

PERCEPTIONS, INTENTIONS AND REALITIES: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE  
OF SPORT PARTICIPATION AMONG YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS LIVING IN  
TORONTO NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT AREAS

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## Abstract

Sport involvement is suggested to offer a context for health and wellness, civic engagement, economic development and prosperity, and other physical, psychological, and social benefits (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Sport Information Resource Centre. (2012); however, sport can also be a site for differentiating, marginalizing and excluding individuals and groups (Spaaij et al., 2014). This study examined the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), which included: (1) understanding sport development pathways; (2) examining the psychosocial factors that influence sport participation; and (3) understanding how neighbourhood spaces facilitate/impede sport participation. The research draw upon ‘cultural praxis’ (Blodgett et al., 2015, Ryba & Wright, 2010), socio-ecological approaches (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), postcolonial feminism (Khan, McDonald et al., 2007; O’Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010), and spatial theory (Lefebvre, 1991) to critically examine factors that influenced sport participation and development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 young adults to explore participant sport journeys and five focus groups were conducted with 27 young adults to understand how local spaces were used/perceived for sport. Four manuscripts are presented, which directly address the research questions, starting with a broad understanding of participant sport journeys, followed by a deeper exploration of the socio-ecological processes influencing youth and young adults’ sport participation and development within NIAs. This dissertation challenges researchers and practitioners to widen of scope of studying and understanding sport participation and development.

*Keywords: sport participation, sport development, positive youth development, inclusive sport, Toronto sport, sport spaces*

**Dedication**

*I've looked at life that way  
But now old friends they're acting strange  
They shake their heads; they say I've changed  
Well something's lost, but something's gained*

*In living every day  
I've looked at life from both sides now  
From win and lose and still somehow  
It's life's illusions I recall  
I really don't know life at all*

- *Joni Mitchell "Both Sides Now"*

To the little girl who failed two grades in school, you no longer need to be so scared.

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*You need to stretch people to help them achieve their full potential. The most powerful way to do this is by having the courage to say, "I believe in you." These four words constitute the most inspirational message a leader can convey.*

*- Bill Walsh*

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*...they [practitioners] will come to realize that every sport context is loaded with culture just beneath the surface. The question then becomes, whose culture lies beneath the surface, and what are the consequences of silencing and ignoring cultural identities?*

*(Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, 2012, p. 44)*

In 2014, the City of Toronto identified 31 out of 140 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). These NIAs were chosen based on low Neighbourhood Equity Benchmark (NEB) scores measuring economic opportunities (e.g., unemployment, low income, and social assistance), social development (e.g., residential instability, ethnic concentration, dependency and material deprivation, and post-secondary completion), participation in decision-making (e.g., municipal voting rate), physical surroundings (e.g., community places for meeting, walkability, healthy, food stores, green space), and healthy lives (e.g., premature mortality, mental health, preventable hospitalizations, diabetes) (City of Toronto, 2014).

In response to the call to support NIAs, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020* (TSNS 2020, City of Toronto, 2016) proposed building capacity, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility, maintaining transparency and accountability, and developing programs sustainable through collaborative partnerships and investments to infrastructure and services. Despite the potential benefits of institutions (e.g., government) identifying, addressing, and investing in the specific needs within diverse neighbourhoods, scholars have been critical on the rhetoric that frames neighbourhoods within Toronto (Ahmed & Carpenter, 2017; Leslie & Hunt, 2013; Malone, 2002; Teelucksingh, 2006; Villegas, 2018). As Villegas (2018) argued, the identification of NIAs could be viewed as a means to push neoliberal ideologies of the ‘good citizen,’ without acknowledging the institutional and social processes that contribute to the marginalization within neighborhoods in the first place. Working class, racialized, and immigrant communities comprise the socio-demographic components of NIAs, which

demonstrates that marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities are physically and socially sequestered within the Toronto landscape (Galankis, 2016; Teelucksingh, 2006, Villegas, 2018). Moreover, perceptions of discrimination (e.g., labour market), social exclusion (e.g., ‘othering’), and surveillance (e.g., police presence) have been identified as key issues influencing racialized residents of Toronto NIAs (Galankis, 2016; Nicholas & Braimoh, 2018). In fact, the City of Toronto has recognized that “systemic racism is playing an important role in shaping Toronto's neighbourhoods” (2014, p.10), which includes disparities of income and health outcomes, particularly amongst visible minorities. As such, the delivery of *TSNS 2020* (City of Toronto, 2016) is aimed at improving employment rates and income levels, as well as the mental and physical health of racialized groups (City of Toronto, 2014).

While sport should not be viewed as a panacea, children and youths’ sport participation have been associated with various physical, psychological, and social benefits to participation (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). To support ‘healthy lives’, one of the five key domains identified within *TSNS 2020* (City of Toronto, 2016), the City has demonstrated commitment to promoting active living through access to affordable outdoor activities (e.g., running/walking clubs, sports leagues, outdoor exercise programs/equipment), and increasing access to community recreation through additional credits, discounts, and free drop-in programs. Furthermore, the City has invested \$12 million in funds to build or enhance community infrastructure within NIAs, which includes facilities for sport and physical activity. In 2017, the *City of Toronto Sport Plan* was launched as a guide for the City of Toronto and partners to support sport participation across the city, which included building capacity, delivering quality programming, increasing awareness, and promoting inclusivity in sports. The City engaged with various under-represented groups to develop the plan, such as NIAs, to ensure their needs were reflected in the strategy.

However, it is acknowledged that sport can be a site where normative and hierarchical practices are produced and reinforced, thereby contributing to the exclusion of various individuals and groups (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005).

Sport psychology has provided extensive insight into the behavioural factors that influence sport participation. These include personal engagement in activities, creating quality relationships, and appropriate settings (Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016). However, research stemming from sport psychology has been criticized for having a positivist perspective, and an over-simplified lens in determining the factors influencing sports participation (e.g., Andersen, 1993; Butryn, 2002; Duda & Allison, 1990; Krane, 1994, 2001; Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002).

Overlooking the complexities of the factors influencing sport participation (e.g., proximal and distal processes), and limiting representation of those studied can reinforce power and privilege that dominates sport. This can thereby contribute to the silencing of voices, which in-turn can lead to the exclusion of individuals, and the production of biased research (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, & Fisher, 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Therefore, it is imperative that sport researchers seize the opportunity to expand their understanding of take-up and continued participation in sport with a particular consideration of socio-demographic differences.

### **Study Purpose and Research Questions**

It has been recognized that children's sport participant rates are low within Canada's metropolitan cities (e.g. Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver; Clark, 2008), where great disparities amongst socio-demographic groups exist, thereby hindering access and inclusion in sport participation within cities such as Toronto (City of Toronto, 2017). Given this situation, the purpose of this doctoral research project is to explore the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living within NIAs in Toronto. The specific objectives are:

- To understand sport development journeys;
- To examine the psychosocial factors that influence sport participation; and
- To understand how neighbourhood spaces facilitate/impede sport participation.

## **Contents of the Dissertation**

*Chapter 2: Review of Literature* examines key sport development models/frameworks that provide insight into optimal settings to foster positive development outcomes through sport involvement. However, when critically examined, it is evident that physical access and social inclusion are not recognized as priorities within sport development literature, even though disciplines such as sport sociology have extensively identified factors that influence sport exclusion, and have articulated inclusive approaches to increasing sport participation, particularly amongst under-represented groups. As such, the latter section of the chapter explores how the study of sport development can be expanded, drawing from key literature across various disciplines.

*Chapter Three: Theoretical Foundation* provides an in-depth exploration of the theories used to guide this dissertation. Namely, the chapter explains how cultural praxis guided the overall approach to the dissertation. As well, socio-ecological perspectives, postcolonial feminism, and spatial theory were strategically used to critically examine the proximal (e.g., personal characteristics, social support, sport settings/space), and distal factors (e.g., culture institutional systems, normative practices, wider social issues) shaping participant sport experiences.

*Chapter Four: Research Orientation and Positionality* provides details of the research methods and procedures utilized for this dissertation, including study design, context and participants, data collection, analysis, and methods used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness so as to ensure that the participants' voices remained at the forefront of the dissertation.

*Chapters Five to Eight* directly address the research questions in the form of manuscripts. Each manuscript has been developed, based on the type of journal it will be submitted to. The order of the manuscripts is strategic, starting with a broad understanding of participant sport journeys, followed by a deeper exploration of the socio-ecological processes influencing youth and young adults' sport participation and development within NIAs, which includes sport activities, social support, and sport settings/spaces.

*Chapter Five* is the first manuscript of the dissertation, titled: “*If I Maybe Started Rugby A Bit Earlier, I Don’t Where I Could Have Been Right Now*”: *Examining The Sport Journeys of Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas*. This paper highlights how children and youths’ sport participation (e.g., take-up and continued involvement) within NIAs is influenced by involvement in deliberate play activities (e.g., unstructured sport), the provision of organized sport through school programming, and the support provided to when faced with life (e.g., graduating level of school), and athletic (e.g., advancement) transitions. In addition, perceptions and lived experiences of sport involvement were influenced by socio-demographics (e.g., gender, social class), and distal processes (e.g., normative practices, culture of competition), which were unpacked to gain a contextual understanding of sport development within NIAs.

*Chapter Six* is the second manuscript of the dissertation titled: “*All the Immigrant Families Here are Working Pretty Hard*”: *Perceived Parental Influence on Sport Participation in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas in Toronto*”. This paper recognizes parental support as fundamental to youth and young adults’ sport take-up, particularly in childhood (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008), which includes the provision of resources (e.g., time, finances), and involvement (e.g., attending games). Furthermore, the study highlighted distal factors (e.g., immigration settlement and Canadian sport culture) perceived to have influenced parental support for sport participation within NIAs, thereby highlighting that social and institutional environments act as a barrier for immigrant parents’ ability to support their children’s engagement in civic activities such as sport.

*Chapter Seven* is the third manuscript, titled: “*It’s Not That Good, But it’s Better Than Nothing*”: *How Space Influences Sport Participation Among Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas*. This paper argues that physical and social spaces facilitated/impeded sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs in Toronto. As such, spatial sport practices were first explored, followed by critically examining the production of

social spaces, which are shaped by dominant ideologies often existing within sport environments, and society. Lastly, the paper delved into participants' claiming of space, which met (some) of the needs of the community through accessibility.

*Chapter Eight* is the final manuscript of the dissertation, titled: "*It's an Imaginary Line that Just Exists*": *The Gendering of Unstructured Sport in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas*. This paper suggests that unstructured sport activities provide a means for children and youths' take-up of sport and advancement in sport (e.g., pathway for organized sport) in NIAs, particularly amongst families perceived to have limited resources (e.g., time, money), and support from parents (e.g., lack of interest, awareness of programs) (Lareau, 2002). However, when examining gender and unstructured sport participation, it was clear that hegemonically masculine practices mediated unstructured sport participation within NIAs. Drawing from Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis of gender construction, this paper examined how normative practices were reinforced by social interactions within (e.g., participants, peers and siblings), and outside (e.g., parents, community residents) of the sport setting, as well as institutional structures (e.g., school, community-based programs/facilities).

*Chapter Nine: General Discussion and Concluding Remarks* presents three overarching themes that highlight the importance of acknowledging the lived experiences of socially marginalized groups with regards to sport participation and development, by listening to voices and experiences of a wider range of individuals and groups, acknowledging and exploring the complexities of identity (e.g., intersectionality), utilizing interdisciplinary and social-ecological approaches and perhaps most importantly, reconceptualising our notions of sport. Finally, given the widely published benefits of sport participation, it is imperative that inclusive practices are better understood and enacted on, with the purpose of ensuring that all children and adolescents have equal access, and gain the benefits of sport participation and development.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

*How do we bring athletes into the system? How do we keep them involved and enhance their commitment to sport? Once they are involved, how can we best ensure their advancement, particularly in the advancement of athletes whose development shows promise?*

(Green, 2005, p. 236)

This chapter explores key literature, examining sport participation and development, which include athlete entrance, retention, and advancement. The academic field of sport psychology and sport governing bodies describe this process as *sport development*<sup>1</sup>, which is defined as:

Ensuring the pathways and structures are in place to enable people to learn basic movement skills, participate in sports of their choice, develop their competence and performance, and reach levels of excellence (Sports Council, 1993).

There are various sport development models/frameworks that have been proposed to ensure successful sport processes, including providing optimal settings to foster positive outcomes through sport involvement. However, when critically examined, it is evident that access and social inclusion have not been recognized as priorities within sport development. Disciplines such as sport sociology have extensively identified factors that influence sport exclusion and articulated inclusive approaches to increase sport participation, particularly amongst under-represented groups. In part to better understand sport participation and be able to offer more inclusive sport experiences, the latter sections of this literature review explore how the study of sport development can be expanded, drawing from key literature from various disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> It is acknowledged that academic disciplines present differing descriptions and scope of *sport development*. The field of sociology of sport views sport development (or sport for development) to include traditional sport development (as defined by sport psychology) as well as *sport plus*, where sports are adapted to reduce barriers to participation, and *plus sport*, which uses sport as a means strategically address wider social change (Coalter, 2007).

## **Sport Development Frameworks/Models**

Sport development models have been proposed, designed, and implemented within both academic and applied fields. An example would be the Long-Term Athlete Development model (LTAD; Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). It was designed to support high-performance athletes and was implemented by various national sporting organizations globally (e.g., Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia). Sport Canada, for instance, introduced the *Canada Sport for Life - Long-Term Athlete Development* Framework in 2005 to build sport and physical activity through policy and program deliverance to improve health, wellness, and sporting experiences. The *Sport for Life* LTAD Framework (Sport for Life Society, 2016b) provides a 7-stage process for athlete development. The first three stages; (1) Active start (0-6 years), (2) FUNdamentals (males 6-9 years; females 6-8 years), and (3) Learn to train (males 9-12 years; females 8-11 years) were centred on encouraging physical literacy and sport for all. The next three stages; (4) Train to train (males 12-16 years; females 11-15 years), (5) Train to compete (males 16-23 years; females 15-21 years), and (6) Train to win (18+ years) focused on excellence. The last stage, (7) Active for life, does not have a defined age group but includes two streams, Competitive for life and Fit for life. Competitive for life is for individuals who continue participating in competitive sport, whereas Fit for life focuses on engaging in physical activity more broadly.

The strength of the LTAD is that it recognizes the varying needs of individuals and groups. This model has been modified by various organizations to address the needs of specific socio-demographic groups (e.g., Aboriginal Long-Term Participant Development Pathway, 2016a; Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity, 2012; Canadian Special Olympics' Long-Term Athlete Development for Athletes with an Intellectual Disability, 2004). For example, to address gender differences in delivering the LTAD, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical activity (CAAWS, 2012) published a supplement called *Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors*. This supplement was intended to

increase awareness about the experiences of women and girls in sport, and to provide recommendations for addressing psycho-social factors that influenced female athlete development, leadership, and life-long participation in sport and physical activity. Furthermore, Wheelchair Basketball Canada (n.d.) adapted the framework to support the development of athletes with disabilities, acknowledging that “Awareness and First Contact” were, and still are particularly important “for individuals with an acquired disability who, prior to injury or illness, may have had no contact with, and no knowledge of, sport and physical activity for persons with a disability” (p. 24).

Although the LTAD provides a platform to support long-term sport participation and performance, it has received some criticism. First, various actors have suggested that the framework is challenging to interpret, implement, monitor, and evaluate. The Sutcliffe Group (2016) evaluated the Canadian Sport Policy 2012 (Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012) and provided a thematic review of the LTAD. The report illuminated the difficulties faced by sport providers (e.g., public and private organizations, levels of government, public health physical activity promoters, etc.) to comprehend and deliver the framework. Specifically, sport administrators struggled to understand and promote concepts of physical literacy and long-term athlete development, particularly at the grassroots level (e.g., community sport clubs) due to a shortage of human resources and funding. Second, scholars who examined the implementation of the LTAD suggested that the framework was rigid and narrowly focused, making it challenging to adapt for a variety of sports (Holt, 2010; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Lang & Light, 2010; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). For instance, Lang and Light (2010) examined the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA; England) LTAD (2003) and highlighted concerns for implementing the model, which included an emphasis on high volume of training for athletes, which had the potential to lead to poor technique, and contradictions with ASA regulations (e.g., focusing on technique over endurance), that could have lead to misinterpretations by coaches. As well, they observed a lack of guidance on monitoring and evaluation of athletes, which would lead to challenges in assessing the efficiency of implementation. Holt (2010) published a commentary of the LTAD,

stating that the framework was based on anecdotal philosophies rather than empirical evidence, and placed an emphasis on physical training, physiology and motor development, with few references supporting the psychological components of the LTAD. Instead, he proposed that the *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) should have been considered as part of the framework, as it provides insight into how to teach “developmentally-appropriate psychological skills” (p. 423).

The DMSP is regarded as one of the most prominent conceptual models for examining athlete development in the sport psychology literature (Bruner, Erickson, McFadden, & Côté, 2009). The DMSP provides insight into the processes, pathways, and outcomes associated with continued sport participation, enhanced performance, and personal development (3Ps; Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2008), particularly during childhood and adolescence (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). The model proposes three trajectories of sport participation: recreational sport through sampling, elite performance through sampling, and elite performance through early specialization. Each trajectory outlines different ways in which youth engage with sport activities (e.g. deliberate play, deliberate practice, early specialization, and early diversification), as well as the different support roles in their social environments (e.g., role of coaches, parents, and peers) (Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). These interactions could be referred to as proximal processes (i.e., interactions between the individual and immediate environment; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The first two trajectories are based on the foundation of the sampling years (ages 6-12 years), where children participate in various sports focused primarily on deliberate play (i.e., sport engagement where rules are modified based on the age or skill level of the athletes; Côté & Hay, 2002). From the sampling years, youth may transition into the recreational years (ages 13+ years) with a focus on continued involvement for enjoyment and health (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Hay, 2002). Alternatively, youth may advance from sampling to specializing (ages 13-15 years) and investment years (ages 16+ years) by focusing their participation on specific sports, and increasing their engagement in deliberate practice activities (i.e., structured effortful

training designed to improve performance, with the goal of elite performance; Ericsson, Krampe & Tesch-Römer, 1993). In the third trajectory, elite performance through early specialization, an athlete invests in high-performance sport early in life (prior to 13 years old) and partakes in deliberate practice activities. Ultimately, the path that any one child will take is dependent on different needs relating to opportunities (e.g., types of activities), resources (e.g., money), and support (e.g., parents, coaches, and peers).

The model has been considered fluid, as athletes can transition in and out of the different trajectories during their skill development (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). Furthermore, the model was designed for the tenets and postulates to be evaluated, allowing sport development strategies that draw from this model to be appropriately assessed and measured (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). However, the DMSP does have some shortcomings. First, despite being termed *Developmental Model of Sport Participation* the model focuses mainly on the factors influencing pathways to high-performance sports, rather than non-elite sport pathways. Therefore, this model provides limited insight into the development of individuals who do not have an interest in, the skills, or the opportunities, for achieving high-performance outcomes (e.g., athletes who play competitive sport for organized sport clubs at a non-elite level; Wolman & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). By positioning a definitive binary between recreational sport and high-performance sport, the DMSP places an emphasis on achievement in sport, and limits our understanding of the spectrum of sport participation and development that often occurs.

