? Y / N

☐ Check this box if you would like to receive a summary of the study findings (and please print your contact information in the space below).

If you do not check any of these boxes, you can still participate in the current study. You can also check these boxes off but decide in the future that you do not want to participate.

E-mail Address (please print): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone # (or where we can leave a message): _____

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Introduction

I want to start off by saying that I am grateful that you are willing to do this interview with me today. Thank you for taking some time to connect with me!

My name is Isra, and I am Master of Science Student at York University, and I am here today because I am interested in learning more about your role as [insert the SFD NGO staff member's role within the organization] and the ways your organization incorporates 'safe sport' practices into programming that work to protect children and youth participants.

I want to inform you that there are no physical risks or physical duties that may pose harm to you during this interview or research process. I hope we will engage in meaningful discussion and conversations. I want to remind you that everything said in this interview will be kept confidential, including organizational name, your name, age, job title, etc., and will not be shared to third parties or beyond research purposes.

I will be discussing potentially sensitive topics such as racism, abuse etc. [assurance that participants may choose to not answer questions and they may take a break or end the interview at any point].

Before we begin, do you have any questions about the process? Are you okay with proceeding to the questions?

Part I: (Background Information)

1. Can you tell me more about yourself? (i.e., age, race, gender, ethnicity, etc.)

2. What motivated you to join this SFD NGO (Probes: How long have you worked here? What is your current role?)
3. How did you come into your current role at [insert NGOs name]? What are your responsibilities?
4. Can you tell me more about the region(s) where your NGO operates programming for children and youth? [insert the country the SFD NGO operates from]

Part II: (Safe sport) → [use NGO's safe sport policies for probing]

1. Are you aware of the term 'safe sport'?

a) If so, how do you define it?
b) What does a 'safe sport environment' in SFD look like in your country/community context; or the countries where your NGO operates?

2. When did your NGO develop safe sport policies, and why? [Probe: Does your organization have a current or existing safe sport or safeguarding policy in place?]

3. [If YES to the above question] can you describe the process of creating and implementing these policies?

   a. What challenges have you encountered?
   b. What successes have you encountered?
   c. How (if at all) were challenges addressed?

4. What considerations did you make in creating these policies (e.g., in terms of language used, etc.)

5. [If NO to the above question] can you outline the reasons for not implementing such policies?

   a. What factors restrict the implementation of such policies?
   b. Would you consider implementing safe sport policies in the future?

Part III: [Race/gender/class in/through SFD and safe sport]
[SFD NGO safe sport policies will be used for probing]

1. What is the age range of your child and youth participants?

2. Approximately how many girls, boys, and gender-diverse youth participate in your programs?

3. Has your NGO created policies to address gender inequity or racism in/through SFD?
   a. If so, when did your NGO create these policies and why? What is the process like in developing these NGO policies? Considerations/challenges faced in relation to developing policies related to safeguarding child and youth participants?
   b. If not, what do you think could be done to create such policies, if there is interest?

4. Do you think the policies you currently have in place addressing sexism and racism by your organization do enough to ensure a safe and supportive sport environment for child and youth SFD participants?

5. Has there been reports of harassment or abuse towards the participants?
    a. Have you noticed any accounts of violence and abuse towards the participants during programming?
    b. If so, what influences the culture of abuse? (i.e., social norms, cultural norms, etc).

6. If accounts of abuse take place, what measures have the organization put in place?
    a. If there aren't any measures, can you provide a reason(s) for their absence?

7. Do you think the policies you currently have in place by your organization do enough to ensure a safe and supportive sport environment for children and youth participating in SFD?

8. Do you have anything to add to our discussion today? Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Snowball: Do you know any other organizations who may want to participate in the study? Located anywhere in the global south in your network?

Conclusion
So, our conversation today is officially over! I want to thank you again for your time in addressing such vulnerable and sensitive questions. I acknowledge that this task was probably not easy, but nevertheless, I (virtually) extend and express my gratitude for your involvement. Before we end, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix D: Recruitment Poster #1

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster #2

Appendix F: Ethics and Ethics Amendment Approval

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OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS (ORE)
Kaneff Tower

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Toronto ON
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Tel 416 736 5914
www.research.yorku.ca

Certificate #:	**STU 2024-110**
Approval Period:	**10/29/24-10/29/25**

ETHICS APPROVAL

To: **Isra Iqbal**
Graduate Student of Kinesiology & Health Science
iisra@yorku.ca