Interesting, the original model of the DMSP (Côté, 1999) was based on four athletes from middle-class, intact families (i.e., a nuclear family structure with a mother and a father) in Canada. Three of the athletes were members of the Canadian National Junior Rowing team, and one was a tennis player competing at the Canadian National level. This sample is homogeneous and limited, as it draws on the experiences of high-performance youth athletes in two sports in Canada – a demographic group that is not representative of sport development more broadly. In contrast, a study by Storm, Kristoffer and

Krogh (2012) compared the DMSP to the lived experiences of elite Danish athletes. The research proposed that specialization pathways may be unique to the individual and were culturally situated. Specifically, the study found differences in age-cut offs, sampling, practice, and transitions in the model, showing that sport systems and pathways in Denmark may be different from what was presented in the DMSP model. Similarly, Light, Harvey, and Memmert (2013) examined children's involvement in swimming clubs in France, Germany, and Australia, by drawing from the DMSP. The study suggested that sport development processes differ depending on the sport and setting/structure (e.g., club, school).

Lastly, a third limitation of the DMSP is that the model implies that children and youth have the same means to access the resources and support required for sport development without taking into consideration the complex factors that contribute to take-up and continued involvement in sport, such as socio-demographic considerations, and broader factors (e.g., exclusionary normative practices). As such, the model fails to address entrance to sport, which is greatly influenced by social support and infrastructure, which are fundamental components of sport development (Green, 2005).

### **Optimal Sport Development Environments**

While sport development models such as DMSP and LTAD provide insight into the mechanisms for supporting athlete participation and performance trajectories, the *Personal Assets Framework* (PAF; Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016) provides guidance on designing and delivering optimal youth sport programming more broadly. The framework suggests three dynamic elements: (1) personal engagement in activities (what); (2) creating quality relationships with others (who); and (3) appropriate settings (where) which can foster personal assets (4Cs - competence, confidence, connection, and character), leading to positive outcomes such as continued participation, personal development, and increased performance (3Ps; Côté et al., 2008). The PAF recognizes that personal engagement in sport activities is a proximal process that can foster the 4Cs. The authors draw on key constructs of the DMSP to highlight the importance of differing sport

activities, depending on the developmental level of the athlete. For instance, young individuals should experience a diverse range of sport experiences and a large volume of deliberate play activities, as they can lead to the more positive outcomes associated with youth sport participation. In addition to types of activities, the PAF suggests that social support (e.g., from parents, coaches, peers, siblings, and other significant others) has a critical role in children's and youth's sport participation, performance, and personal development experiences, depending on the individual's age and level of development in sport (e.g., recreational vs. specializer; Fraser-Thomas, & Côté, 2006). Additionally, the framework draws on seminal literature to examine how interpersonal relationships shape athlete development (e.g., initiation and continued participation), which includes works by Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009), Keegan, Harwood, Spray, and Lavallee (2009) and Ullrich-French and Smith (2006). The PAF refers to transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), which can be categorized by four forms of influencers: (a) idealized influencers (e.g., leaders who foster trust and respect through role modeling), (b) inspirational motivation (e.g., leaders who inspire and challenge), (c) intellectual stimulation (e.g., leaders who encourage innovation), and (d) creative and individualized consideration (e.g., leaders who have concern for development and achievement). The PAF suggests positive transformational leadership behaviours by coaches, parents, peers, and other significant people can promote the assets and outcomes outlined in the framework.

The PAF recognizes that sport experiences are shaped by how activities and quality relationships “interact with the broader social and physical environment” (Côté et al., 2014, p. 21). In their 2014 paper, Côté and colleagues described how differing environments involve a range of factors, which shape the activities that the individual will engage in. For example, the paper highlighted how *birthplace effects* (e.g., smaller communities produce greater numbers of elite athletes; Côté, MacDonald, Baker & Abernethy, 2006) shape sport development. Smaller communities generally have more spaces for deliberate play (e.g., unstructured sport) and engagement in physical activities (e.g., running, biking, etc.). Another explanation might be that smaller communities foster more supportive

social relationships (e.g., families, schools, communities), which can positively influence behaviours related to sport involvement. In 2016, Côté and colleagues expanded on “appropriate settings” by identifying six setting features that can foster sport participation (i.e., where youth can play, develop skills and enjoy sport), which included: (1) a safe environment in which youth develop; (2) an appropriate structure in which children experience a stable environment; (3) the availability of opportunities for skill building; (4) the integration of family, school and community efforts; (5) accessibility to different sport contexts is more important than the quality of the sport facilities and equipment; and (6) sport contexts with fewer people increase youth personal effort and involvement in different roles and positions. The first four features were drawn from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report (NRCIM; 2002), as they related to the physical environment, while the last two elements were recommended by the authors, as they provided features that were more specific to sport. Although these six features were identified, this chapter does not provide descriptions of what these characteristics entail.

The 4Cs (i.e., competence, confidence, connection, character/caring) were based on Lerner Brown, and Kier’s (2005) asset-building approach to PYD. It was determined that it was suitable within sport contexts to combine character and caring given these components overlapped within sport literature (Côté, Bruner, Erickson, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2010; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005). Competence refers to the ability to perform or the performance of sport, whereas confidence indicates the degree to which one believes they can be successful within sport contexts. Confidence refers to internal perceptions of self-worth, self-efficacy, and global self-regard within sport contexts. Connection relates to the quality of one’s relationships within sport. Lastly, character includes key attributes or life skills such as responsibility, integrity, empathy, and respect (Vierimaa, Erickson, Côté, & Gilbert, 2012). When the dynamic elements are repeated over time, it can lead to long-term participation, performance, and personal development in sport (Côté et al., 2008).

Overall, the PAF provides a ‘roadmap’ of elements and processes that contribute to youths’ positive experiences in sport. However, some of the dynamic elements proposed are vaguely described, thereby missing an opportunity to support researchers and practitioners in understanding *how* to foster development through sport. For example, access is recognized as a key feature of appropriate settings; however, the PAF does not elaborate on how to address this critical component. Therefore, it would be beneficial to expand on these features, to ensure that settings are accessible to a range of individuals, under differing circumstances.

The PAF framework also recognizes the benefits of applying a socio-ecological approach to sport, in order to examine the systems that shape youth sport experiences (e.g., activities, relationships, and settings). However, this framework does not account for an individual’s social position (e.g., gender, race, and class), nor broader social factors, which can impact sport experiences (e.g., normative practices). This is concerning, given that there are recognized social (e.g., discrimination; Spaaij, 2012) and structural (e.g., cost; Kingsley & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2015) barriers to sport involvement, particularly amongst marginalized groups (Collins & Kay, 2014; Goodwin & Peers, 2012; Kay, 2014). Interestingly, three setting features proposed by NRCIM (2002) were not explicitly outlined in the PAF. These features include opportunities to belong, positive social norms, and support for efficacy and mattering all of which are integral to access and social inclusion. The NRCIM defines opportunities to belong as “opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement and integration; opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation; and support for cultural and bicultural competence” (p. 9). One can appreciate that some of these components may be referenced within other dynamic elements of the framework (e.g., support for efficacy and mattering); however, it can be argued that access and inclusion should be prominently positioned to acknowledge its importance. Without recognition or understanding of wider contextual factors influencing sport involvement, only those who

have access to sport will likely gain the benefits of sport development, as described within the framework and models presented.

### **Social and Structural Barriers to Sport Involvement**

Within Canada, sport participation rates are lower amongst various socio-demographic groups such as individuals of lower socioeconomic status, women, immigrants, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ2+ (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Government of Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2013). Income and socioeconomic status, including household income and education levels, have been recognized as strong determinants of sport participation (Bloom, Grant, & Watt, 2005; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Donnelly & Harvey, 1999; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011). Barriers to sport involvement amongst low-income families often include cost, lack of transportation, and time commitments (Holt et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Holt and colleagues (2011), common barriers related to parental support for sport involvement amongst low-income families included lack of time and restricted finance. Furthermore, this study provided a contextual understanding of these barriers, which included that parents were working multiple jobs, received poor government funding to support children's sport involvement, and experienced feelings of shame when asking for subsidies from programs. While parents were consciously exploring ways to 'help themselves,' they suggested that increasing knowledge and awareness of funded programs and provision for additional funding opportunities would support their ability to have their children engaged in sport. Similarly, Kingsley and Spencer-Cavaliere (2015) found that low-income youth and their parents experienced common structural barriers to participation due to the lack of financial resources. Although the youth were provided with subsidies to participate, many of the youth experienced feelings of exclusion related to cultural capital which included abilities, values, desires, which were recognized and validated within sport settings. The lack of economic and cultural capital led to varying outcomes, which included a lack of access and opportunities to participate, and reduced motivation for participation. This highlights how initiatives aimed at increasing access, such as the

provision of subsidies may not alleviate some other barriers to sport, such as social exclusion, which appears to be a more complex process to address.

In addition to income and socioeconomic status, patriarchy can also be a barrier to sport participation, particularly for girls/women and boys/ men who do not fit the hegemonic gender roles. Scholars have long argued that female participation in sport is less than males due to lack of access to programs and facilities (e.g., availability, quality), safety (e.g., transportation), development opportunities (e.g., elite level, leadership), and support (e.g., childcare) (CAAWS, 2012, 2016; Donnelly, 2016; Frisby & Millar, 2002; Trussell & McTeer, 2007; Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005). Unfortunately, although males are perceived to dominant sport spaces and places, many experience a form of social exclusion. A prime example would be some males feel pressured to demonstrate ‘heterosexual’ behaviours by engaging in sports that are perceived to be ‘masculine’ (e.g., contact sports; Messner & Sabo, 1994). It is widely published how LGBTQ2+ communities face challenges participating in sport (Messner, 1992; Pronger, 1990; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphey, 2001). Messner (1992) describes sport as a “masculine institution” (p. 159), where there is an unequal distribution of power, prestige and resources between genders, which is reproduced and reinforced through social interactions (e.g., peers), institutions (e.g., sex segregation of teams), and popular culture (e.g., media, professional athletes) (see Chapter Eight for a detailed discussion on Messner, 1992).

Barriers to sport participation are also experienced by immigrant groups. Newcomers frequently face barriers to sport participation due to language difficulties, unfamiliarity of activities, financial challenges, and feelings of discrimination and exclusion (Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Yan & McCullagh, 2004; Yu & Berryman, 1996). These barriers relate to the challenges new immigrants face when integrating into a new social, economic, and cultural landscape. These challenges are precipitated by systematic issues and racial discrimination related to finding skill-appropriate employment, securing affordable childcare, obtaining safe and quality housing, accessing language services, navigating transportation, and participating in recreational and cultural activities (City of

Toronto, 2001, 2013). Furthermore, sport-related policy and administrative procedures often do not reflect a pluralistic understanding of cultural values and differences (e.g. importance of traditional clothing, religious observances, necessity for same-sex activities; Dagkas, Benn, & Jawad, 2001, Knez, Macdonald, & Abbott, 2012; Maxwell & Taylor, 2010), which Tirone, Livingston, Miller and Smith (2011) highlight are of critical importance when servicing and supporting immigrants from non-white, and non-Western countries.

Additionally, Kingsley and Spencer-Cavaliere (2015) argued that socio-demographics represented only a small component of “much larger processes of social exclusion” (p. 24). Indeed, we must recognize that the way sport is conceptualized, designed, provided, occupied, and controlled is also implicated in these inequities. Green (2005) explored how the pyramid model for sport development includes broad-based participation at the base, followed by competitive sport and high-performance sport. Moreover, within this model the three levels are interlinked, given that high-level athletes are dependent on the development of broad-based participation and competitive sport. Yet, scholars have argued that government systems focus on high-performance sport and valuing elite athletes at the expense of investing in broad-based participation, thereby (re)producing and reinforcing power hierarchies (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Livingston, Tirone, Smith, & Miller, 2008; Schimank, 2005). This emphasis on performance and competitive environments has influenced how sport is conceived and delivered, which is demonstrated in parents’ desire to equip young children with quality early learning experiences (Stirrup, Duncombe, & Sandford, 2015) and early specialization in sport (Ericsson et al., 1993; Malina, 2010; Wiersma, 2000). Buchanan, Odenheimer, and Prewitt-White (2016) examined access in athletic programs throughout public high schools in the United States and suggested that the value placed on professional and college sports has trickled down to earlier school sports, leading to the “hyper-commodification” of youth sport and highly competitive environments. This focus on competition and organized sport can be problematic, as it mainly benefits those with the

resources to invest and engage in sport, and wedges a robust gap between those with power and privilege compared to ‘others’ (Bourdieu, 1978; Buchanan, Odenheimer, & Prewitt-White, 2016).

Along with this emphasis on high-performance outcomes, scholars have argued modern sport is based on hierarchical structures, which reproduces and reinforces hegemonic normative practices that favour White, Anglophone, male, and middle-upper class bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005). Scholars such as Bale (2002), Fusco (2005), and King (2005) have illuminated the role of sport and sport spaces in the construction of white normativity and privilege, which has contributed to the underrepresentation of various racialized groups. Moreover, researchers have examined how race is lived through sport culture (Abdel-Shehid, 2005; James 2005; Nakamura, 2012; Thangaraj, 2015). Sport and sporting contexts are thus not free of the broader social forces that operate to exclude ‘others’. For example, Razack (2002) and Fusco (2005) both argue that sport settings emphasizes this racial superiority and cultural hegemony, by suggesting that “sociocultural organization of space produces and embodies construction of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability and nationhood,” which is influenced by “the virtues of maleness and whiteness” (Fusco, 2002, p. 305). Similarly, Joseph, Darnell, and Nakamura (2012) argue that race continues to shape social relations in Canada, which includes the dominance and naturalization of Whiteness and the construction of racialized difference. These differences take the form of references to “ethnicity, skin colour, religion, language, customs, indigeneity and cultural habits” (Joseph, Darnell, & Nakamura, 2012, p. 1). Sport serves as a key site where the normalization of Whiteness and racialization of difference occurs. Thus, as Spaaij, Magee, and Jeanes (2014) state, despite the benefits that sport participation may foster, sport is a site where differentiating, marginalizing, and excluding individuals and groups are exercised in large part because sporting policies and practices are embedded within “existing ethnocentric, patriarchal and heteronormative systems” (p. 3). As such, to facilitate successful sport development, no matter the pathway, we must first address the barriers to accessing

sport that exist in the first place, including addressing the “complex and multi-dimensional process” of social exclusion (Levitas, Pantazis, Fahmy, Gordon, Lloyd & Patsios, 2007).

While social and structural barriers often lead to the exclusion of individuals and groups, this is not to suggest ‘marginalized’ groups do not participate in or have not gained positive experiences in sport. Studies by Elling, De Knop, and Knoppers (2003), Jones and McCarthy (2010), and van Ingen (2004) all highlight how sexual minority-focused sport groups provide a safe environment for sexual minorities to socialize, exercise, and enjoy sport, which can foster a sense of belonging, camaraderie, social support, relaxation, and mastery. Conversely, Spaaij (2012) highlighted the benefits, challenges, and tensions of accruing and negotiating social capital through sport participation. His study was centred on Somalian men’s experiences of sport participation within a football (a.k.a. soccer) club. He found that some participants preferred to be among those with similar ethno-cultural backgrounds, as social interactions were “uncomplicated, symmetrical and meaningful” (p. 1526) which, in turn, fostered a sense of belonging and access to social and material resources, and provided them with an opportunity to temporarily escape challenges and tensions association with settlement. Similarly, Nakamura’s (2012) study highlighted how sporting events such as the North American Chinese Invitational Volleyball Tournament, provided a platform for Chinese women and men to demonstrate and claim citizenship, and national belonging in North America, due to broader exclusion and racialization in mainstream sport. Collectively, these studies highlight potential limited opportunities for marginalized groups to experience bridging (e.g., getting to know people that may be different than one’s self; Putnam, 2000), due to feelings of social exclusion. However, the study by Tirone and Pedlar (2005), which examined leisure activity participation of second-generation Canadian youth (e.g., parents were from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan), provides insight into circumstances that fostered belonging amongst differing socio-demographic groups. For example, participation in activities of dominant cultures was often related to an individual's’ own drive to not allow discrimination to affect their participation. In addition, participants described surrounding themselves with friends who showed

consideration for their traditional leisure practices, which fostered positive experiences. This study highlights interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviours that contribute to sport involvement, particularly amongst settings where feelings of exclusion and ‘Othering’ often occurs. Despite the barriers to sport participation that have been documented in the literature, there is evidence of meaningful sport participation for underrepresented groups, such as members of the LGBTQ2+ community, racialized immigrants, and refugees.

Recognizing the importance of increasing sport participation and improving inclusive practices, various sport-based social initiatives have been launched and subsequently evaluated. For example, *Positive Futures* is a program that supported over 120 locally based projects aimed at supporting children and youth living within deprived neighbourhoods in the United Kingdom. Overall, the program promoted access to sport, social cohesion, a pathway to the labour market through (re)engagement with education and training, and promoted active participation through consultation by giving youth a voice (Kelly, 2010). Despite the positive outcomes of the study, Kelly questioned if sport-based interventions could in fact support social inclusion, suggesting that socio-structural aspects of exclusion at a higher-level (e.g., policy) must be addressed. Indeed, as Donnelly and Coakley (2002) state, social inclusion entails “making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society [; however,] social inclusion reflects more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion” (p. viii). To promote social inclusion then, one must recognize it as a multidimensional and dynamic process that is linked to social location, individual agency, and organizing processes (Bailey 2008; Ponc & Frisby, 2010). Furthermore, social inclusion should be represented within broader infrastructures (e.g., programming, facilities) and superstructures (e.g., policies) focused on sport participation and development. To isolate social inclusion within sport research and practice may contribute to the reinforcement of hegemonic practices, further perpetuating ‘Othering’ of various socio-demographic groups within sport. An example of ‘Othering’ is the LTAD, which has been

adapted to support sport development among various subgroups in Canada, such as females, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and so forth. However, social inclusion is not acknowledged in the *Sport for Life LTAD* (Sport for Life Society, 2016b), which is a missed opportunity to address the importance of and provide insight into approaches and guidelines for providing accessible and inclusive environments.

There have been positive steps towards promoting social inclusion in sport and addressing inequities in sport more broadly. In 2008, Sport Canada published the *Sport Participation Strategy, 2008-2012*, with a goal of increasing the participation of players, coaches, officials, administrators, and volunteers, particularly those under-represented in sport. The Canadian Sport Policy (Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012) recognizes the lower participation rates amongst under-represented groups (e.g., people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, ethno-cultural groups), and highlighted the need for inclusive practices to be implemented and barriers to be minimized (e.g., availability and accessibility of sport facilities). In 2018, Spaaij and colleagues published a report that provided practical steps which may contribute to diverse and inclusive youth sport club environments, which was targeted at clubs, national and state sporting organisations, as well as other stakeholders (e.g., local government) in Australia. The report highlighted challenges that sport practitioners face when addressing diversity. Although many practitioners consider and act on some forms of inclusive practices, it is often done in isolation (e.g., gender diversity), rather than changing the entire culture of the program. As well, practitioners often feel overwhelmed and under-resourced to foster diversity/inclusion, as they feel it is in addition to their 'broader' objectives, which are focused around sport culture that primarily values performance. The report provided recommendations for fostering more social inclusive environments, such as encouraging conversations about diversity, developing a differentiated approach, strengthening club-level diversity policies, being flexible in the promotion of diversity to and within clubs, valuing and supporting diversity champions, getting the 'best players' onside, engaging coaches to drive diversity practices, critically examining club culture and norms, diversifying club leadership structures,

addressing tension between participation and performance, and sharing local knowledge and experience. This report is innovative as it provides an in-depth understanding of diversity and inclusion (e.g., benefits, challenges, etc.), and provides an explicit roadmap of how inclusion can be incorporated in sport programming. However, it was based on institutional sport and social systems within Australia, which likely differ from other countries. Nevertheless, it does illuminate the importance of considering how sport cultures can be more inclusive by continuing to understand the lived experience of those under- and often not-represented in sport, as well as recognizing that processes of social exclusion are complex and multi-dimensional (Levitas, et al., 2007). Therefore, the following section explores how scholarship examining sport development may want to consider expanding and integrating access and social inclusion within its literature.

### **Widening the Scope**

Scholars have cautioned against the one-size-fits-all approach to sport psychology, which has traditionally been criticized as homogenous, scientific, and positivist. Indeed, this approach can protect normative practices and contribute to the silencing of marginalized voices (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon & Fisher, 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Krane, 1994, 2001; Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010). Recognizing how sport theories, explanations, and interventions may not always account for an individual's social position (e.g., gender, race, class), and being critical of how sport may be implicated in the construction of difference, the following is a review of key considerations that scholars have highlighted, which may foster a wider scope of studying and understanding sport development, particularly within the field of sport psychology. These considerations include social-ecological perspectives, recognition of inclusion in sport development literature, interdisciplinary approaches, increasing representation, and examining the complexities of identity.

**Conceiving sport more broadly.** A challenge to understanding sport experiences more broadly is related to how sport may be defined in narrow ways by differing fields (e.g., academic and applied)

and disciplines (e.g., sport psychology and sociology of sport). For example, government institutions have formally defined sport as,

an activity that involves two or more participants engaging for the purpose of competition.

Sport involves formal rules and procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized

neuromuscular skills and a high degree of difficulty and effort (Statistics Canada, 2013, p. 13).

However, there are challenges in conceiving modern sport this way, given the diversity of levels (e.g., recreational, competitive, elite), activities (e.g., team, individual), structures (e.g., organized, unstructured), and cultural meanings behind sport participation (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2010). In contrast, Bailey (2005), a prominent scholar within sociology of sport, provided a broader perspective of sport, drawing from the Council of Europe's European Sports Charter (CoE; 2001):

Sport means all forms of physical activity, which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming relationships or obtaining results in competitions at all levels. (Article 2)

Therefore, to expand the definition of sport within the disciplines, considering the CoE description may help to widen the scope of understanding and scholarship, which as Bailey (2005) described is more inclusive of a range of physical activities, rather than solely focusing on competitive games.

**Social-ecological perspectives.** Sub-disciplines such as cultural sport psychology (CSP) have emerged to offer contextual understandings of sport participation and performance (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon & Fisher, 2015). Furthermore, scholars within the field of sport psychology have embraced a socio-ecological perspective to examine interaction between the environment and children, and youths' sport involvement. For example, Strachan, Côté, and Deakin (2009) describe the benefits of utilizing this approach:

Ecological research, in particular, allows researchers to consider not only individual children but also contextual factors that may affect them as they participate in sport. Because an

ecological framework can assist in providing a base for systematic study of human processes and interactions. (p. 352).

However, an ecological perspective is often used to recognize that sport settings can support the development of the individual (e.g., PAF; Côté et al., 2014, 2016), rather than exploring the proximal and distal factors influencing involvement and development through sport.

Holt is a prominent sport psychology scholar who has widened the scope of sport development by employing socio-ecological perspectives. Specifically, Holt has utilized Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory in much of his work to examine factors influencing sport participation (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehna, & Wall, 2008). In 2017, Holt, Neely, Slater, Camiré, Côté, Fraser-Thomas, ... and Tamminen conducted a meta-data analysis and meta-synthesis of sport-related positive youth development (PYD) research. Outcomes of this research led to a proposed model of Positive Youth Development Through Sport, which highlights appropriate social and learning environments for promoting PYD through sport. As well, the model recognizes that social-ecological systems influence and are influenced by behaviour (Lerner, Bowers, Geldhof, Gestsdóttir, & DeSouza, 2012); however, these systems have been de-emphasized within sport-related PYD models (PAF; 2014, 2016). Therefore, Holt and colleagues incorporated broader ecological systems (e.g., culture, policy, community) and individual factors (e.g., socio-demographics, traits and disposition, etc.) into their model. This shift is significant, as it encourages one to consider the influence of contextual conditions on sport development (i.e., participation, performance, and personal development).

**Recognition of inclusion.** Although it is widely understood that sport is not accessible for various socio-demographic groups, inclusive practices are not illuminated in seminal sport development research (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). Donnelly and Coakley (2002) suggested social inclusion was often viewed as an outcome of sport involvement, rather than a facilitator. This is demonstrated in PYD literature (Côté et al., 2014, 2016)

that highlights how optimal sport environments (i.e., activities, relationships, and settings) can foster ‘connection,’ a major component of the 4Cs that in turn contributes to sport participation, performance, and development. But, as Bailey (2008) argues, sport can provide a platform for social inclusion, as long as functional, relational, and spatial needs are met, along with addressing power dynamics. Functionally, programs should lead to the enhancement of capabilities and competences (e.g. skills, knowledge, and understanding). Relationally, programs should deliver environments which foster social acceptance and belonging. As sport development models meet functional and relational needs, social inclusion should be a component that is considered when supporting sport participation. Spatially, Bailey suggests that the social and economic divide should narrow. Lastly, power dynamics need to shift, providing participants with a sense of control, agency, and empowerment. In other words, social inclusion in sport needs to go beyond the connection with others, as outlined within PYD literature, and be considered a fundamental component of sport development.

**Interdisciplinary approaches.** Sub-disciplines, such as cultural sport psychology, encourage an interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary approach to sport psychology. These sub-disciplines draw on various fields such as sociology, media studies, history, philosophy, and public policy with the intention of understanding social difference, power issues, and culture (Ryba & Wright, 2005). Utilizing blended theory also encourages the use of various theoretical and methodological approaches, opening the field to new research topics and issues facing contemporary sport culture, such as exploring athletes’ subjective experiences (e.g., relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), negotiation of power, performance of identity, and athletic/sport culture (Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Holt, Scherer, and Koch’s (2013) study examined the provision of sport opportunities for young men from inner-city areas of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This research utilized an interdisciplinary approach, as the lead author was trained in sport/exercise psychology, while Scherer and Koch were trained in sport sociology. This partnership was beneficial; whilst all three authors shared similar perspectives about ontological relativist and epistemological subjectivism, the sociologists urged for a

more critical perspective to examine how personal experiences were connected with broader social and structural issues. As such, the study provided a contextualized understanding of the benefits, constraints, and opportunities these young men experienced participating in the program.

**Increasing representation.** Scholars such as King (2005), Ram, Starek, and Johnson (2004), and Blodgett and colleagues (2015) stress the need for more commitment to cultural diversity within sport and exercise psychology research, in order to provide a contextualized understanding of sport involvement. As King (2005) argued, we “have to be able to talk about those cheated, hurt, excluded, exploited, and maligned as well” (p. 401). Although barriers to sport participation amongst various socio-demographic groups have been examined, both within sport psychology and sociology of sport, many groups are still under-represented. For example, Joseph and colleagues (2012) suggested that race and sport within the Canadian context was, and still is, under-addressed and under-analyzed. Although Canada has historically drawn immigrants from European countries, the landscape of immigration has changed considerably within the last few decades, with the majority of newcomers to Canada coming from South Asia (e.g. India), and East Asia (e.g., People’s Republic of China) (Statistics Canada, 2011), therefore there is merit in continuing to explore the experiences of sport participation amongst newcomers to Canada. As well, there is limited academic research examining sport participation amongst residents living in urban Toronto neighbourhoods. This is concerning, given that the municipality has acknowledged great disparities amongst those living in its neighbourhoods in relation to physical surroundings, economic opportunities, healthy lives, social development, and participation in civic decision-making (e.g., Neighbourhood Improvement Areas; City of Toronto, 2014). The City of Toronto Sport Plan (City of Toronto, 2017) is a report aimed at increasing sport participation within the Greater Toronto Area, which includes capacity building, delivery of quality sport programs, increasing awareness about community sport, and promoting inclusive opportunities for participation. The plan recognizes that some residents experience greater barriers to participation, have lower rates of participation, and consequently makes a commitment to

providing additional support for Aboriginal peoples, children and families with low income, girls and women, immigrants and newcomers, LGBTQ2+, residents of Neighbourhood Improvement Areas, older adults, persons who are homeless or under-housed, persons with disabilities, and youth. As part of the process of developing the report, consultations were conducted with the various groups listed above. However, some of these groups are still under-studied within academia, which includes Neighbourhood improvement areas, and homeless and under-housed peoples. This illuminates the importance of academic research to continue to explore and understand the lived experience of those under, and often not represented in sport, and to ensure this insight is disseminated (e.g., knowledge mobilization).

Furthermore, in studying those who are underrepresented in sport, it is imperative that we are mindful of how difference is understood within the research. Often, when socio-demographics are mentioned within sport psychology, they are examined as an independent variable, or represented as unusual or different (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Duda & Allison, 1990; Ryba, 2009). Overlooking how difference is constructed, and failing to recognize that power is relational, can contribute to stereotyping, potentially reinforcing power and privilege, and leading to the production of biased research (Blodgett et al., 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Additionally, King (2005) highlighted the importance of enabling individuals to speak as equals, a strategy that encourages the inclusion and legitimation of marginalized perspectives. On the other hand, Blodgett et al. (2015) recommended including perspectives of those in a position of power, as often when marginalized topics are explored, only the perspective of the “Other” is considered (e.g., women in the study of gender, or visible minorities in the study of race and ethnicity).

**Complexities of identity.** Unlike traditional sport psychology, which often views the athlete as singular, whole, and unified (Ryba & Wright, 2005), cultural sport psychology is influenced by postmodernist/poststructuralist theory, which conceptualizes identity as fluid, ever changing, and dependent on various contexts (Blodgett et al., 2015, Ryba & Wright, 2005). For example, Anderson

(1993) provided commentary on Lee and Rotella's (1991) study that examined sport participation amongst Black student athletes. He contested, "there is no reason to believe that variability in personality, style, or coaching preference for black athletes is any less than the variability among Caucasian, Asian, or female athletes" (p.1). Kontos and Breland-Noble (2002) supported Anderson's concerns about stereotyping, and recommended that exploration of different cultures should be considered on a "case-by-case" basis, meaning that knowledge gained from examining lived experiences of one group may not apply to all athletes in similar situations. The following example demonstrates the complexity of athlete identity:

...the African athlete who comes to the U.S. on a sport scholarship does not automatically cease to be a continental African athlete and become a "Black" athlete upon entering an American college. Rather, this athlete's identity is a series of complimentary and contradictory identifications operating simultaneously, with some coming to the foreground or receding depending on context (e.g., the athlete lives and studies in the United States but she is not an American citizen, she is "Black" but not African American, she is simultaneously a continental and a diasporic African). The athlete's experiences are shaped by identity and vice versa. (Ryba & Wright, 2005, p. 204)

Furthermore, the identity that is constructed through sport may be different to the one represented in society (Ryba & Wright, 2005; Walseth, 2006; Weiss, 2001). As described in previous sections, Walseth's (2005) study of Muslim females participating in sports highlighted that sport provided a place of refuge, as well as an opportunity for the women to construct identities which were opposite to the traditional form of femininity that were expected within their ethnic community. Therefore, re-conceptualizing the athlete identity as fragmented and multiple can enhance approaches to understanding the athlete's sporting experience within the field of sport psychology.

**Intersectionality.** To explore and address the complexities of identity, scholars have promoted the use of intersectionality to examine sport and social inclusion as a way to account for the

complexities of identity (Kalman-Lamb & Abdel-Shehid, 2017). Pheonix and Pattynama (2006) defined intersectionality as:

The need for multiplex epistemologies. In particular, it indicates that fruitful knowledge production must treat social positions as relational. Intersectionality is thus useful as a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it. (p. 187).

Therefore, to avoid examining socio-demographics as a ‘variable’ or ‘point of difference,’ social positions should be contextualized, by drawing on broader social structures. For example, Thangaraj’s book *Desi Hoops Dreams* (2015) highlights these complexities and the interconnectedness of masculinity, race, class, and sexuality with sport identity, participation, and performance among South Asian American men. Specifically, participation in a South Asian-only basketball league provided the men in the study with a space to perform and challenge normative practices and discourses that constructed brown masculinity as less than white masculinity, which had been constructed as the norm. However, hierarchies of oppression remained, such that the men’s performance of masculinity and resistance against whiteness as the norm relied on reinforcing the exclusion of other individuals and groups (e.g., women, queer masculinities, and working-class). Namely, although many of the South Asian American men experienced racialized masculinities within sport and the broader society, some exercised their “claim [to] a higher social-standing” by socially excluding gay men, highlighting the ranking of sexuality within sport practices, and upholding the dominance of “whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, and middle-class respectabilities” (p. 173).

### **Summary**

Participation in sport, particularly during childhood and adolescence, is associated with various physical, psychological, and social benefits (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). Therefore, it is crucial that we, as researchers, have a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that support athlete entrance, retention, and advancement in sport (Green, 2005). Within sport psychology,

seminal research has been published examining sport development trajectories (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), and optimal environments (e.g., dynamic elements such as engagement in activities, quality relationships, and appropriate settings) that foster the acquisition of positive assets (4Cs), which in turn influence continued participation, enhanced performance, and personal development (Côté et al., 2014, 2016). Although these models and frameworks provide extensive insight into best practices for retention and advancement, a fundamental pillar of sport development, athlete recruitment, is not given the same attention or guidance. This is problematic given the social and structural barriers to sport participation, which reproduce and reinforce hegemonic normative practices that often favour White, male, middle-upper class, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005).

Moving forward, sport psychology, other research fields, and sport disciplines need to be mindful of how sport theories, explanations, and interventions may not always account for and be representative of a range of individuals and groups. As such, this chapter captures the importance of listening to the voices and experiences of a wider range of individuals and groups, and incorporating social-ecological perspectives, acknowledging and exploring the complexities of identity (e.g., intersectionality), and utilizing interdisciplinary approaches to gain a more complex understanding of the factors that influence sport participation and development, which range from proximal (e.g., socio-demographics, social support, sport settings, etc.) to distal (e.g. normative practices, government policies, culture, etc.). Furthermore, it suggests that sport psychology should incorporate more of an understanding of inclusive practices within sport development models and frameworks, with the purpose of ensuring that all children and adolescents have access and gain the benefits of sport participation and development.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Foundation**

This dissertation examines the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) in Toronto. Specifically, the purpose of the research was to: (1) understand participants' sport journeys; (2) examine the psychosocial factors that influence sport participation; and (3) understand how neighbourhood spaces facilitate/impede sport participation. This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks used for this research, namely how cultural praxis guided the overall approach to the dissertation, whilst a socio-ecological system approach, postcolonial feminism, and spatial theory were strategically used to critically examine the proximal (e.g., social support, sport settings) and distal factors (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems) shaping participant sport experiences.

#### **Cultural Praxis**

This dissertation contributes to the field of cultural sport psychology (CSP), a sub-discipline of sport psychology, which provides contextual understandings of marginalized people and cultural identities in relation to sport participation and performance (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon & Fisher, 2015). CSP recognizes culture as a fundamental component to an individual's identity, experiences, and behaviours, as it influences how we view, relate to, and understand the world around us (Blodgett et al., 2015; McGannon, Curtin, Schinke, & Schweinbenz, 2012; Smith, 2010; Sue, 2004). CSP utilizes a heuristic model known as 'cultural praxis', which combines blended theory, service learning, and social action (Blodgett et al., 2015, Ryba & Wright, 2010). This model guides the overall approach to understanding and addressing contextual factors (e.g., personal, social, and structural contexts) that influence youth and young adults' lived experiences of sport participation in NIAs.

The first component of the model is blended theory, which encourages an interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary approach to sport psychology, drawing on various disciplines such as sociology, media studies, history, philosophy, and public policy with the intent of understanding social difference, power imbalances, and culture (Ryba & Wright, 2005). Utilizing blended theory also encourages the

use of various theoretical and methodological approaches, opening the field to new research topics and issues facing contemporary sport culture, such as exploring athletes' subjective experiences (e.g., relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), negotiation of power, performance of identity, and athletic/sport culture (Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005).

The second component of cultural praxis encourages service learning, where the researcher immerses themselves within the community of study (Ryba & Wright, 2005). Current recommended CSP practices include utilizing collaborative methodological approaches through localized, participatory, and reflective processes (Blodgett et al., 2012; McGannon & Johnson, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Schinke, McGannon, Parham, & Lane, 2012). Furthermore, it is suggested that qualitative approaches are adopted, as they are better equipped to capture the complexities of experiences and provide a deeper exploration of contexts (McGannon & Johnson, 2009).

The third component of the model is contributing to social change by addressing issues related to social difference, inequity, and injustice (Blodgett et al., 2012). Such action can come, for example, in the form of advancing knowledge and developing informed strategies to support participation amongst individuals and groups who are often underrepresented within sport research, and to improve inclusionary practices within sport by addressing issues related to power and inequality.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

With the tenets of cultural praxis in mind, this research utilized an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from both sport psychology and sociology of sport to examine the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs. While drawing from a socio-ecological perspective provides an overview of the proximal and distal factors influencing participants' sport journeys, PCF and spatial theory were used to examine those elements more critically by exposing how power and privilege operate in relation to participants' social position (e.g., gender, race and class) both within the NIAs and the wider Canadian sport context.

**Socio-ecological approach.** This dissertation takes a socio-ecological approach; drawing

primarily on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (see also Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), as it provides an effective approach to understand how participants' sport participation experiences are framed within personal, social, and structural contexts. EST explores the interaction between the individual and five nested systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem represents the innermost level of the model and includes activities (e.g., school, sports, place of worship), social roles, and interpersonal relationships (e.g., parents, peers, siblings, coaches, etc.) that most directly influence the developing person.

The second level, the mesosystem, encompasses relationships between microsystems (e.g., parents and sport settings). For example, it is widely recognized that parental support can influence children's access to sport opportunities (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008).

The exosystem is any relationship, which does not directly involve the developing person but indirectly influences processes within the immediate setting. For example, parents' workplace can affect a child's development in sport. If parents are required to work-long hours, they may not be able to be involved in their child's sport participation.

The macrosystem involves characteristics of culture and subculture such as belief systems and lifestyle, and can affect the conditions and processes occurring in the microsystem. It is widely recognized that hegemonic normative practices dominate Western sport, often favouring white, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005). As a result, the experiences of individuals and groups may differ depending on various factors (e.g., socio-demographics, social support, and sport environments, etc.).

Lastly, the chronosystem involves changes over time, including the characteristics of the person and the environment (e.g., changes to family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, residence, etc.). The chronosystem is also representative of the sociohistorical context (e.g., women and girls' place in sport has evolved over the past century).

The EST (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) is grounded in two propositions. Proposition One

stipulates that human development involves a process of progressive and more complex interactions between persons, objects, and symbols within the immediate environment. These interactions are known as *proximal processes*. Furthermore, proximal processes (e.g., engagement with social support, participating in sport) should occur on a regular basis over extended periods of time to influence human development (e.g., commitment to sport). Proposition Two suggests that form, power, content, and direction of proximal processes are dependent on the characteristics of the developing person, the environment in which the processes are occurring, the developmental outcomes under consideration, and changes to processes that may occur over time. For example, the environmental context (e.g., social class) and characteristics of the person (e.g., high levels of perceived competence) can greatly influence the nature of proximal process. Nonetheless, the proposition also proposes that proximal processes are more powerful than the context in which they occur.