From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Gillian Parekh, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Title: **Beyond the game: Exploring Safe Sport policies in Sport for Development (SFD) Initiatives to Protect Children and Youth Globally**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

I am writing to inform you that this research project, **"Beyond the game: Exploring Safe Sport policies in Sport for Development (SFD) Initiatives to Protect Children and Youth Globally"** has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Note that approval is granted for one year. Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **"RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Director, Office of Research Ethics

YORK
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Certificate #:	**STU 2024-110**
Initial Approval:	**10/29/24-10/29/25**
Amendments:	**Amendment approved: 12/12/24**
Renewals:	
Current Approval Period:	**10/29/24-10/29/25**

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ETHICS AMENDMENT APPROVAL

To: **Isra Iqbal - Graduate Student**
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From: Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Director, Research Ethics
(on behalf of Gillian Parekh, Chair, Human Participants Review Committee)

Date: Thursday, December 12, 2024

Title: **Beyond the game: Exploring Safe Sport policies in Sport for Development (SFD) Initiatives to Protect Children and Youth Globally**

Risk Level: ☒ Minimal Risk ☐ More than Minimal Risk

Level of Review: ☒ Delegated Review ☐ Full Committee Review

With respect to your research project entitled, **"Beyond the game: Exploring Safe Sport policies in Sport for Development (SFD) Initiatives to Protect Children and Youth Globally",** the committee notes that, as there are no substantive changes to either the methodology employed or the risks to participants in and/or any other aspect of the research project, a renewal of approval re the proposed amendment(s) to the above project is granted.

Any further changes to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process by submission of an amendment application to the HPRC prior to its implementation.

Ongoing research – research that extends beyond one year – must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research ethics (ore@yorku.ca) as soon as possible.

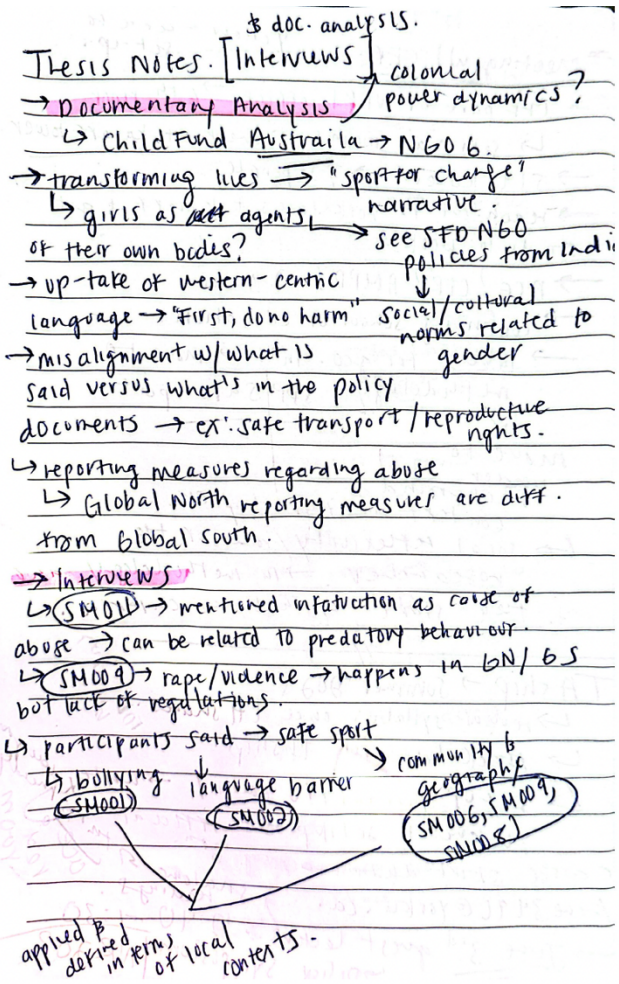
For further information on researcher responsibilities as it pertains to this approved research ethics protocol, please refer to the attached document, **"RESEARCH ETHICS: PROCEDURES to ENSURE ONGOING COMPLIANCE".**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Director,
Office of Research Ethics

Appendix G: Reflexive Field Notes



→ safe sport is not understood in the same way its understood here in the GN/Canada.
→ I question if the participants definitions of safe sport are actually "safe sport" → safe sport is localized.
→ Alex said that it must be adapted to our own context, but seemed he was interested in working w/ me to create safe sport policies for his NGO
↳ power imbalance? Global North-South tensions
→ geography is a big thing → I also did not adapt to the adverse geographical conditions of Pakistan
↳ neither did the staff member, Soman, when travelling to a Rural village in India.