Many scholars have used an ecological perspective to understand broad factors influencing sport behaviours (Holt, Kingsley, Tink & Scherer, 2011; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehna, & Wall, 2008). Most recently, Holt and colleagues (2017) provided a model for understanding positive youth development (PYD) in sport, suggesting individual variables (e.g., socio-demographics, traits and dispositions), sport settings (e.g., school, community sport clubs, etc.), and social interactions (e.g., with peers, family, teachers, coaches) are influenced by distal processes (e.g., community, policy, culture), which in turn, influence positive developmental outcomes. Furthermore, Fredricks and Simpkins (2011) reviewed outcomes related to youth's initial and ongoing participation in organized activities for African American and Latino youth and suggested that micro settings (e.g., organized sport activities) promoted resilience and positive development in ethnic minority youth; however, participation and outcomes vary, based on macrosystem factors (e.g., ethnicity, cultural norms, and immigration). Collectively, these studies highlight the rich insight gained from examining ecological processes to understand behaviours and conditions influencing sport participation.

Although this dissertation draws primarily from EST to specifically explore the intersection of

gender and sport participation, Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis of gender was also utilized. This analytical framework explores how gender boundaries are activated and enforced, which includes (a) interactional, (b) culture symbols, and (c) structural levels. Interactional levels refer to how individuals perform gender, whereas the cultural symbols can reinforce and further perpetuate differences between individuals and groups. Lastly, Messner suggests that structural context examines how gender norms are reproduced and reinforced within institutions. Furthermore, Messner suggested that these levels "are simultaneously and mutually intertwined process, none of which supersedes the others" (p. 767), and therefore, should not be seen as a linear process.

Utilizing a socio-ecological approach is beneficial to understanding sport journeys, as it helps identify *what* influences sport participation. As well, this approach demonstrates how some of these elements are beyond the developing person's control. However, using this framework has some shortcomings. First, it is challenging to view a developing person as 'fixed' or 'whole', given that identity is fluid, ever changing, and dependent on various contexts (Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Indeed, the athlete is subject to "multiple discourses and various identifications, a member of numerous social and cultural groups, and a part of sport as an institution immersed in a particular sociocultural and historical context" (Ryba & Wright, 2005, p. 204). Therefore, differing proximal and distal processes may influence the development of individuals' identities differently, depending on the environment and context they are in. For instance, the athlete's identity that is constructed in one sport setting may be different to the one performed in society or even other sporting environments (Ryba & Wright, 2005; Walseth, 2006; Weiss, 2001). Second, although the framework identifies factors influencing the developing person's sport journey, it does not provide or encourage a critical analysis of why and how these factors are relevant and how they may intersect. Understanding these processes is fundamental, as without it, there is risk of making overgeneralizations, assuming that these factors are within individuals' control, and most importantly, can limit the action/mobilization that can and should be derived from the research. As such, for this study, postcolonial feminism was

adopted alongside socio-ecological processes, to critically examine the distal factors, influencing the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs.

**Postcolonial feminism.** This dissertation was informed by PCF, a theory that acknowledges that colonial and imperial relations have a major influence on the way cultural groups view themselves in relation to others (Mills, 1998). Colonialism has been defined as:

The conquest and control of other people's land and goods. But colonialism in this sense is not merely the expansion of various European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas from the sixteenth century onwards; it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history.

(Loomba, 2007, p. 8)

Loomba's description of colonialism as 'recurrent' is significant. Although formal 'decolonisation' has taken place in many countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, Hong Kong), Loomba (2007) states:

...It is more helpful to think of postcolonialism not just as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. Such a position would allow us to include people geographically displaced by colonialism such as African-Americans or people of Asian or Caribbean origin in Britain as 'postcolonial' subjects although they live within metropolitan cultures. It also allows us to incorporate the history of anti-colonial resistance with contemporary resistances to imperialism and to dominant Western culture (p.16).

In other words, using postcolonialism as a theoretical lens brings to light the lasting effects of colonization on culture and society, in a way that goes beyond chronology and history (Loomba, 2007), an approach that has particular relevance for Canada.

Although utilizing postcolonial theory could aid in understanding complex issues related to the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs in Toronto, it was felt this approach could still contribute to oversimplifying and generalizing factors influencing sport

involvement. It is argued that postcolonial theory favours universalistic characteristics that construct a dominant discourse (e.g., gendered, racialized) that should be questioned and deconstructed (Wallaschek, 2015). Therefore, I wanted to more deeply explore the impact of socio-cultural factors, which included critical moments when these factors intersect to influence participation. Bearing in mind the principles of community-based participatory research, I wanted to select a theory that centred and highlighted research participants' views that are grounded in a specific local context (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2008; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). Keeping this in consideration, postcolonial feminism was utilized for this dissertation, as it disrupts the dominant discourse of imperial Europe, critiques stereotypes and generalizations employed by Western discourses, and raises the voices of those who have traditionally been silenced (McEwan, 2001).

It is widely recognized that the West has dominated the production of feminist scholarship, representing the interests of Western values, knowledge, and power (Hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 1988). Scholars such as Mohanty (1988) and Hooks (2000) have challenged the hegemony of Western feminism for perceiving the female experience of oppression as universal, ignoring the complexities of other components that form women's identities (e.g., social class, sexual orientation, etc.), and leading to the reproduction of difference and 'Othering' of various individuals and groups. For example, Mohanty (1988) criticised Western feminism for perpetuating a stereotype of the 'Third World woman,' one who is powerless, exploited, and sexually harassed. In contrast, Western women are perceived within Western feminism as having control over their body and sexuality, and as having the freedom to make their own decisions.

While this theory was originally developed as a response to the silencing of women's voices and experiences, it has since been expanded to include the intersection of multiple and complex discourses (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status) in relation to the lived experiences of individuals' lives who are shaped by their social, political, cultural, and economic environment (Khan, McDonald, Baumbusch, Kirkham, Tan, & Anderson, 2007; O'Mahoney &

Donnelly, 2010). As Khan and colleagues (2007) argued, PCF “recognizes the need for hearing the voices of all marginalized subjects (females and males) who have been historically silenced” (p. 231). The work of Collins (1993) underscores the need to broaden and reconceptualize the ways we act and think of ourselves, as well as the relationships we have with others with the intention of social change. Collins encourages a shift from binary conceptualizations of self, things, and ideas (e.g., man/woman, oppressed/not oppressed), as this perpetuates the need for categorization. She cautions against the ranking of oppression as it reinforces dichotomous thinking. Rather, our experiences and identity involve multiple and interlocking systems of domination and subordination (e.g., race, gender, class), which are fluid and dependent on context and the environment. Furthermore, all levels of oppression, regardless of its visibility, should be considered as always present. Collins challenges us to see the connections between our different positions of power and privilege and to build coalitions around commonalities through empathy for others different from ourselves, taking accountability for social change, and by examining our position. As Collins shares, “we are each responsible for making individual, personal choices concerning which elements of race, class and gender oppression we will accept and which we will work to change” (p. 43).

PCF has been widely used within the field of health (e.g., Guruge & Khanlou, 2004; O’Mahony & Donnelly, 2010), nursing (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Donnelly, 2008; Racine, 2003), and sociology of sport (e.g., media studies; Cooky, Dycus, & Dworkin, 2013) and sport for development (Hayhurst, Sundstrom, & Arksey, 2018). O’Mahony and Donnelly (2010) demonstrate how race, gender, and class relations intersect with social, cultural, political, and economic factors to shape the lives of immigrant women’s mental health care experiences. The authors highlight the benefits of using a PCF lens, as it supports the generation of transformative knowledge, which can improve equitable practices, and increase understanding/address the specific needs of individuals and groups. Within the field of sport, Cooky and colleagues (2013), examined Caster Semenya, a South African female track and field athlete who was subjected to “gender-verification” testing. They utilized PCF to deconstruct categories

(e.g., “woman” and “female athlete”) by which bodies are placed in a sex/gender system, which is shaped by nationalism, race relations, and colonial histories. Hayhurst (2011), a prominent scholar within sport for development research, utilized a PCF framework to consider how a multinational corporation that funds a sport, gender, and development programme was informed by the ‘Girl Effect’ movement (which assumes girls are capable of bringing forth social and economic change for their families, communities, and countries) in the Two-Thirds World is influenced by the postcolonial environment in which it operates. However, to my knowledge, PCF has been not utilized within sport psychology relating to sport participation and development.

**Spatial theory.** Given the importance of sport settings on sport participation (PAF, Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016), part of this research draws on Lefebvre’s (1991) *The Production of (Social) Space* to examine how spaces within the neighbourhood facilitates/impedes sport participation. This approach compliments EST and PCF, as it facilitates the critical exploration of physical and social sport space, including how space is socially constructed, produced, maintained, and resisted (van Ingen, 2003). Lefebvre’s framework identifies three interconnected forms of social space: spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation. Spatial practices refer to the perceived spaces, which are both material and physical. Spaces reflect human activity, behaviour, and experience. Generally, the space can be drawn or mapped out (e.g., sports gymnasiums and fields), often involving everyday activities and routines, such as playing sports. The second form of social space is a representation of space, which is the conceived, imagined, and constructed space. Representations of space are dominated by representations of power, which shape, regulate, and control. For example, van Ingen (2003) described how hockey holds a prominent position within the Canadian imagination, representing masculinity, heterosexuality, and nationality. Lastly, the third component is spaces of representation, which is also known as the “lived” space. Lived spaces not only reveal social struggle (e.g., discriminatory practices), they can provide a platform for oppositional practices and resistance (Keith & Pile, 1993). For example, the sport of

parkour redefines the “use and meaning of urban space, urban life and forms of embodiment” (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011, p. 112-113). Furthermore, the sport is viewed as providing a sense of place for those who felt traditionally excluded from mainstream sports due to hegemonically normative practices.

Lefebvre’s form of spatial analysis compliments both ecological systems and PCF approaches, as it strives to examine the complexities of experience, as individuals and groups move in, out, and around the periphery of sport spaces. van Ingen (2002) examined the social space of sexual minorities within a running club in Toronto, which included relations of power and resistance, as well as the impact of gender, sexuality, and race on urban-leisure. This study contributed to her 2003 paper, which continued to carry the importance of examining social spaces as part of spatial inquiry within sport. In this paper, she suggested drawing on theorists such as Lefebvre (1991) to explore the social production of social spaces in sport, which she linked to dominant ideologies and the politics of identity. This includes a deeper understanding of how gender, race, and sexuality are produced, maintained, and contested within social spaces to uncover the often “hidden geographies of power” in sport (van Ingen, 2002, p. 208).

### **Understanding Sport (Un) Involvement in NIAs**

Utilizing these theoretical frameworks to explore sport involvement within NIA was beneficial, as this not only provided an understanding of a group that is traditionally under-represented in sport research, but this insight may also support, differ, contradict and/or question research that is established within sport psychology, given that the field has been criticized for being overtly positivist, homogenous, and institutional (Anderson, 1993; Blodgett et al., 2015; Krane, 1994, 2001; Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Furthermore, this research recognizes that these lived experiences are framed within the context of distal factors (e.g., culture, geography, politics, and history), which extend beyond the sport environment. Historically, Canada is a white settler nation that has colonized Indigenous peoples. At the same time, this country has and continues to actively recruit and accept immigrants, many of whom are postcolonial subjects (Razack, 2002). It is, therefore, critical to contextualize the

experiences of immigrants and their families within a postcolonial frame and identify how the legacies of colonialism continue to echo and shape immigrants' settlement experiences and beyond (Razack, 2002).

**Inequity in Canada.** Despite the Multiculturalism Act which states that it values all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, language, or religious affiliation (Government of Canada, 2015), this idealism is not reflected in the lived realities for many racialized groups living in Canada (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2015; Coleman, 2006; Fleras, 2015; James, 2010, Mackey, 2002; Razack, 2002). In Toronto, many newcomers struggle to integrate into the city's social, economic, and cultural landscape due to challenges related to finding skill-appropriate employment, securing affordable childcare, obtaining safe and quality housing, accessing language services, navigating public transportation, and participating in recreational and cultural activities (City of Toronto, 2001; City of Toronto, 2013). Furthermore, the demographic of immigrants who have come to Canada in the last few decades is increasingly racialized. Racialization is the process by which "personality traits, behaviours, and social characteristics are ascribed to minority people because of their race and are seen as permanent and inalterable" (James, 2010, p. 66). James (2010) suggested that many Canadians view ethnicity as a marker for "Other," which is conceived as people who are not of British descent. This construction of otherness and exclusion, according to Hall (1997) is linked to Gramsci's conception of hegemony, a form of power that perceives the dominant group's values, views, and ideology as being the "norm." Central to this representation of 'normal' and otherness is stereotyping (Hall, 1997). Stereotyping reduces people to a few simple characteristics and is fundamental to social stratification, or the hierarchizing of individuals and groups based on their (lack of) power and social location (e.g., socioeconomic status, class, gender, age, nationality, race, language, sexual preference, etc.). By naturalizing and fixing difference, creating boundaries, and excluding those whom are perceived as not belonging, stereotyping is a form of power that is directed at and exercised against subordinate groups.

Teelucksingh (2006) argued that the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities continues to be mapped out both materially and symbolically within Canadian cities, limiting access to power and resources for various marginalized groups. It is suggested that the evolution of ethnic enclaves is the result of racial differences and discrimination, leading to social and spatial segregation amongst ethnic groups within Toronto (Quadeer, Argawal, & Lovell, 2010). Enclaves are neighbourhoods where there is a concentration of business, services, places of worship, clubs, institutions, associations, and residents from a particular ethnic group (Danso, 2002, James, 2010; Quadeer et al., 2010). Due to challenges with settlement and discrimination (e.g., housing and employment), new immigrants often settle within communities where they share a cultural identity, which is a source of social capital, mutual support and ethnic economies (Danso, 2002, James, 2010; Quadeer et al., 2010). Although, enclaves can be seen as individuals and groups maintaining their attachment to their culture (Quadeer, 2003), which is in-line with the purpose of Canada's Multiculturalism Act (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988; Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1971; Immigration Act, 1976; see Dewing, & Leman, 2006). Enclaves can also be viewed as representation of the lived reality for many immigrants, which includes poverty and social marginalization (James, 2010). Much like the spatial concentration of immigrants and their experiences of disenfranchisement, identification of 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) could be viewed as a means for contributing to the 'Othering' of marginalized individuals and groups in Toronto.

**Inequity in sport.** The inequality that prevails in society is also reflected in sporting practices in Canada, which has been dominated by European culture, and has shaped the Canadian social and institutional landscape, privileging white settlers with greater access to capital (e.g., education, employment, and connections; Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011). Organized sport, as we understand it today, originated from English public schools, which were educational establishments reserved for the Bourgeois elite, which led to sport governance (e.g., associations), universal standards (e.g., rules, awards, etc.), and the development of defined sport spaces. The impact of this shift fostered

spatial limitations on activities and control over the athletic body, therefore, constraining those who could engage in sport (Bale, 2000). For instance, sport involvement predominantly supported the upward mobility of the dominant class (e.g., those with spare time, economic and cultural capital), and more specifically the development of boys and young men, preparing them for “careers in business, government, colonial administration and the military by instilling physical and mental toughness, obedience to authority and loyalty to the ‘team’” (Kidd, 2013, p. 555).

The development of organized sport within Britain during the nineteenth century shaped sporting practices within commonwealth countries (e.g., Canada, Australia, Caribbean, etc.). Manthia Diawara’s (1990) article *Englishness and Blackness: Cricket as Discourse on Colonialism* provides a critical discussion of the historical development of cricket in the West Indies:

For modernizing and colonial Britain, which was in the business to conquer more territories and raw material, cricket is another way of introducing Englishness to the rest of the world. The very introduction of cricket to new places is a way of asserting the British cultural presence, a way of linking sports and politics. (p. 838)

When British settlers came to Canada, they brought British sports (e.g., cricket), adapted Indigenous games (e.g., lacrosse), and created new sports (e.g., ice hockey) for their own consumption (Kidd, 1997). Kidd (1997) recounted how George Beers adapted the Mohawk game of lacrosse called *tewaarathon* in the 1860s in Montreal to encompass standard rules and equipment and a governing association. In addition to lacrosse, many other organized sport clubs were established in the mid 1800s, which were mainly limited to wealthy Anglophone men in urban areas (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Kidd, 1997). Upper-class clubs were viewed as ‘amateur’ and were generally available to the elite, who did not participate in sport as a means to support their livelihood. In contrast, the working-class were more likely to participate in ‘folk’ games and commercialized sport, which led to emergence of professionalization of sport. Throughout the nineteenth century, national and provincial organizations in Canada were developed, which governed “who played sports, how they were played”

(Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 61). Following the late 1800s to early 1900s, sport participation expanded due to the emergence of unions and social reformers who called for the increased availability of free time of working-middle class, which were mainly white males. As well, the middle-class demographic began to expand, enabling more resources for leisure and sport participation.

In addition to the development of organized sport, this period led to the emergence of recreational programs and organized playgrounds. It was recognized that sport could contribute to character development, as a means for promoting “God and country” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 67), which was based on Christian values, and was seen as particularly beneficial for supporting the settlement of immigrant children to become active members of Canadian society. To further this, the notion that sport builds character was targeted mainly at young, working class males. Sport participation was a means to transform young lower-class males into productive and obedient citizens, whilst maintaining the upward mobility of power and influence amongst upper-middle class males. Females’ sport participation was limited due to supposed health concerns (e.g., negative impact on childbearing); however, when women and girls did participate, it was mainly those who belonged to the middle or upper-middle class who were involved in activities which fostered beauty, composure, and body control (e.g., gymnastics, figure skating). Additionally, Coakley and Donnelly (2009) shared that sports environments reinforced the exclusion of individuals and groups, based on race and disability. Indigenous people and visible minorities were often excluded from amateur organized sport and various segregated teams and leagues based on race were developed. As well, older people and individuals with mental and physical disabilities were discouraged and denied opportunities to participate in sport, as it was perceived to be harmful to their well-being.

Although the development of organized sport in Canada occurred during a period with specific political, economic, and ideological contexts, the colonial history of organized sport in Canada continues to influence how sport is provided in this present day. There have been a variety of political and social movements that have changed the sport landscape in Canada (e.g., Right To Play) by

advocating sport inclusion; however, lower participation rates continue to be observed amongst various groups (e.g., women, individuals of lower socioeconomic status, immigrants, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and LGBTQ2+; Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Government of Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2013), highlighting that sport environments continue to be influenced by colonial values and structures which favour white, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Krebs, 2012). Hockey and hockey arenas are examples of sport and sport spaces that continue to reinforce the hegemonic normativity of sport, dominated by white males (Krebs, 2012). Although marginalized individuals and communities play the sport, often their accessibility is limited and their participation is often referred to as playing ‘our game’, which strengthens the divide between the dominant culture and ‘Others’ (Krebs, 2012).

Moreover, sport participation continues to be promoted as a kind of social engineering, in that it is viewed as means for developing positive behaviours (e.g., positive youth development through sport; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), and societal outcomes (e.g., enhanced education and skill development, health and wellness, civic pride and cohesion and economic prosperity; Sport Information Resource Centre, SIRC, 2012). This is particularly apparent, as Coakley (2011) points out, in how sport has been positioned as a way to support “at-risk” populations, as it provides structure around values and goals, deters them from antisocial behaviours, teaches them positive attributes (e.g., self-control), and provides them with access to positive role models; in other words, sport can make ‘at-risk’ youth into good citizens. However, scholars have been critical of utilizing sport as a means for social outcomes, as it raises questions as to whose standards they are being benchmarked against (Coakley, 2011, Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2009; Spaaij, 2009). For example, although the Canada Sport Policy 2012 (SIRC, 2012) suggested that sport participation could facilitate civic pride and cohesion, Nakamura (2012) argued that white Canadians automatically reap the benefits of citizenship, while “Others” must earn their citizenship through “appropriate behaviour” (p. 221). Therefore, opportunities to exercise ‘positive’ outcomes such as civic engagement could be fostered or constrained based on hierarchies

that exist within sport and society in Canada. Although sport-for-development programs are aimed at supporting positive social outcomes for vulnerable individuals and groups, scholars such as Darnell and Hayhurst (2011) caution that sport in itself cannot be used as a sole means to address wider social and structural issues, highlighting the need to critically examine and address distal processes (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems, culture) influencing sport behaviours. For example, Scherer, Koch, and Holt (2016) examined the experiences of low-income/homeless men involved in a sport-for-development floor hockey program in Edmonton. Participation in the program provided various benefits, such as access to social services and a sense of community, belonging and support; however, this research uncovered neoliberal (e.g., mental health, poverty, crime, addiction) underpinnings within urban spaces, which were beyond the individuals' control. This study highlights the importance of distal factors such as history, politics, and ideology, within and beyond the boundaries of sport are fundamental to gaining a deeper understanding of sport experiences. However, it is acknowledged that individual characteristics (e.g., socio-demographics and personality traits) contextualize the lived experience, illuminating the importance of examining intersectionality and localized perspectives.

### **Summary**

Guided by 'cultural praxis', EST, PCF and spatial theory are used to examine the lived experiences of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs, a demographic group that has been under-studied and under-represented within sport research and practice. From a sport psychology perspective, this research uses an ecological system approach to examine proximal (e.g., self, social support, sport environments) and distal (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems) factors that shaped individuals' sport journeys. Secondly, postcolonial feminism is used to critically examine the distal factors, and how power and privilege influenced participation, including the intersection of multiple and complex discourses (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status, etc.). Furthermore, this research utilizes spatial theory to critically examine how the built, natural, and social environments can influence the use of sport spaces. These

theoretical frameworks informed the entire process of the dissertation, from the development of the research question, design and implementation of the methodology, development of the manuscripts, and knowledge mobilization activities and initiatives planned and enabled thus far.

## Chapter Four: Research Orientation and Positionality

The following chapter provides detailed insight into the research methods and procedures that were utilized for this dissertation, including descriptions of study design, context and participants, data collection, analysis, and methods used to ensure credibility and trustworthiness when conducting my research and interpreting the findings. Before doing so, I provide some background to the approaches used for this dissertation by sharing how this project was initiated.

I was in the midst of running a girls rugby program (Summer 2013) at a local club in Toronto, which drew girls that were not traditionally represented in rugby, given the sport's colonial roots. The program drew many female athletes from the two high school teams I helped coach over the spring season (2013). One high school team was predominantly comprised of females of South Asian (e.g., Pakistan) descent, whereas the other school team drew females from Central Asian descent (i.e. China), which reflected the demographics of the communities both schools were situated in. As a coach, of both the club and high school teams, I experienced an ongoing process of truly understanding diversity and also creating an inclusive environment. I made conscious efforts to learn, listen, and adapt the programming, based on the players' diverse needs. Most of the time, I learned by asking questions; however, there were times when I also made assumptions. For example, I remember talking to a player about the *hijab* during the club (Summer) season. I was so nervous about approaching her, as I was concerned about her safety, given the style of veil she was wearing. I asked her if we could find another type of style she could wear. I sounded awkward and nervous, as I did not want to come across as being rude or judgemental. The player laughed at me and told me not to be afraid of asking. Nonetheless, it was sometimes challenging to encourage and expect inclusive practices (e.g., efforts to learn, listen and adapt to differing needs) of my coaching staff and players, particularly amongst my club team, which was more racially diverse (e.g., staff and athletes).

We had an amazing year with the club, with one of the highest numbers of registered players in the league. To my dismay, the following year, most players from South Asian descent did not return.

This was especially confusing because, during the season, the players as a collective appeared to have enjoyed playing (e.g., few missed games). I contacted one of the players to ask the reason she and others did not return and she mentioned that although she enjoyed playing, participation was not a priority. This discussion with one of my former athletes, along with the significant withdrawal of players from my team inspired my interest in understanding the lived experience of sport participation, particularly among those who are often underrepresented in sport research and practice. I remember enthusiastically sharing this experience with one of my supervisors. However, I also remember walking away from that meeting, wondering if I said something wrong, insensitive, ignorant, and potentially harmful about my athletes when I was sharing my experience. These thoughts made me realize that the approach I wanted to take for this research would strive to place the participants' experience as the focal point, by providing them a platform to be heard and for others to learn from their experiences.

### **Research Position**

Guided by the theoretical framework, this research focuses on the lived experience, specifically how people live through and respond to personal experiences, including various aspects of a person's life and identity, even those not directly connected to the research question (Boylorn, 2008). As well, this focus on lived experience assumes that there is no definite reality; rather, knowledge is socially constructed, imperfect, and subjective (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, this approach can provide valuable insight into how the participants see themselves within a place or situation (Creswell, 2013), or as in the case of this research study that examines sport participation within a geographic area, the individual and collective experience of youth and young adults living in NIAs. Furthermore, this approach was selected because it can provide a localized view and effective way to understand and address the experiences of marginalized, non-Western cultural groups who have traditionally been silenced (Huss 2009; Swadener & Mutua 2008).

Eastmond (2007) described four dynamic levels that contributed to an understanding of the lived experience, drawing on the work of Bruner (1986): (1) life as lived, (2) life as experienced, (3)

life as told, and (4) life as text. *Life as lived*, recognizes that participants provide a sequence of events that have impacted their lives (e.g., chronologically). *Life as experienced* reflects on how the person interprets and gives meanings to occurrences, drawing on previous experiences and socio-cultural factors (e.g., social class, gender, disability, etc.). *Life as told* acknowledges the collaborative effort between the narrator (e.g., participant), researcher, and audience (e.g., reader) in constructing and reconstructing the lived experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Crapanzano, 1980; Skultans, 1999). Past experiences are always remembered and interpreted in light of the present and how the future is imagined. Lastly, *life as text* recognizes the researcher's and reader's understanding, interpretation, and retelling of the story. Therefore, these four elements were considered when designing and implementing the methods used for this research, to ensure that the participants' voice was at the forefront, whilst still acknowledging my impact on the process and presentation of the findings.

In addition, as power imbalances often exist between the researcher and participants, in this study the principles of community-based research (CBR) were employed to encourage openness, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity between the researcher and participant (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2008; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). The CBR principles employed included undertaking the study in partnership with the communities, drawing on multiple sources of knowledge across disciplinary lines, and ensuring that the research was reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Holland, 2005). Prior to and throughout the study, a significant amount of time was spent meeting with local leaders to build trust and to gain valuable insight into the community. The initial entry point was through sport organizations that worked in the neighbourhood and with whom I had previously worked, which led to engagement with other local organizations such as the local service agencies, and also staff from the municipal government. This engagement provided a better understanding of the neighbourhood, such as how sport spaces were used, ways of living, and the issues the community was facing. In addition, these local organizations assisted with participant recruitment. CBR principles aligned with service-learning, encouraged by cultural-praxis and PCF, which encourages conducting

research that is "for, with and by the people, rather than on people" (Conrad & Campbell, 2008), an approach that empowers individuals and groups who have traditionally been excluded or marginalized by the dominant society (Cahill, 2007).

### **Participants and Context**

Participants were youth and young adults who were (a) residents of two selected NIAs, (b) between the ages of 16-25 years old, and (c) participated in sport. "Participated in sport" was intentionally kept vague to include participants who may not have been playing sport at the time of the study. It was felt their insights would be valuable for the study, as it cannot be assumed that even though they were not playing at the time of the study, that they would not return to sport, as sport participation can be related to a range of factors, from proximal (e.g., personal characteristics, social support, sport programming) to distal (e.g., normative practices). As well, participants who had moved away for post-secondary education, but were from the neighbourhoods of study were considered.

**Neighbourhoods of study.** Two neighbourhoods of study were selected for this dissertation, as both are recognized as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) by the City of Toronto (2014). NIAs are neighbourhoods which the City of Toronto has identified as falling below the Neighbourhood Equity Score, a measure that accounts for economic opportunities, social development, healthy lives, participation in decision-making, physical surroundings, and "that signals that the overall burden of inequities faced by a neighbourhood requires action" (City of Toronto, 2014, p. 1). The City of Toronto has provided demographic profiles of NIAs, which are based on the 2011 Census that collects information on population, age, sex, dwellings, living arrangements, family structure, and language (see Appendix E: Table 1 for a summary of demographics for both neighbourhoods). Pseudonyms are used for each neighbourhood of study to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Both NIAs have a relatively high percentage of residents who are born outside of Canada, compared with the average of Toronto, with most of the residents having immigrated from South and East Asia. Most residents of both areas have a mother tongue (e.g., Urdu, Gujarati, and Farsi) different

to the official language of Canada (English or French), at a rate that is considerably higher than the city overall. Additionally there are a higher percentage of children and youth (aged 0-24 years), as well as families with three or more children in these NIAs. Residents within both communities spend a greater percentage of their income on housing compared with others living in Toronto, and for many, their housing does not meet the National Occupancy Standards (e.g., exceeding maximum living capacity per bedroom, City of Toronto, 2015). As well, more residents have lower-incomes, compared to the City of Toronto's average.

Despite these patterns, the identification and boundaries for NIAs, which were drawn by City of Toronto officials, should be considered with caution. Prior to the start of data collection, it was my intention to examine only one NIA. Guided by CBR principles (Denison & Winslade, 2006; Partington, et al., 2005), I spent a considerable amount of time speaking with local leaders and sport organizations to gain a better understanding of the community and approaches for participant recruitment. It was evident from this engagement that those who live and work within Greendale did not perceive the geographic boundaries of their neighbourhood in the way that was set out by the City of Toronto. As a result, the geographic boundaries for this study were extended to include a neighbouring community (which was also identified as an NIA), as many of the programs and services were shared (e.g., schools, sports facilities) amongst both communities and many leaders suggested that both communities shared values, norms, needs, and interests. Furthermore, when exploring spaces used for sport participation (see Chapter Seven), this methodological decision was affirmed when many participants argued that the boundaries defined by the City of Toronto did not represent their views of the space, suggesting that some areas are better conceived as being part of another neighbourhood close by with differing (read: affluent) demographic profiles. Collectively, this engagement highlights how the boundaries of a neighbourhood set by institutions (e.g., government) may not represent the experience of those who live and work within it.

**Recruitment.** Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for the study and was initiated through existing relationships I had with some youth who resided within the neighbourhoods of study. Prior to the research, I communicated with existing contacts (e.g., athletes I previously coached or knew), which met the recruitment specification (e.g., residents of two selected NIAs, between the ages of 16-25 years old, and participated in sport) and invited them to take part in the study or to assist with recruiting participants. As well, relationships were built with local organizations and service agencies (i.e., sports clubs, sport organizations, and the municipality), by presenting the study at meetings and activities. As well, organizations and service agencies sent recruitment communications on my behalf to their contacts, which led to some participants directly contacting me with interest in participating. Once the study commenced, respondent-driven sampling, as known as 'snowballing' (Heckathorn 1997) was also utilized for recruiting additional participants, as many encouraged their peers to participate.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. All interviews were conducted in English and digitally audio-recorded. As well, this research adhered to regulations and policies set out under institutional ethics. All participants were provided with an informed consent form (Appendix A and B for consent forms) prior to the interview, which detailed the purpose of the research, what was required of them as participants, anticipated risks, confidentiality, and procedures for asking questions or withdrawing from the study. This study's protocol was in accordance with the regulations and policies set out under the affiliated university's Human Participants Research Protocol. An incentive of a \$20 gift voucher to a local business was provided for the participants of the interviews and an incentive of a \$10 gift voucher to a local business and food was provided at the focus groups to encourage participation and to thank them for providing their time to the study.

**Semi-structured interviews.** To understand the lived experience of sport participation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants (n=8 males, n=8 females) during the

Summer of 2016. Interviews ranged in duration from 45-120 minutes and were either conducted face-to-face within the neighbourhoods of study (e.g., community centre, library, local park), or by telephone depending on the preference of the participant. Scholars have suggested that telephone and in-person interviews produce a similar quality of data (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). As such, there was no disadvantage with respect to the type of responses that were given depending on the particular collection method.

Broad, open-ended, and non-judgmental questions were used to loosely guide the interview, and probing questions were used to follow-up on participant responses to seek clarification or further detail (See Appendix C - Participant Interview Guide). As language can be socially constructed, participants were first asked to provide their definition of 'sport' and 'athlete' at the beginning of each interview, which served to contextualize their views and experiences of sport. In addition, participants were asked to imagine that their life was like a storybook, and that each chapter was a stage in their life (e.g., childhood, youth, young adulthood), which encouraged them to provide a chronological account of their life and experiences in sport. This provided insight into their family life, upbringing, relationships, and for some, settlement in Canada. As there may be limitations in providing a retrospective account from memory, participants were also asked to share a sporting moment that was important to them, to help initiate further discussions of participation. As well, participants were asked about what motivated them to participate in sport, to provide additional context. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to describe any conditions that they felt were important for their sport involvement. This question was intentionally vague, in order to encourage participants to share what they felt was important to them. This question also provided insight into their sport journey, as these conditions were often connected to a positive or negative experience they encountered. For instance, one participant highlighted that she would only play sports that did not have uniform restrictions, which was related to an experience she had in secondary school when she was asked to leave the court because she was wearing track pants for

religious reasons. Lastly, participants were asked their views on how the availability of sport programming facilitated and/or impeded their sport participation within the NIA.

**Focus groups.** To understand the lived experience of sport participation in NIAs, which included neighbourhood spaces that facilitate/impede sport participation, five focus groups were conducted with twenty-seven 16-21-year-olds ( $n = 19$  males,  $n = 8$  females) in Fall of 2016. Focus groups were conducted in English, and ranged in duration from 120-240 minutes, and took place within the neighbourhoods of study (e.g., library, school). Originally, I proposed to conduct mobile interviewing, as it can be an effective way of exploring how individuals use and conceptualize different spaces (Emmel & Clark, 2011; Jones, Bunce, Evans, Gibbs & Hein, 2008). However, I wanted to get a broader understanding of how spaces were used and perceived for sport amongst a larger group of people, given that it has been argued that spaces for sport are socially constructed (Lefebvre, 1999). As such, focus groups were selected as an appropriate data collection method, as they can be an effective method for understanding how people collectively think and feel about an issue. Krueger (2014) suggests that focus groups should entail a small group of participants that possess common characteristics (e.g., socio-demographics), and the discussion should focus on understanding a specific topic of interest. As well, the benefits of using focus groups compared with one-to-one interviews are that they can provide richer and more vast insight on topics in a short span of time, through social interactions between participants (Rabiee, 2004).

The five focus groups ranged from two to ten youth and young adults who lived in both of the NIAs (i.e. groups were not divided based on NIAs), depending on the availability of the participants. Two of the focus groups were large in number ( $n=10$  per group) and were mostly made up of male participants, with both groups having only two female participants in each. I was very mindful of the power dynamics that were occurring during the groups. For example, it was evident that power was operating through how the men were dominating the discussion, which impacted the females' voices. Overall, females did not speak as much during the focus groups, with the exception of one break, when

the males left and the two females stayed behind to share more insight into their experiences.

Subsequent groups were smaller in size and two of the three subsequent groups were gender segregated, which were easier to moderate, allowing participants to contribute more to the discussion.

A semi-structured discussion guide was used (See Appendix D - Participant Discussion Guide), drawing from the theoretical frameworks chosen (i.e., EST, PCF and Spatial Theory). Primarily, the discussion guide was guided by Lefebvre's (1991) *Production of social spaces*, which identifies three interconnected forms of social space: spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation. *Spatial practices* refer to the perceived space, which is both material and physical. Space reflects human activity, behaviour, and experience. Generally, space can be drawn or mapped out, such as stadiums, gymnasiums and playing fields and it often involves everyday activities and routines such as walking, running and playing sports. *Representation of space* (a.k.a., conceived space) is the second form of social space Lefebvre refers to, which is imagined and constructed. This space is dominated by representations of power, which shape, regulate and control. The third form is *spaces of representation*, which is also known as the "lived" space, revealing social struggle (e.g., discriminatory practices), oppositional practices, and resistance (Keith & Pile, 1993). As such, the discussion guide was designed with the following questions in mind:

- How do the participants use and perceive sport spaces in the neighbourhood?
- How do participants perceive those who use spaces within the neighbourhood?
- Are there feelings of inclusion or exclusion within the space?
- What are the bodily experiences within those spaces?

Furthermore, EST and PCF were used to draw upon and to explore the proximal (e.g., physical settings) and distal factors (e.g., normative practices) influencing the use of spaces for sport more deeply and critically. For example, although the boundaries of the NIAs were established by the municipal government (e.g., City of Toronto), it is acknowledged that the definition of physical space

is influenced by historical, political, and economic ideologies that have been influenced by colonialism (Bale, 2000, 2002). As a result, it is likely that these processes have shaped perceptions and the lived experiences of spaces used for sport by participants.

To initiate discussions around spaces used for sport, a mapping exercise was used, as I still wanted to capture how individuals used and viewed different spaces for sport. Participants were provided with large-scale maps of both NIAs (provided by the City of Toronto), which included sport spaces as identified by the City of Toronto (e.g., Parks and Recreation). Sport spaces were marked out, to help the participants orient themselves and assisted in moderating the discussions and probing about spaces designated for sport in the NIAs.

First, participants were encouraged to reflect on the NIAs of study, as identified by the City of Toronto. Questions included, “Do these boundaries best represent the neighbourhood you live within?”, “How do you view [name of neighbourhoods of study]?”, “Is this different to how it is perceived by non-residents?”, and “How are neighbouring communities similar/different?”. The intention of this discussion was to get an overall understanding of how the participants viewed their neighbourhoods and those that surrounded them. This suggested that the boundaries identified by the City of Toronto were not a representation of how some participants view their neighbourhood.

Second, the maps were placed on tables in the focus group room with a box of pins. Participants were provided with approximately 30 minutes to examine the maps together and place pins on the maps on spaces where they currently (at the time of study) or had previously (prior to the study) played sport, within the neighbourhoods. As participants were reviewing the maps together, it initiated several discussions between participants, which included recollection of sporting memories within the spaces and clarification of the location of spaces used for sport. Following this exercise, I posed questions like, “I noticed that many of you use this space [pointing to a location on the map] for sport. Tell me about it....”, which was followed up with probing questions such as, “What types of sports do you play here?”, “What do you like about playing sports here?” and “How can the space be improved?”. These

questions were used to initiate discussions, allowing the participants the autonomy to share and express experiences and opinions about the spaces, used (and not used) for sport. Additionally, participants were asked if there were any other spaces used for sport that were not identified on the maps. This led to an engaging conversation among participants on alternative spaces used for sport, highlighting participants' motivation for sport participation and the desire and ability to claim space, which parallels Lefebvre's analysis of spaces that are 'lived,' along with other lived experiences shared by participants during the interviews.

**Reflexive journal.** I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process, which focused on my own thoughts and feelings during the data collection phase. Tufford and Newman (2012) suggest that journaling can “enhance researchers’ ability to sustain a reflexive stance” (p. 86) which includes questioning intentions and presuppositions of the research and recognizing their social position within power hierarchies and personal values. The journal was also used as a method for ensuring credibility, which is discussed later in this chapter (see Credibility and Trustworthiness subsection). Prior to the start of data collection, journal entries were completed after each interaction with community stakeholders (e.g., local sports organizations) to consider their feedback when recruiting participants and developing the interview guide. This included ways of living, how sport spaces are used, and issues facing the community. As well, journal entries were completed after each interview and focus group, reflecting on the interview process and the interactions had with the participants, exploring power dynamics, interview techniques, and content to improve facilitation and engagement with participants as the project progressed. Reflexive practices enabled me to explore and challenge my position of power, which was fluid and ever-changing, depending on the context of the interview. For example, the following journal entry was completed after interviewing a participant with whom I share commonalities (e.g., sports played):

...As he is a rugby player, I feel very close to the data, so I need to be mindful that when I am talking to someone who I feel has had a 'similar' experience, I need to bring myself back to the

methods, that this is his lived experience and not mine and that we all experience situations and feelings differently.