Reflexive Fieldnote 1 – The Muslim Identity

During the interview with Rahim, he greeted me with 'Salaam,' a greeting common among the Muslim community. I responded with the same, 'Salaam.' As the conversation continued, I occasionally noticed Rahim using Islamic terms like Zakat and Fitrana. I chose not to comment on his use of such vocabulary, as I didn't want to impose my own understanding of these terms during the conversation. However, it seemed to me that Rahim wanted me to use the same terminology as well, to foster a deeper connection and a sense of solidarity or belonging. I wasn't just a researcher to him; I was someone who understood him and his background, which closely resembled my own. To Rahim, I was simply another Muslim fellow – a Hijabi (Reflexive Fieldnote, December 2024).

Reflexive Fieldnote 2 – Burnout and Exhaustion

When discussing with Suman the importance of providing children and youth with rest as a form of physical safety, I began to resonate with and relate to her insights. I was also shocked to hear about the rigorous and disciplined schedule that children and youth in her community experience. As someone who has faced burnout and exhaustion in her late teens to early 20s, I couldn't imagine how a 5- or 14-year-old would understand or navigate such high stress and tension in their small bodies. During our conversation, I felt sympathy for the local children and youth and wished I could do more from afar to help. Perhaps my empathy stems from caring for my baby cousin, Aden, who is only 4 and takes long naps after returning from school. I have seen her exhausted after playing and socialising with her friends, and at that point, her day ends. I believe small bodies should not be exerted beyond their physical capacities (Reflexive Fieldnote, December 2024).

Appendix H: Mental Health Resources

Resource List

"We're the One's Working on the Ground, the 'Real' Ground": Exploring Tensions and Realities of Global South SFD NGOs in Fostering 'Safe Sport' Environments for Children and Youth

While we do not foresee any harm as a result of participating in the research interview, this sheet is provided to all participants should the topic we talked about be in any way stressful.

The interviewer will invite you to "debrief" toward the end of the research interview. However, should you require further opportunities to discuss any related issues please contact your health care provider (e.g., family doctor, counsellor, psychiatrist) or one of the following resources:

24-Hour Crisis Centres of Greater Toronto

- Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868
- Youthdale's Crisis Support Team: 416-363-9990
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto 24/7 (Indigenous clients) – Mental Health Crisis Management Service: 1 855 242-3310
- Assaulted Women's Helpline: 416 863-0511; Toll-free: 1 866 863-0511
- Community Crisis Program, Scarborough Health Network: 416 495-2891 for 24/7 telephone crisis support. Service borders: south to the lake, north to Steeles Avenue, east to Port Union Road, and west to Victoria Park
- Distress Centres of Greater Toronto: 416 408-4357 or 408-HELP
- Gerstein Crisis Centre: 416 929-5200
- Spectra Helpline: 416 920-0497 or 905 459-7777 for Brampton and Mississauga residents TTY: 905 278-4890; Languages: English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Portuguese

Appendix I: Geographical Information of Each Region

South Asia

The world's most densely populated region, South Asia, is home to one of the earliest peoples known as the Indus civilizations (Ryabchikov & Yefremov, 2025). The region is composed of various countries including India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and together these three countries are often referred to the 'Indian subcontinent' (Ryabchikov & Yefremov, 2025; Zeidan, 2025). Based on the responses from the social media campaign, SFD NGO staff from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were highly interested to participate in this research; an important recruitment feature considering that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are relatively unexplored contexts within the SFD and safe sport literature (see Levermore, 2016). According to Levermore (2016), SFD scholarship is geographically concentrated and heavily focused in Sub-Saharan Africa for a variety of reasons (i.e., alleviation of poverty). On the other hand, scholars have conducted research within South Asia but have focused on the relationship between 'gender,' and SFD, rather than safe sport (see Aslam, 2021; Green, 2007; Rahman & Joseph, 2024). Despite the region's formidable physical features, such as the Himalaya Mountains (Finlayson, 2019), the Indian subcontinent has historically experienced great political turmoil and tension. These dynamics continue to shape its current social, economic and political landscape. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus specifically on aspects of the political and economic context that are relevant to the research topic, particularly as they relate to sport.