This journal entry highlights the challenges of studying topics with which you have a close connection. This participant played and coached the same sport that I played and coached, so naturally, I was viewing the data through the lens of my own experiences. However, this was his lived experience, therefore, this entry made me realize that I needed to improve on my listening skills, allowing the participants to share their story, as they view it, and be sensitive to how I subsequently reconstruct their experiences in this study.

Other times, I felt like an outsider because of my gender (female) and ethnicity (white, Canadian-British, Jewish). This was particularly felt during focus groups when the participants were mainly comprised of males:

There were various times, they spoke in a different language to one another and also there was a lot of giggling after one person would comment...At the time, I was skeptical of their feedback, given the behaviour they were projecting - which at times, got me flustered and nervous, which impacted my ability to facilitate the discussion, but also my confidence in asking questions and trusting what they were saying. In reflection, I really feel this was a representation of power dynamics on so many levels. I am not a resident of the community, I don't work for [sport organization name], I don't play [the sport], I'm female, I'm white, I'm 40, I am representing a university and I am conducting research. Maybe they never met someone like me. Maybe they have and did not like them. Maybe I am a bad listener. Maybe this is all my head. Maybe I have no idea what their perceptions of me are and what dynamics were happening. The reality is, I will never know because I am not them.

This particular focus group provided a positive and constructive learning experience for me, as it made me realize the complex power dynamics that were occurring during the research process, which not only reflected the interaction between researcher and participants but how the participants engaged

with one another. Overall, utilizing a reflexive journal enabled me to improve on my interview technique as the research project progressed. As well, the journals enabled me to take notes down on potential emerging themes and connections between participants, which were considered during the analysis process.

### **Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews and focus groups; it is a process of identifying, examining, and drawing common themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This form of analysis aligned well with my theoretical framework and study design, as the process of thematic analysis placed the participants' voices at the forefront of the research, by drawing initial codes directly from the data through an inductive process. As well, it was through a deductive analysis, drawing on an ecological systems perspective and PCF lens, that I was able to gain an understanding of the collective contextual factors influencing sport experiences.

First, interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and NVivo 11.4.0 (QSR International Pty. Ltd) software was used to code interviews during the initial stages of the data analysis (i.e., inductive analysis). Transcripts were then read and re-read for familiarity. Participants of the semi-structured interviews were sent their transcripts by email and encouraged to review the document and provide comments on key points that stood out in the interview from their perspective. (See "Credibility and Trustworthiness" section for detailed information on this process).

Second, transcripts were further re-read and an inductive approach was employed to develop initial coding. An inductive analysis is a data-driven, bottom-up approach, reducing the risk of researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, initial codes included "body," "motivation," and "unstructured sport". These codes were then categorized and developed into themes such as "gendering of unstructured sport", "perceptions of competence" and "parental support." As well, analytic memos were completed, noting down ideas, patterns, and connections of interest. Third, keywords and

concepts were grouped together to form sub-themes. Fourth (where applicable), sub-themes were combined to develop themes that addressed the primary objective of the study.

Lastly, themes were compiled utilizing deductive analysis, a top-down approach driven by a theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the analysis was guided by prominent conceptual psychology and sport psychology models/frameworks, to explore sport participation and performance, including factors that influenced sport take-up, advancement, and withdrawal. For example, in Chapter Six: Perceived Parental Support for Sport Participation, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST: Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) was used to frame the participants' sport participation experience within personal, social and structural contexts. As well, sport psychology frameworks relating to sport development (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) and positive youth development (Côté et al., 2014, 2016) were utilized to explore proximal factors (e.g., motivation, parental support, sport environment), which influenced their sport participation.

Second, from a sociological perspective, PCF and Lefebvre's work were used to critically examine factors influencing sport participation. PCF provided direction for contextualizing how power relations influenced behaviours and experiences of individuals and groups, by exposing inequalities related to an individual's social position (e.g., gender, race, and class) that resulted from the process of colonization (Racine, 2003). This framework was particularly important when exploring how social (e.g., relationships) and institutional (e.g., structures) processes affected the lived experiences for those living in NIAs (e.g., immigration settlement, sport delivery systems). Furthermore, Lefebvre's (1991) three forms of social space were used to explore how space was socially constructed, produced, and maintained (see Chapter Seven: Space). This approach to spatial analysis supported the critical examination of how sport spaces facilitated and impeded sport participation, which included factors relating to the built (e.g., safety), natural (e.g., space), and social (e.g., exclusion) environment.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis was an effective method for gaining a rich understanding of the factors that influenced the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs in Toronto. Specifically, this approach highlighted the notion that sport behaviours are influenced by broader contextual factors, which included both contemporary and historical issues (e.g., relating to power, identity and culture) that require further exploration (Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005).

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Cope (2014) suggests that credibility and trustworthiness are fundamental factors to qualitative research, as these factors can potentially minimize the risk of researcher bias. As such, this research draws on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria used to evaluate qualitative data research, which includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In what follows, each criterion is discussed further; speaking to how each criterion was implemented through the research process.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to striving to ensure that the data is interpreted in a way that best represents the participant; this involves the researcher engaging in reflexive practices to acknowledge their role within research, and member checking with the participants (Cope, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, bracketing methods were utilized to assist in balancing potential tensions between the researcher and participants and to reduce the risk of imposing my own values, opinions, and experiences on the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I chose to implement a multilayered process for bracketing, which occurred throughout the research, from inception to developing the dissertation, which included: (1) recognizing my position, (2) reflexive practices, and (3) member-checking with participants.

***Recognizing the researcher's position.*** A fundamental to PCF is that the researcher is "aware of his or her own subjective experience in relation to that of the participant and this awareness was to acknowledging the limits of objectivity" (O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010, p. 442). Reflexive researchers question the collection and evaluation of knowledge by acknowledging their own experiences and

interpretations, values, biases, and position within social structures in relation to the participants (Schinke et al., 2012; Ryba & Schinke, 2009; Ryba & Wright, 2005). In doing so, they can challenge, produce, or perpetuate power structures, which in turn, empower individuals, or disempower others (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). The following passage elaborates on my location in relation to the research, providing details of my personal characteristics (e.g., values, norms, and beliefs), position in power (e.g., oppressor and oppressed), and experiences (e.g., sport, growing up) which can/did influence the research process, from the choice study and research question to how the data was collected, analyzed and presented:

*This is me.* I am a (not in any particular order) feminist, wife, mother, former athlete, sports administrator, mental and chronic illness fighter, student and owner of a gorgeous dog and thriving business. I am 41 years old and I have the grey hairs and the mature lines, lumps, and bumps to show for it. I come from a long line of immigrants and refugees. My step-grandparents had tattoos that made them targets of hatred and my grandparents were awarded medals for freedoms that we now often take for granted. I am a mother to a little boy who made me fight for his existence and who inspires me to fight for a better world. I am Jewish by birth, but probably as reform as you can get (I love the food, I nag a lot), but I also celebrate Christian holidays that involve chocolate out of respect for my husband and the love of chocolate. I am white and that makes me privileged. I know that the colour of my skin affects how people treat me. I am also middle-class; I can buy things that I want and I can afford things that are trivial but I still complain that I have no money. As an academic, I have studied at the highest level of education, I am aware of my position of power and influence, and I hold myself accountable. My husband, my partner describes me as "powerful", even when I don't believe or feel like it. However, in other ways, I am held back. Sometimes, I feel small, powerless, intimidated and angry. When I was a kid, the people around me seemed to be obsessed with what I should look like and who I should be. They encouraged me to go on diets, encouraged me to wear 'girly'

clothes, asked me if I was gay because I loved rugby and told me to “not mess things up” when they met my husband for the first time. My son tells me that I am not invited because “it’s boys only” and that I am only allowed to play with the toys that are pink and purple. Was it me who taught him this? Sometimes I wonder if I were a man, would life be easier? Would I be taken more seriously? Would I not be accused of “flapping my arms in the air” when I feel strongly about something? Would my father ask me how rugby is going? Would I be invited to join the ‘boys’ at the table? All this thinking makes my heart heavy and the desire for change stronger.

In addition to recognizing my own position of privilege, oppression, and commitment to social change, my academic and sport administration experience has shaped the research process. This includes the development of the research question, methodological approaches, and the presentation of the findings. However, rigorous reflexive processes were implemented to strive to minimize biases and best represent the lived experience of the participants.

***Reflexive practices.*** As detailed in the data collection section, reflexive journals were kept throughout the research process, which explored power dynamics, interview techniques and contented to improve facilitation and engagement with participants as the project progressed. As well, analytic memos were utilized during the analysis phase, which assisted in recognizing emerging themes early in the research process, catching thoughts, and making connections and comparisons between the interviews. Charmaz (2006) suggested that memo taking encourages the researcher to be actively engaged in the material and provides a space to explore the research in an informal way. The following journal entry was completed towards the end of the participant one-to-one interviews, where I noted some emerging themes:

*Entry - August 25, 2016.* The other question that is bugging me is that all the dropouts talked about leaving sports to focus on school. Does playing sport negatively affect education performance? Is this proven? Why do people have this perception that sport is more of a burden for those who want to be professionally successful? I really need to understand this better. If

parents see sport as a negative thing – then it's an uphill battle to incorporate sport in a young person's life.

This entry demonstrated how some of the interviews evoked areas that I wanted to explore in future interviews or through the data analysis process. Reflexive practices like this were particularly useful when reflecting on what frameworks/theories to consider when reviewing the transcripts and making connections between participant experiences. However, it is acknowledged that these 'hunches' were influenced by my position of power, experiences, and opinions. As such, these memos were not used as the base of analysis; rather, they were considered 'placeholders' to consider and possibly revisit during the development of the findings.

***Member checking.*** As power imbalances often exist between the researcher and participants, I drew upon participatory methods to develop a trusting relationship with participants (Cahill, 2007; O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010). As such, member checking was employed, as a “way of finding out whether the data analysis [was] congruent with the participants’ experiences” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Participants of the semi-structured interviews were sent their transcripts by email and encouraged to review the document and provide comments on key themes that stood out to them, and to raise any questions or concerns about the interview. Four participants responded with feedback, which was considered for the analysis. Emerging themes highlighted by the participants included the importance of social support (e.g., peers, parents), provision of sport within the community (e.g., inclusive and accessible sport spaces), and focusing on promoting sport within early stages of childhood (e.g., development of sport skill and interest).

A different approach to member checking was utilized for the focus groups. During the focus groups, participant feedback was recorded on large poster papers, which were placed around the room for participants to review and discuss. Following the discussion of each question, I summarized the key points and asked participants if what was discussed was a reflection of their experiences. Participants provided verbal and physical agreement (e.g., nodding head); however, at times, these discussions also

initiated debate (e.g., contrasting experiences and opinions) and deeper discussions on various topics related to spaces and sport participation. This approach was taken to ensure that participants were not giving feedback on others' comments that they did not originally provide, but instead, giving feedback on the overall discussion. As well, given the amount of focus groups participants (n=27), it would have been challenging to receive individual feedback from each member.

Lastly, there was considerable deliberation between myself and my supervisors on how to identify the participants in the dissertation. It was recognized that names have social and cultural significance, which imply particular ethnic, religious, class and age-based associations, connotations that could lead to stereotyping (Clark, 2006). At first, I used gender and age as the identifier (e.g., M1, F2); however, my supervisors suggested that the identifier came across as 'cold' and 'sterile' when reviewing one of the manuscripts. As a result, together, we came up with the approach to ask all participants to provide three female and male names they would like to represent them, to have a pool of names to draw on for those who did not respond. Five participants replied back and provided names and these were used in the dissertation. It is acknowledged that this does not alleviate the issue of stereotyping; however, participants were able to exercise their agency by deciding what best represented them, which aligns with PCF.

**Dependability.** Dependability refers to implementing processes to ensure that the research process can be replicated. Throughout the research process, meetings took place with my supervisors at various stages of study development and analysis to minimize any risk of biases and to ensure the methodology was rigorous.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability refers to the ability to demonstrate that the data is representative of the participants' responses and that the researcher's biases are minimized. As detailed in the analysis section, a thorough inductive approach was taken to ensure that initial coding was driven by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As well, member checking was a method for ensuring confirmability with participants, as it provided participants the opportunity to clarify and elaborate on

their transcripts. Lastly, when examining themes within the manuscripts, participants' quotes are utilized to contextualize their lived experience, which includes thoughts, emotions, and motivations.

**Transferability.** Transferability suggests that findings can be applied to other settings. This feature of credibility and trustworthiness is challenging, as this research is bounded by time; therefore, participant experiences in childhood may not be entirely relatable to current children living within NIAs, as neighbourhoods are constantly evolving in terms of infrastructure (e.g., new housing developments, redevelopment of sport spaces) and also resident demographics. However, this research may be relatable to individuals with similar socio-demographics and within similar contextual conditions (e.g., urban neighbourhoods in Toronto). As well, the methodology utilized is an effective approach to examining the lived experience of sport participation amongst a specific neighbourhood. Utilizing data triangulation (interviews, focus groups, and reflexive journals; Denzin, 1978) was an effective approach for gaining a comprehensive view of lived experiences (Cope, 2014).

## **Chapter Five:**

### **“If I Maybe Started Rugby a Bit Earlier I Don’t Know Where I Could Have Been Right Now”: The Lived Experience of Sport Participation Among Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

This paper will be submitted to a sport psychology journal (e.g., International Journal of Sport Psychology, Psychology of Sport and Exercise) as: Wolman, L., Fraser-Thomas, J., & Nakamura, Y. (2019). “If I maybe started rugby a bit earlier, I don’t where I could have been right now”: The lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas

### Abstract

Common objectives for sport policymakers and administrators are to increase sport participation rates and to enhance competitive performance outcomes (Green, 2005). The *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) provides insight into the processes and outcomes associated with differing sport participation and performance trajectories in childhood and adolescence. However, scholars have cautioned against one-size-fits-all approaches to sport, as this can protect normative practices and contribute to the silencing of marginalized voices (e.g., Ryba, 2005). This study examined the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), with a focus on understanding their sport development journeys, and the psychosocial factors that influenced their journeys. The research draws upon Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and postcolonial feminism (Khan, McDonald, Baumbusch, Kirkham, Tan, & Anderson, 2007; O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010) to critically examine the contextual factors that influenced sport participation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 young adults (n = 8 males, n = 8 females) to explore participant sport journeys. As well, thematic analysis and reflective and bracketing methods were utilized to analyze the data. Overall, this research highlights how sport journeys were greatly shaped by socio-ecological processes, which included socio-demographics (e.g., gender, immigrant status, social class), proximal factors (e.g., sport activities, relationships), and distal factors (e.g., normative practices, sporting culture, institutional systems), illuminating the challenges of making overgeneralizations about sport development trajectories.

*Keywords: cultural sport psychology, immigration settlement, postcolonial feminism, sport development, sport participation, socio-ecological processes, Toronto sport, youth sport,*

**“If I Maybe Started Rugby a Bit Earlier, I Don’t Know Where I Could Have Been Right Now”:  
The Lived Experience of Sport Participation Among Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto  
Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

Sport participation has been associated with extensive physical (e.g., fitness, strength, wellness, etc.), psychological (e.g., enjoyment, self-esteem, life satisfaction, etc.), and social (e.g., strong peer relationships, civic pride and cohesion, academic and career success) benefits (Côté and Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Sport Information Resource Centre, SIRC, 2012). Weiss (2001) proposed that sport could facilitate identity reinforcement through extrinsic motivational factors such as receiving approval, gaining status, or obtaining material rewards for performing well at sport. However, sport cannot be deployed uncritically and without careful examination of how sport is viewed and lived, as perceptions and experiences of sport participation may vary for different groups and cultures. Various scholars have cautioned against the one-size-fits-all approach within sport psychology – a discipline that has been criticized for being historically homogenous and positivist, in turn protecting normative practices and contributing to the silencing of marginalized voices (Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon & Fisher, 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Krane, 1994, 2001; Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010). As such, sport participation and development models and interventions may not always account for an individual’s social position (e.g., gender, race, class), or the distal processes (e.g., normative practices, culture, institutional systems) that may influence participation and development in sport. Given that sport participation rates in Canada have been on the decline for the past two decades (Statistics Canada, 2013), there is value in expanding our understanding of take-up and continued participation in sport for a wider range of individuals and groups, particularly those underrepresented in sport.

In Toronto, Canada’s largest city, 31 of the city’s 140 neighbourhoods have been identified as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), based on an assessment of physical surroundings, economic opportunities, healthy lives, social development, and participation in civic decision-making

(City of Toronto, 2014). In general, NIAs have higher rates of low-income, unemployment, poor housing standards, newcomer settlement, visible minorities, and use of social support, compared with the city average (City of Toronto, 2014). This study examined the lived experiences of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs, with a focus on understanding their sport participation journeys, and the psychosocial factors that influenced their sport journeys. This study used a blended theory approach, drawing from both sport psychology and sport sociology disciplines. From a sport psychology perspective, this research used a socio-ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) to examine proximal factors (e.g., self, social support, sport environments), and distal factors (e.g., normative practices, culture, institutional systems) that shaped participants' sport journeys. We also drew upon postcolonial feminism (PCF; Khan, McDonald, Baumbusch, Kirkham, Tan, & Anderson, 2007; O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010) to critically examine distal factors, and how power and privilege influenced participation; this examination included the intersection of multiple and complex discourses (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status).

### **Sport Participation and Development**

Various models of sport development provide insight into the processes, pathways, and outcomes associated with sport participation and development, in relation to broad-based and elite sport trajectories. The *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) is one of the most prominent conceptual sport development models (Bruner, Erikson, Wilson & Côté, 2010). The model proposes three trajectories of sport participation: (a) recreational sport through sampling, (b) elite performance through sampling, and (c) elite performance through early specialization.

The first two trajectories are based on the foundation of the sampling years, between ages 6-12 years, where children participate in various sports in both organized and unstructured contexts, engaging primarily in deliberate play activities. Coutinho, Mesquita, Davids, Fonseca, and Côté (2016)

suggest that deliberate play may occur within both organized and unstructured sport contexts. Within unstructured sport (i.e., playing hockey in the streets with peers) play-based activities are informal, participant-led, often spontaneously created, and have a high degree of variability, enabling participants to invent, adapt and negotiate rules, which can facilitate improved skills and performance (e.g., motor learning), along with socialization, leadership and organizational skills (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, Davids, Renshaw, & Button, 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016). However, deliberate play may also occur in more organized contexts, fostering implicit learning (Maxwell, Masters, & Eves, 2000). The sampling years are typically marked by parents' provision of opportunities for children to enjoy a wide range of sports which are enjoyable, stimulating and exciting, with coaches, peers, and siblings playing encouraging and supportive roles.

From the sampling years, youth may transition into the recreational years (ages 13+) and carry on participating in various sports for enjoyment and health, without aspirations of reaching an elite level (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Hay, 2002). Alternatively, youth may advance to the specializing (ages 13-15) and investment (ages 16+) years, gradually decreasing their involvement in other activities, increasing their focus on their specific sport, and increasing their engagement in deliberate practice activities (i.e., structured effortful training designed to improve performance, and generally perceived to be less enjoyable; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993), with the goal of elite performance. During the specializing and investment years, the roles of parents, coaches, peers, and siblings shift somewhat as peers move into a more supportive role, and the athlete-coach relationship becomes more of a partnership. The final trajectory of the DMSP – elite performance through early specialization suggests some athletes begin specialization as young as 6 years old (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). The model proposes that although these young athletes may experience early sport success, they may risk their physical health and experience decreased enjoyment, which has the potential to lead to early drop out (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007).

The DMSP has been widely referenced within sport psychology literature (e.g., Baker, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). The model proposes that youth sport trajectories can be fluid, as athletes can transition in and out of the different trajectories during their development (e.g., investment into recreation). Further, tenants and postulates of the model can be evaluated, allowing sport development strategies that draw from this model to be appropriately assessed and measured (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). However, the model has some shortcomings. Firstly, it can be argued that the DMSP is based on a largely homogenous elite Canadian sample, which may not be reflective of participation across varying levels, sports, demographics and cultures. More recently, researchers (e.g., Light, Harvey & Memmert, 2013; Storm, Kristoffer & Krogh, 2012) have argued that sport trajectories are unique to the individual and are culturally situated, providing insight into age-cut offs, sampling, practice, and transitions amongst athletes in differing sport settings/structures. Additionally, the DMSP focuses to a greater extent on factors influencing elite performance, and provides less insight into the development of individuals who do not have an interest, the opportunities, or the skills to achieve high-performance outcomes. Lastly, the DMSP fails to address the process of entrance in to sport, which is greatly influenced by recruitment (e.g., social support) and infrastructure (e.g., opportunities for participation) - fundamental components of sport development (Bailey, 2007; Green, 2005). In so doing, the DMSP assumes that individuals have equal access to the resources and supports required for sport development, without taking into consideration the complex factors that contribute to take-up and continued involvement, such as socio-demographics and broader processes (e.g., normative practices, culture, institutional systems). This is problematic, given how structural (e.g., cost; Kingsley & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2015) and social (e.g., discrimination; Spaaij, 2012) barriers influence sport involvement, particularly amongst marginalized groups (e.g., Collins & Kay, 2014; Goodwin & Peers, 2012; Kay, 2014).

## **Critical Perspectives of Sport Participation and Development**

Given concerns regarding the one-size-fits-all approach within sport psychology (Blodgett, et al., 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Krane, 1994, 2001; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Ryba, Schinke, & Tenenbaum, 2010), re-conceptualizing athletes' identities as complex, fluid, and influenced by social and structural processes may serve to enhance understanding of athletes' sporting experiences within the field. Recently, scholars in the field have begun to embrace a socio-ecological perspective to examine interactions between the environment and children and youths' sport involvement. Holt and colleagues' (2017) meta-data analysis of sport-related positive youth development (PYD) resulted in a model, which recognizes the social-ecological systems that influence, and are influenced, by behaviour (Lerner, Bowers, Geldhof, Gestsdóttir, & DeSouza, 2012); the model incorporates broader ecological systems (e.g., culture, policy, community) and individual factors (e.g., socio-demographics, traits, and disposition). This shift is significant, as it encourages greater consideration of the influence of contextual conditions on sport development. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, scholars such as King (2005), Ram, Starek, and Johnson (2004), and Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, and Fisher (2015) stress the need for more commitment to cultural diversity within sport psychology research, in order to provide a contextualized understanding of sport involvement. As King (2005) argues, we "have to be able to talk about those cheated, hurt, excluded, exploited, and maligned as well" (p. 401).

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Recognizing that theories, explanations and interventions within the discipline of sport psychology have not always accounted for, and been representative of, a range of individuals and groups (Blodgett et al., 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Ryba & Wright, 2005; Ryba et al., 2010), this study examined the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs, with a focus on understanding their sport development journeys and the psychosocial factors that influenced their journeys. Further, given that sport participation rates in Canada have been on the decline for the past two decades (Statistics Canada, 2013), there is value in expanding our

understanding of take-up and continued participation in sport for a wider range of individuals and groups, particularly those underrepresented in sport. Trends have shown there are great disparities amongst socio-demographic groups, which includes residents of NIAs, relating to access and inclusion, to sport participation within Toronto (City of Toronto, 2017). However, there is limited academic insight examining sport journeys within these neighbourhoods.

### **Research Orientation and Positionality**

Guided by the theoretical framework, this research draws on the lived experience, as it an effective method for exploring how people live through and respond to personal experiences, which includes exploring various aspects of a person's life and identity, even those not directly connected to the research question (Boylorn, 2008). As well, this focus on lived experience assumes that there is no definite reality; rather, knowledge is socially constructed, imperfect, and subjective (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, this approach can provide valuable insight into how the participants see themselves within a place or situation (Creswell, 2013), or as in the case of this research study that examines sport participation within a geographic area, the individual and collective experience of youth and young adults living in NIAs. Furthermore, this method was selected because it can provide a localized view and effective way to understand and address the experiences of marginalized, non-Western cultural groups (who have traditionally been silenced) (Swadener & Mutua 2008, Huss 2009).

As power imbalances often exist between the researcher and participants, the principles of community-based research (CBR) were employed to encourage openness, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity between the researcher and participants (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2008; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). Prior to and throughout the study, a significant amount of time was spent meeting with local sport and Community leaders to build trust, and to gain valuable insight about the community, which provided a deeper understanding of the neighbourhoods, such as how sport spaces were used, ways of living, and the issues facing the community.

## **Participants and Context**

Two NIAs were selected for the study (See Appendix E: Table 1 for summary of demographics for both neighbourhoods), based on their demographic characteristics and use of shared services (e.g., schools, library, community centre). Furthermore, various stakeholders, including participants, suggested residents viewed the two neighbourhoods as one community. Participants included 16 youth and young adults (n = 8 males, n = 8 females) aged 16-21, who lived within two neighbouring NIAs, and reported participating in sport at some point in their life (See Appendix E: Table 2 for participant demographics). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (i.e., engagement with community sport clubs, local organizations, and municipal government departments), followed by snowball sampling (i.e., recommended by participants).

## **Data Collection**

This research adhered to regulations and policies set out under institutional ethics. All participants engaged in semi-structured interviews during the summer of 2016. Interviews were conducted within the neighbourhoods of study (e.g., community centres, libraries, local parks) or by telephone, depending on the preference of the participant, as scholars have suggested telephone and in-person interviews produce a similar quality of data (e.g., Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Interviews were conducted in English, and ranged in duration from 45-120 minutes. Broad, open-ended, and non-judgmental questions were used to loosely guide the interview, and probes were initiated to delve further beneath the surface. Participants were asked to imagine that their life was like a storybook, and that each chapter was a stage in their life (e.g., childhood, youth, young adulthood), which encouraged them to provide a chronological account of their life and experiences in sport. As there may be limitations in providing a retrospective account of a memory, participants were also asked to share sporting moments, which were followed by questions regarding motivations and conditions for participation, to provide further context to their experience (Law, Côté, & Ericsson, 2007). For

example, participants were asked, “What was your favourite sporting moment that stands out to you?”, and “What motivated you to continue participating in sports?”

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews, a process of identifying, examining, and drawing common themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for review. Second, the transcripts were read and re-read for familiarity. Third, transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11.4.0 (QSR International Pty. Ltd), which was used to code interviews during the initial stages of the data analysis (i.e., inductive analysis). For example, codes relating to coach support included “encouragement” “investment” and “supporting transitions.” Fourth, codes were grouped together into categories (e.g., “positive coach behaviours”) and developed into themes (e.g., “quality relationships influencing sport participation and development”). During this stage participants’ feedback from the transcripts was considered, to strive to assure the themes represented participants’ experiences (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). For example, participants highlighted that social support (e.g., peers, parents), provision of sport within the community, (e.g., inclusive and accessible sport spaces), and focusing on promoting sport within early stages of childhood (e.g., development of sport skill and interest), were priority themes, which were congruent with the themes drawn from the inductive analysis. Lastly, themes were reviewed again, utilizing deductive analysis, a top-down approach driven by theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This deductive analysis was guided by prominent conceptual models/frameworks in psychology and sport psychology which allowed for the exploration of sport participation, development, and performance, with a specific focus on factors influencing sport take-up, advancement and withdrawal.

Broadly, the Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) was used to frame participants’ sport experiences within personal, social, and structural contexts. EST explores bidirectional and reciprocal interactions between the individual and the social environment, conceptualized within nested levels. The microsystem and mesosystem comprise the

most inner levels, where “proximal processes” (i.e., interactions between persons, objects and symbols within the immediate environment) facilitate development. In this study, the DMSP (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) served to facilitate understanding of sport journeys and factors that influenced participants’ sport journeys at these proximal levels. The EST also incorporates the more distal levels of the exosystem and macrosystem (e.g., culture, policy, community). At the distal level, PCF (Khan, McDonald, Baumbusch, Kirkham, Tan, & Anderson, 2007; O’Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010) was used to critically explore the intersection of multiple and complex discourses (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, socioeconomic status, etc.) on participants’ sport experiences. PCF acknowledges that colonial and imperial relations have a major influence on the way cultural groups view themselves in relation to others (Mills, 1998).

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Credibility and trustworthiness were considered to minimize risk of researcher bias (Cope, 2014). Credibility refers to striving to ensure that the data are interpreted in a way that best represents the participant. As such, a multilayered process for bracketing was utilized throughout the research process, which included: (a) recognizing the researchers’ position, (b) reflexive practices, and (c) member-checking with participants. Reflexive journals were kept throughout the research process, which explored power dynamics, interview techniques, and content to improve facilitation and engagement with participants as the project progressed. As well, analytic memos were utilized during the analysis phase, which assisted in recognizing emerging themes early in the research process, catching thoughts, and making connections and comparisons between the interviews. Furthermore, member checking was employed, where participants were sent their transcripts by email and encouraged to review the document and provide comments on key themes that stood out to them, and to raise any questions or concerns about the interview. Four participants responded with feedback, which was considered for the analysis. Participants also provided pseudonyms to be used in the study

to protect their anonymity. As well, this provided participants with the agency to decide what name they wanted to be represented as in the findings.

## **Results**

Participants' experiences are presented through four main themes, which align with four key trends and stages of their sport participation journeys: (a) initiation into sport through unstructured participation; (b) "late" entry into organized sport; (c) coaches and peers influenced organized sport participation; and (d) periods of transition: facilitators and challenges to continued involvement. While no two participants' journeys were identical, these themes highlight key trends and commonalities in their sport experiences. Table 3 (See Appendix E) provides a summary of participants' sport journeys.

### **Initiation Into Sport Through Unstructured Participation**

Eleven of the 16 participants described initiating their overall sport involvement through unstructured sport (n=6 during childhood, n=5 during youth). Three subthemes are discussed: (a) accessibility of unstructured sport, (b) influence of peers and siblings, and (c) unstructured sport as a unique context for development.

**Accessibility of unstructured sport.** Many participants described how unstructured sport was accessible to them, given that it was flexible (e.g., time, location), and allowed their involvement to be peer-led and autonomous. Sivasan highlighted how unstructured sport could be played anytime, anywhere: "Sometimes I played on the streets and sometimes I played in a field. Whenever my friends had time to play and wherever the space was available, we played." Sophie also explained how she appreciated the flexible format:

You can start whenever you want, you can stop whenever you want, you can argue about a player or a point and restart that. With structured sports, it's always the referee that chooses or the referee gets to pick what happened and what didn't happen, and what he saw or didn't see and that always becomes a problem because you can never say anything to the referee, or seem disrespectful.

Further, Mustafa outlined how games were adapted to be inclusive of all those participating, which sometimes meant sharing resources (i.e., space) cooperatively.

We try to include everyone but sometimes there are people who [pause], like there is a big group, like a bunch of friends and then another big bunch of friends. So sometimes, you would compete with them. Other times, you would play for the net. Whoever loses goes to another net or something or you have multiple games going on one net... Instead of kicking someone off - that rarely happens - it's mostly like a bunch of people playing on the same night.

Although many enjoyed the benefits of unstructured sport, not all participants felt they had equal access to play. Some females described how gender norms were reinforced by social interactions within unstructured sport settings (e.g., participants, peers, and siblings), imposing ideologies of gender norms outside of the sport setting (e.g., parents, community residents), and institutional structures (e.g., school, community-based programs/facilities). As Dahlia shared:

A lot of the time, like you wanted to play soccer. It's usually like the same group of ten boys just on that whole patch between the two goal posts, and they're [males] just there ... So whenever you wanted to even go up, first of all you felt like really bad just asking, "Hey, can I join?" because they would have just looked at you and been like, "No".

This quote suggests that there is a hierarchy within unstructured sport, which is based on those who are perceived to use it most often, which many described as males. As a result, some females felt intimidated and discouraged from participating in unstructured sport, partially restricting their sport participation experience. (See Chapter Eight for a full review of gendering of unstructured sport in NIAs).

**Influence of peers and siblings.** Many participants described how peers and siblings were the main influencers of their initial involvement in sport, by providing encouragement for participation in unstructured sport in the community and at school. As Mustafa explained, "It was just me and my

friends. They would encourage me to go and play [soccer and basketball] in the evening, but nothing organized”. Similarly, Tommy shared:

I had some friends who would go to the [local] baseball diamond, and they would play baseball just amongst themselves. So there were a few older kids, like in grade nine, who were basically some of the older brothers and some of the other younger kids who were around my age.

Amanda described how she played unstructured sports with friends at school (e.g., during recess): “I would just go and join their game. Like ‘Hey, can I play with you?’ We had done stuff in gym class, and they already knew that I was sporty, so they didn’t hesitate to join me in.”

Siblings also influenced individuals’ early participation in unstructured sport. Arsa described how she gained an interest in basketball by heading to the local court with her older sibling: “My sister taught me how to play...by the [community] courts over here. She would teach me how to lay-up and I just wanted to practice and be better”. Similarly, Sophia shared how participating in various sports with her older brother developed her desire for competition:

My brother was also competitive. Me and my brother used to go downstairs and just, you know - kick a soccer ball, or a tennis racket, or basketball, or go somewhere play... That’s how it really started for me, you know, having that person there with me and playing against them, and being really like competitive even though it was a friendly game.

Further, siblings served as role models, sometimes leading participants to engage in the same sport as their siblings. Rahu described how he perceived his younger brother to be more skilled at soccer, which influenced his desire to improve:

He’s [younger brother] a year younger than me but he started soccer like a year before me right, so he’s naturally better than me because he has more...he’s talented. I have to work hard for it because I don’t have any talent. I just have to work hard to get something. Every time, him and I [would play soccer], he would beat me 10-0, 10-2, 10-3.

**Unique context for development.** Many participants described how unstructured sport provided a unique context for their athletic and personal development. Mustafa explained his passion for the unique competitive elements of unstructured sport: “What I love is that it’s unstructured but still organized. It’s not very very competitive but it’s a lot of fun. It’s intense. So, you’re still playing, trying to win...but it’s not competitive. There’s no heat between teams.” Dahlia highlighted how she developed competence in a supportive learning environment:

No one would come up to me and say like, “Hey, you’re doing it wrong”...at that point I think it was really important for me to feel like I was doing something right just because it was my first experience going off into like more active sports.

For many, the skills and confidence gained through unstructured sport acted as a stepping-stone to organized sport participation. Tommy described how involvement in unstructured baseball at the local diamond over the summer led him to be selected onto various inter-school teams the following school year:

When I went and tried out for volleyball...one, I knew some of the people there so I was a little bit more comfy. Two, I was just more confident in anything I was doing. Whether it was playing softball or... I wasn’t even that good. I remember not being good at [unstructured] baseball even after like an entire summer but it just made me better at some of the other things.

### **“Late” Entry into Organized Sport - Through School**

As highlighted above, most participants initiated their sport involvement through unstructured sport, and eventually transitioned into organized sport. Often their transition into organized sport was “late” in comparison with others (e.g., children from other neighbourhoods). Specifically, two participants became involved in organized sport in early childhood (0-5 years), nine in childhood (i.e., 6-13 years, during elementary/middle school) and five in adolescence (i.e., 14+ years, during high school); most participants (n=13) were first introduced to organized sport through school programming (i.e., intra- and inter-school teams). Participants attributed their “late” entry into organized sport to: (a)

differing sport environments in countries of origin; (b) limited awareness and/or access to community-based programming during childhood; (c) parents' inability to provide time and/or money for sport; and (d) the late start of sport programs within the school system (i.e., in upper elementary). These subthemes are detailed below.

**Differing sport environments in countries of origin.** Sport experiences appeared to differ between participants who immigrated to Canada (n=11; age of immigration 1-16 years) and Canadian-born (n=6) participants. Participants who immigrated to Canada often discussed limited provision of organized sport in their country of origin and/or political environments that led to limited opportunities for sport. For example, Tommy moved to Canada when he was nine years old and shared how organized sport was not readily available in Pakistan: "It wasn't even a concept [in schools or the community]. Expensive private schools - maybe - but the smaller schools - no - there's nothing like that." Tommy later suggested that he felt this lack of exposure to organized sport influenced his opportunities to make school teams once he moved to Canada, commenting: "I always felt [...] I just started way too late." Further, Rahu described the political climate in his country of origin (Afghanistan), highlighting safety concerns as preventing him from engaging in sport:

Coming from Afghanistan, my parents' mentality was a third world country, right? They would think, "Oh if I do this I'm gonna get kidnapped" or "I'm gonna get hurt." That's why I didn't leave the house much [in Afghanistan]. I didn't have much freedom, so I didn't see anyone playing sports.

Similar to Tommy, the lack of opportunities to engage in sport in childhood influenced his future experiences, particularly when trying out for organized school sport teams.

**Limited awareness and/or access to community-based programming.** Participants also attributed their late involvement in organized sport to their limited awareness of and/or access to opportunities for participation within their communities (i.e., in Canada, within their NIAs). As Tommy mentioned:

The range of opportunities outside of school aren't that big and it wasn't that big when I was a kid... So when we did get here [in Canada], the first few years, it wasn't just that ... well, part of that was probably just that I didn't know and my parents didn't know where the soccer clubs were and stuff... around this neighbourhood. There wasn't anyone going around, going like, "Hey, come try rugby!" or "Hey, come try soccer!" ... that would have really helped because I probably would have tried it and stuck to it.

Conversely, Bill reflected on the impact that more community-based sport programming within the neighbourhood could have had:

Had there been organized sport like outside of school, I think that would have helped a lot. And not just myself but a lot of my other friends who were like, way more athletic than I was just had nowhere to go. Like there was no way they could have played soccer or there's no way they could have played baseball.

**Parents' inability to provide the time and/or money for sport.** Some described their parents' inability to provide the time and/or money for sport, and how this influenced their participation growing up. Interestingly, many described their parents as being "supportive", but not actively seeking opportunities for their sport participation in the community. Specifically, many suggested that when their parents immigrated to Canada, the process of settlement (e.g., employment) was given highest priority over other less pressing or important activities (e.g., sport). Sophia shared, "My dad's always been busy with work, you know, cause he tried for many years [to get a job]. Then he had a job from nine in the morning all the way to 12 o'clock at night."

In particular, the cost of community-based sport programming was perceived as a barrier to involvement. Priyanka explained that her involvement was limited to school sport, as school sport was free of charge:

I think growing up in the area; it [community-based sport programs] was expensive. So, going to school was the easiest thing for people in my area to play sports... I did not have the need to

play outside in leagues because it was already in my school, but looking up costs myself, it was just ridiculous, so I was like, “I don’t want to ask my parents that!”