Political Conflicts Between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh

Political conflict in the region began in 1947, when the British Empire ended its 200-year rule over the Indian subcontinent, resulting in the formation to two separate nations: Pakistan and India (Asrar, 2019). However, the process of partition was marked by violence and upheaval, as various interest groups clashed over territorial and political control. This unrest continued, ultimately leading to Bangladesh

gaining independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Asrar, 2019; Ryabchikov & Yefremov, 2025). Additionally, the legacy of British colonization has continued to exacerbate conflicts between the three countries and has deeply entrenched colonial and Eurocentric practices into their contemporary systems of governance (Rahman, 2018) – a dynamic explored further in the latter sections of this thesis.

Figure 4.0: Map of South Asia

Note: World Regional Geography (2019)

Southeast Asia

A unique feature of Southeast Asia is the cultural diversity that flourishes throughout the region (Andaya, 2025). This region is situated south of China and east of the Indian subcontinent and includes a vast range of countries, which are divided into 'mainlands' and 'island' areas including Laos and the Philippines (Andaya, 2025; Leinbach & Frederick, 2025). These two areas from the region will be the focus as it reflects the participant sample. The political history of Southeast Asia is marked by various periods of colonial rules and most of the region's states were in economic and social catastrophe (Frederick, 2018). The region was distributed among the French, British, Dutch, and Spanish and were

then replaced by the Americans through various colonial wars (Frederick, 2018). While the Japanese occupation introduced a more ferocious version of colonial rule, all the colonial regimes (i.e., French, British, Dutch and Spanish) utilized colonial violence to disarm the Indigenous populations to create Southeast Asia into a new worldwide capitalist system (Frederick, 2018). Indeed, these (neo-)colonial ideologies continue to shape current social and political systems despite Southeast Asia gaining independence and is evident through various economic practices and policies, religious associations, ethnic identities, and political dogmas (Frederick, 2018).

Figure 5.0: Map of Southeast Asia

Note: World Regional Geography (2019)

The Middle East

The Middle East, often called the 'cradle of civilization' due to the evolution and settlement of the world's earliest civilizations (Students of History, 2025), encompasses a wide range of countries including Turkey, Iraq, Palestine (i.e., West Bank and Gaza Strip), and Afghanistan (Augustyn, 2025), which will be the focus from this region. The Middle East has complex histories of colonialism and neocolonialism that has left many Arab nations in vulnerable positions (Asi, 2022; Council on Foreign

Relations, 2024).While the region has faced multiple structures of colonialism from various interest groups, including Europe, the United States of America, the French, etc., (Asi, 2022; Council on Foreign Relations, 2024), Iraq and Palestine were colonized by the British Empire (UN, 2025; Sharp, 2008). Later in history, Iraq gained political independence (Blake & Khadduri, 2025), and the British rule in Palestine ended, but current day Palestine is still under Israeli rule and governance (UN, 2025). The on-going political tensions between Palestine and Israel is deeply embedded in claims for land ownership, authority and settler colonialism that match the Israeli government's objectives (BBC, 2025). The origin point of this political war starts from 1948, but in recent events, Israel has now colonized and occupied Palestinian territories (i.e., the West Bank), which was accomplished through various means of settler colonialism and colonial violence (BBC, 2025).

Meanwhile Turkey, has never been under European powers or under a 'traditional' colonial rule it was governed by a powerful and dominant force, The Ottoman Empire, which was formed by the Turkish tribes in Anatolia (Çapan & Zarakol, 2017; Shaw & Yapp, 2025). However, Turkey faces enormous internal political tensions due to neocolonial strategies adopted by the government (Çapan & Zarakol, 2017). Similarly, Afghanistan has never been under colonial rule and gained independence in 1921 but is currently under the governance of the Taliban (PBS News, 2021). Manifestations and continuations of (neo)colonial and imperial ideologies are often overlooked in the Middle East and require deeper examination (Asi, 2022) – a task this chapter undertakes in the following sections. Indeed, given current-day political contexts – characterized by war and instability– the region, including the countries of interest for this thesis (i.e., Turkey, Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan), are widely impacted by foreign influences (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024).

Figure 6.0: Map of The Middle East

Note: Students of History (2025)

Sub-Saharan Africa

In the earlier centuries, Sub-Saharan Africa was home to many successful and prosperous empires that made significant advances in various academic disciplines (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). This region included 49 countries, from which South Africa and Kenya, will be the focus as it reflects the demographics of the participant sample in this study (Tran, 2019). Before colonization, European empires would take resources, including land and slaves, and exploit the region without direct control (Finlayson, 2019). However, as the Industrial Revolution started to spread across the European continent and Sub-Saharan Africa was hit by an intense and fast period of colonization, known as the 'Scramble for Africa' (Kulik, 2025). European powers, including France, Britain, Belgium, and Portugal, fought and competed to gain control of the region's minerals and agricultural resources (Finlayson, 2019). To settle colonial matters and new governance structures, 13 European countries and the United States agreed to divide and re-shape the continent to maximize power (Finlayson, 2019). Indeed, European colonization had reformed the cultural, ethnic and political landscapes of the region and the effects are deeply embedded into current-day structures (Finlayson, 2019). Specifically, South Africa and Kenya were significantly impacted by colonialism where land was taken and given to the British settlers, which created inequalities in the labour markets and increased demands in private land rights, all of which is still

evident today despite decolonization (Simpson, 2024). Taken together, the decolonization of Sub-Saharan Africa was largely due to anti-colonial and resistance movements and British colonies – including South Africa and Kenya – were the first to gain independence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Université Du Luxembourg, 2025).

Figure 7.0: Map of Sub-Saharan Africa

Note: McKenna (2025)

South America

South America is the fourth largest continent across the globe, which is home to many countries, including Peru, which will be the focus for the study (Ramos et al., 2025). Prior to colonization, a diverse range of ancient cultures originated from South America and were seen in a variety of contexts, including coastal regions (Finlayson, 2019). The region was colonized by various powerful nations, including Spain and Portugal (from the West and East of South America respectively), France, Netherlands and the United Kingdom (in the coastal areas of South America) (Finlayson, 2019). Peru was colonized by the Spanish and later, under the governance of Simón Bolívar, gained independence from colonial rule (Davies & Moore, 2025). Colonization altered the traditional urban and rural landscapes of South America to benefit

colonial interests (Finlayson, 2019). Colonial groups were interested in extracting resources and riches from South America, which affected local development, and many rural areas of the region still face isolation and poverty (Finlayson, 2019).

Figure 8.0: Map of South America

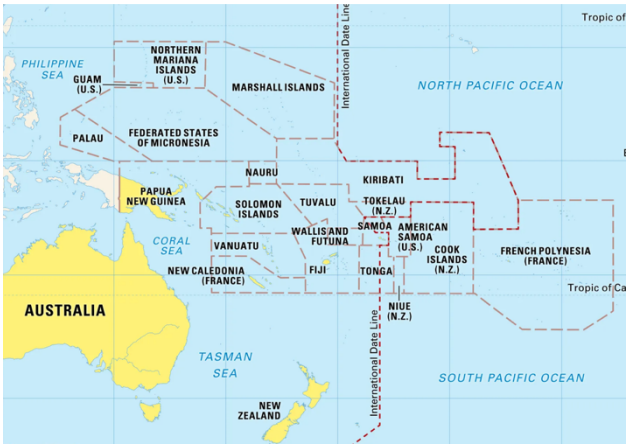
Note: Héctor & Minkel (2025)

Oceania

Oceania is a remarkable region given the unique wildlife presence that cannot be found on any other region or continent (Finlayson, 2019). Despite Oceania being home to many islands and countries, for the purposes of this research study, I will be focusing on Fiji. Oceania was colonized by European powers and the United States, except for Tonga (a country in Oceania) being under protection by the British (West & Foster, 2025). When Fiji's native authority and regime collapsed, the British had intervened and took control (West & Foster, 2025). As a British colony, Fiji faced great economic challenges. To name a few, the Fijian people had partial involvement in political and commercial development, sales of Fijian land were prohibited, local natives were taxed in agricultural produce, and

migrant labourers from India were introduced to the country as permanent settlers to work on the processing mills and sugar plantations (Macdonald & Foster, 2025). After the end of World War II, many islands and countries, including Fiji, started to gain independence (Finlayson, 2019). Post-colonial Fiji suffers from the colonial economic structures, which has impacted the identity and cultural practices of the native populations today (Fiji Islands, 2025).

Figure 9.0: Map of Oceania



Note: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2025)

Appendix J: List of Data Analysis Themes and Codes

Discourse	Code
Defining Safe Sport	Bullying
	Harm
	Community Spaces
	Empowering girls
	Abuse and violence
	Child Protection
Creating Safe Environments	Reporting Measures
	Inclusion
	Coaches and program staff
	Safeguarding sessions
Global North-South Tensions	Resistance
	UN, UNICEF, FIFA, IOC
	Lack of Space
	Funding
Challenges to Safeguarding	Geography
	'Naturally' unsafe environments
	Lack of training
	Social, cultural and political climates
Gender	Girls versus Boys
	Empowerment
	Gender (in)equality
	Domestic labour
	Prostitution