Interestingly, later in adolescence, Priyanka joined a community sports club, taking advantage of subsidized programming that was offered for residents of NIAs.

The cost [of club membership] was subsidized, so instead of paying the full cost, we could play for \$50 and someone else would be covering the rest, so many people thought it was a good time to play. It made a difference, definitely. It made it easier because rather than paying like hundreds, thousands, you only had to pay \$50. Amazing.

Similarly, Gold explained that she too participated only in school sports because it was without cost, but described her friend’s situation, who was trying to find the funds and invest in competitive sport through community programs.

I have a friend that plays [basketball] outside of school but it’s really costly nowadays. For one season, like four months, she is paying \$700 for it and that’s a lot. That is too much for me...so there are teams outside of school, but it’s based around money and school sport is free.

**School sport programs offered only in later grades.** Finally, participants explained that their relatively “late” entry into organized sports was due largely to sport teams not being introduced in school until grade four (i.e., at approximately nine years of age). As Sophia shared, “Sport didn’t start for me until I was in grade four - like actual structured organized sport - being on a sports team.” Similarly, Amanda shared, “In grade one, you were allowed to do track and field, but like there’s no organized team sports up until grade four.”

### **Coaches and Peers Influenced Organized Sport Participation**

Participants described coaches and peers as being significant influencers in the initiation and continuation of their organized sport involvement. In particular, they discussed (a) coach encouragement, (b) coach investment (or lack thereof), and (c) peer support (or lack thereof).

**Coach encouragement.** Coaches played a fundamental role in facilitating participants' initiation and continued involvement in organized sport by encouraging participants to join organized sport programs or teams. For example, Rahu shared how a teacher-coach encouraged him to join the track team, after watching him participate in unstructured sport at school and recognizing his talent:

My teacher she was also the cross-country coach and she saw me one day...I was running with my friends...I think we were playing tag or something, but she saw me. She's like, "Oh you're very fast. Come to come join our thing - our team".

Similarly, Tommy described a teacher-coach who gave local youth an opportunity to gain exposure to sport and advance their skills, which in turn led to the involvement on the high school rugby team:

He [teacher/coach] would just go to the park sometimes on Saturdays or whatever. So like outside of school hours. And we didn't sign any forms or anything. We just played for fun a little bit and he'd go to [the local park] and then from that, he recruited probably half the guys [for the school team].

Several participants (n=12) also discussed how school coaches played a role in facilitating their involvement in community sport programs. For example, some of the male participants highlighted how their rugby teacher-coach brought members of a local club into the school. As Tommy explained:

We had these guys come in [to school] at like 7:00 in the morning just to teach us about the sport. Like it's pretty cool and of course I looked up to them as players too...so I went to one or two of the [club] training sessions...yeah, me, [the teacher-coach] and this one other friend of mine...I remember going up there and a few of the [club] coaches were like, "Hey, you guys are pretty good. Are you playing club this summer? If you are, you should come play for us."

For others, it was local community coaches that introduced them into community sport programs. Amanda explained how a local community softball coach encouraged young females:

In grade nine, I began to play in a softball league...because there was a woman [a local

community coach]...she started a league for softball specifically for [NIA youth]. So, she had us practice our skills just with her, and then she managed to get a deal with them to get us in the [community] league for like \$15 as opposed to like \$90...she was very encouraging. It was nice that she's like a woman who was from this community who had played sports.

Coaches' encouragement, and in particular, their introduction of youth to community club sport allowed many participants to continue participating in competitive organized sport, following graduation from high school. For some, it also supported their advancement to elite sport (e.g., representative teams, post-secondary varsity teams).

**Coach investment (and lack thereof).** Complimentary to coaches' encouragement, was coaches' investment in young athletes, whereby coaches provided athletes with opportunities for participation and supported their athletic and personal development. For example, Anjali recognized that her skills needed to improve, and appreciated the coach's openness to investing in and support her potential:

I went out for the tryouts. I knew the coach...he's one of the gym teachers there and he was a really cool guy to get to know. So, I'm like, "Okay, there is nothing wrong with trying out, so let me try out, right?" So, I did, and it went well. Obviously, there were things I had to learn, but I was learning every time I had a tryout. It was pretty cool, and I guess the coach saw that. And so I went for it and I got on the team.

Dahlia explained how her Ultimate Frisbee coach optimized her development opportunities by not having selection processes for school teams; this allowed all interested individuals to gain access to sport and develop skills, which was often not possible in more selective environments.

In Frisbee, you have 7 people [playing at once] on a team, and usually a team is like 14 people or like maybe 15, maximum. We actually had a team of 30 people just because our coach didn't want to cut anyone. And he was like, "It's the first year. I want more people to get involved in the sport."

Dahlia suggested this coach's philosophy made the team much more accessible (i.e., less intimidating), particularly for herself, and others like her, who were coming out for an inter-scholastic sports team. She appreciated the coach's investment in her as a developing player.

However, some participants outlined how coaches created highly competitive environments. Some participants felt they could not thrive in these contexts, and were particularly intimidated by selection processes. Some participants suggested coaches already had preconceived ideas of which athletes they were going to select, and/or showed favouritism towards particular individuals, in turn, limiting opportunities for those coming out to a team for the first time in high school. As Gold described:

When I was in grade nine, I did not really have the opportunity to get on teams because the coaches already know who's good from previous years, so the Grade 11 and 12s [made the team]. They [coaches] already know who is good, so they take those people.

Dahlia shared an experience where she felt her school coach prioritized winning over player development, despite his initial claim to invest in and develop all players.

I had a really bad experience with a coach. It was like a do or die kind of game where we had to win...I didn't expect this from him [coach]. This is the same coach who was like, "I'm going to take everyone on the team and I'm not making any cuts." But he only used, out of like a team of 20 players, he only used 10 of them. He said, "We need to win so I'm just going to put out the top players and they're just going to play the whole time" and we didn't win that game. I felt really bad afterwards because it was like, "You didn't trust 10 players [from the team]. One of them was me - and you didn't trust us to kind of go out and do our best."

**Peer support (or lack thereof).** For many, having a friend or peer group that was interested in sport facilitated their initiation and continued involvement in organized sport. For example, Amanda explained how she got involved in multiple teams with one of her closest friends: "My friend, she is athletic too, so we wanted to do it together. Having a friend to do it together made it easier than going at it alone." Close friendships and peer groups particularly relevant among participants with parents

who were less involved due to other priorities. As Ali shared:

It's when friends and stuff got me into basketball, soccer, and things like that - that's when sports started for me and it was all on me. I feel like I'm a bit different than most kids, where I didn't have like anybody [parents] putting me into a program like sport or anything like that.

Peers also appeared to play an important role in youths' continued involvement in organized sport, particularly during periods of transition or periods of personal challenge (e.g., immigration, new school), likely due to the strength, meaning, and the sense of belonging these relationships offered. For example, Zach shared how he met a new friend the first day of school by discussing their common interest for soccer, and how this led to his involvement in intramural soccer at school, and subsequently playing for a community club:

My first day at school, I meet this guy and he's very into soccer...he's like, "Do you play any sports?" I'm like, "Yeah. I play soccer." And he's like, "Oh awesome. I play soccer too!"...he's like, "Yeah, we have school teams, intramurals every year, and we have lots of space outside in the community as well." I was amazed because he didn't know me at all.

Similarly, Gold explained how sport facilitated meaningful friendships as she started high school:

I made most of my friends through school teams. I did not have friends at first. I wasn't friends with people until I joined sports teams. They were just acquaintances - people I knew - and then I started becoming friends with people.

Additionally, some participants emphasized how the diversity within their organized sport programs in different parts of the city (i.e., outside NIAs) fostered more complex and meaningful friendships. Ali described how this played out on his team:

Our [club] team is very culturally diverse. We ask each other questions all the time about what it's like being a Portuguese person, what it's like being a Greek person, what it's like being this and that...whereas for [school], we are all from the same [place], live in the same area, and the same school. We all went to the same place to eat and stuff like that. Now I am seeing people

from different neighbourhoods, different cultures. I like it a lot more.

Although most participants discussed positive experiences relating to peers, Rahu shared a particularly interesting experience, where a peer confronted him after a soccer team try-out at school: “This one senior player came up to me started talking very bad - cussing at me- telling me I was useless and that I never get on any team.”. **Rahu** described how his initial reaction was to give up on soccer. However, after some thought, this experience drove his desire to improve his skills, which he did, and subsequently earned a spot on the school team the following year. He explained:

That’s when I got serious. I’m like, “I’m gonna prove this guy wrong” and I had to. That was in May and throughout all summer and spring, I was like working every single day - every single morning I just practiced, practiced, practiced after school...every time I touched the soccer ball, I got the anger cause I kept hearing “useless” and I kept hearing those words and it got to a point to where it was winter. The next year when I was in Grade 8, it was winter, and a lot of people knew me for being an athlete. I was good. I tried out for a lot of [school] teams and I got in.

### **Involvement in Organized Sport into Adulthood**

The final theme related to participants’ involvement in organized sport into adulthood. The three subthemes included: (a) withdrawal due to competing priorities, (b) involvement limited by availability of / access to adult programming, and (c) transitioning to leadership roles.

**Withdrawal due to competing priorities.** Eight of the 16 participants were not participating in organized sport at the time of data collection, due to competing priorities – namely, their focus on academics. As Gold shared:

Honestly, I don’t feel like I am going to try out for any sports [high school]. I might try out, but I feel like I don’t want to participate in the sports, in part because I have a very heavy workload. Maybe I will try out in the second semester but this semester, I can’t. It’s too much for me...it’s more important for me to focus on my education then it is... I can play sports whenever I want,

I can join a team whenever I want, but I can't get marks whenever I want.

Similarly, Sivasan explained his sense of obligation to succeed academically, which influenced his decision to withdraw from organized sport:

I wanted to keep playing for the soccer team but I decided to put my future in front of the soccer... My mom always says to me, "Of course you can do both if you want, but you do your studies first and then whatever time you have left, you can use that to play sports or enjoy yourself." When you're the only person that's going to university in your family... right? So, you want to make sure that you're... you do the best you can. So, you don't want anything interfering in your studies. So that's why [I withdrew from sport]. I want to succeed... that's why – it is the studies.

**Involvement limited by availability of/access to programming.** Some participants expressed their wish to continue participating after high school, but explained that they had discontinued in part due to the limited opportunities and/or access to sport programming for adults. As Priyanka explained:

We live in such a big area, that I don't really hear about leagues happening in our area. It's more neighbouring neighbourhoods, stuff like that. It would be easier if there was a league nearby, let's say a basketball league and they trained here at [the elementary school] or at [the high school]. It would be easier for people in the area.

Arsa also shared:

I took a year off [basketball, after high school], but I am going back in September... I am only going [to college] part-time so I don't think I can join the [college] team, so I am going to look for other teams in the city... I don't know where to go to sign up and guess money wise as well - cause its expensive to get in, right?

**Transition into leadership roles.** Interestingly, at the time of data collection, although only a limited number of participants were playing organized sport, 12 of the 16 participants had transitioned into leadership roles in sport within the NIA and the city. These roles included coaches, officials or

administrators. Generally, participants' positive sport experiences motivated their desire to "give back" to the community, keeping them involved in sport (albeit indirectly). Anjali described, "I actually still go back every year to help coach. I have a big connection there." Similarly, Bill shared his passion saying, "I want to give back to the community, doing something that has meaning to it. Leaving a legacy here." Ali also described how his interest was fueled by his own experiences: "I always think if I maybe started rugby a bit earlier I don't where I could have been right now...I want to get the opportunity to do that for kids now." Although for some, transitioning into leadership roles took time away from their own involvement in organized sport, these roles were important to them, and enabled them to continue being engaged in sport environments.

### **Discussion**

This paper uncovered how sport participation experiences of youth and young adults living in NIAs involved a journey through unstructured sport in childhood, the provision of organized sport through school programming, and support provided by peers and coaches. Over time, as youth and young adults moved through their sport journeys, most remained involved in sport in leadership roles, but encountered challenges to continued participation. While participants' experiences of sport have many similarities to the experiences of youth in previous studies, this study highlights unique journeys, and important psychosocial influences that are not reflected in current prominent models of sport development (e.g., DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). The subsequent discussion explores these key findings in more depth.

#### **Importance of Inclusive Unstructured Sport in Childhood**

Results from this study demonstrate how unstructured sport provided participants access to sport and a learning environment contributed to the development of sport competence and confidence in a peer-led, flexible, primarily inclusive environment. This sport environment was particularly beneficial for individuals with limited resources (e.g., time, money), and minimal involvement from parents (i.e., due to their lack of awareness of programs or prioritization of sport). For many,

experiences participating in unstructured sport in childhood acted as a stepping-stone to participation in organized sport. This research supports the DMSP (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), which highlights the importance of providing opportunities for children to engage in deliberate-play activities (i.e., sport engagement where rules are modified, based on the age or skill level of the athletes, often child/youth-led; Côté & Hay, 2002), contributing to continued sport participation and performance in later years. In line with past research, unstructured sport (and inherently, deliberate play as described by participants) also appeared to offer a unique context fostering psychosocial benefits and life skills, including socialization, leadership, organizational skills, and confidence (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, Davids, Renshaw, & Button, 2013; Coutinho, Mesquita, Davids, Fonseca, & Côté, 2016; Holt et al., 2017; Larson, 2000). Furthermore, Coutinho and colleagues (2016) highlighted how unstructured sport has been understudied within the field of sport psychology; therefore, more research exploring the influence of unstructured sport on sport participation and development is encouraged.

Although unstructured sport served an important role in providing an accessible pathway to participation for many in the study, when examining the intersection of gender, involvement in unstructured sport varied greatly. Findings indicate that males participated considerably more in unstructured sport compared with females (See Chapter Eight for a full examination of gendering of unstructured sport within NIAs). This finding echoes the work by Trussell and McTeer (2007), who uncovered that gender was the strongest predictor for unstructured sport participation, with young males more likely to engage in these activities compared to females. Therefore, findings further highlight the hierarchy of oppression in sport environments and the importance of examining the intersection of socio-demographics, as they provide more contextual insight into the factors influencing sport participation and development; it is critical these factors be identified, examined and addressed, with the purpose of fostering more inclusive practices.

## **Desire for Earlier Organized Sport Involvement**

Although participants had primarily positive unstructured sporting experiences during childhood, many perceived their take-up of organized sport as ‘late’ compared with others (e.g., peers from other neighbourhoods), and wished they could have become involved earlier. Participants discussed various factors that contributed to their late entry into organized sport; namely, these factors included differing sport environments in their country of origin, parents’ (and their own) limited awareness of and access to community-based programming during their childhood, and parents’ inability to provide time and/or money to support their organized sport involvement. Many of the participants’ challenges were congruent with past work, highlighting the structural (e.g., cost, time, transportation; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011), and social (e.g., awareness and understanding of sport participation opportunities and culture; Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Yan & McCullagh, 2004; Yu & Berryman, 1996) barriers that immigrant and low-income families face in accessing organized sport opportunities. Therefore, more research is needed to understand how immigrant and low-income families can be supported, in order to increase opportunities for sport involvement; this could include improving awareness and availability of affordable programming within NIAs (e.g., through partnerships with schools).

Despite participants’ wish to start organized sport earlier, for the most part, their later start did not appear problematic to their sport journeys. Rather, throughout childhood, participants experienced access (e.g., opportunities), positive experiences (e.g., enjoyment, learning), and meaningful relationships (e.g., coaches, peers and siblings) that influenced their initial take-up, and continued involvement and advancement in sport. As such, their experiences align with seminal research in sport development, which promotes the benefits of diverse unstructured sport participation during childhood, in order to sample a range of sports/activities within different settings, focused around enjoyment and learning in a supportive environment (e.g., DMSP, Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014).

These findings are particularly interesting in the current sport context, where sport governing bodies appear to be perpetuating a culture that focuses on high-performance sport from a young age, at the expense of investing in broad-based participation (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Livingston, Tirone, Smith, Miller, 2008; Schimank, 2005). This has influenced how sport is conceived and delivered – with a greater focus on specialization and investment at younger ages (e.g., Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Fraser-Thomas & Safai, 2018). Therefore, the findings of this research reinforce the value of broad-based programs, in the face of a sport system moving towards earlier competitive and elite sport environments. From a practical perspective, it may be important to identify contexts that are instrumental in fostering environments that support broad-based sport participation and development, given that is level of sport contributes to the development of competitive and elite athletes (Green, 2005).

### **Important Role of Schools in Take-Up of Organized Sport**

As noted above, many participants wished they could have become involved in organized sports sooner, suggesting that they only became involved once sports were provided through school in upper elementary (i.e., Grade 4). Given the challenges participants experienced in accessing organized sport in their childhood, school sport served as a critical entry point into sport, particularly for those for whom resources and support were limited (e.g., White & McTeer, 2012). School sport (e.g., intramural and intermural) in turn served as a foundation to youths' advancement in community-based sport (e.g., club), and sport leadership positions (e.g., coach, official, administrator). Some participants suggested that they wished organized school sport could start earlier, which would in turn provide them with more opportunities from a younger age. While this study cannot speak directly to the value of this suggestion, findings do highlight the critical value of school sport, and thus, suggest there may be value in reviewing the overall philosophy, approach, and delivery of school sport programming.

In particular, participants seemed to highlight two different approaches to school sport, as executed by coaches. Some participants spoke of interschool programming which did not have

selection processes, and how these programs had a profound impact on their sport journeys. Through these initial school sport experiences, they continued on to play their sport in other settings (e.g., community sport clubs), and at higher levels (e.g., college, university). In contrast, many tried out for school teams as soon as they were able to in elementary school; however, they were not selected, in part, due to the fact that they had never played, or had limited experience, in organized sport. In turn, many participants were discouraged from participating in organized sport due to the competitive selection processes, as well as experiences where coaches focused on performance outcomes, rather than investing in player development. These experiences further reinforced their regrets about starting sport 'late'. These participant experiences are in line with work by Buchanan, Odenheimer, and Prewitt-White (2016), who examined access in athletic programs throughout public high schools in the United States, suggesting that the "hyper-commodification" of youth sports has fostered highly competitive environments. They argue this "hyper-commodification" is attributed to the value placed on professional and college sport, which has trickled down to school sport, and the focus on competition and organized in sport can be problematic, as it mainly benefits those with cultural and economic capital to invest and engage in sport, wedging a robust gap between those with power and privilege (e.g., White, male, Anglophone bodies), and "Others" (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Messner, 2002). While it is acknowledged that sport cultures and structures in Canada differ from those in the United States, pressures related to competitive environments remain prominent and relatable.

Although governing bodies within education (i.e., in this study's context, the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Association (OFSAA) and the Ontario Ministry of Education) promote the healthy development of children and youth (e.g., Ontario Health and Physical Education, 2010), focusing on opportunities for learning and development (e.g., emotional, social, physical, cognitive) within a safe (e.g., physical, emotional) and supportive (e.g., staff, community) environment, guidelines around the provision of intra-school and interschool sport programming are less clearly defined within their policies around school sport participation and competition. For example, policies and protocols around

sport focus primarily on logistics (e.g., health and safety, age categories) rather than on coach-athlete behaviour (OFSAA, 2018). However, this research demonstrates that the structure of sport settings within schools greatly influenced participation. Some participants thrived in competitive school sport programs, whereas others benefitted from programs that were focused on participation for all.

Therefore, consideration should be given to means of optimizing children and youths' involvement in a range of sport activities through schools, including opportunities for both broad-based participation and higher-level competition. For example, schools may want to consider widening sport programming to include more intramural programming (e.g., house league), as it provides opportunities for children and youth to develop an interest and competence in sport, while in more informal settings that are less focused on competition (Bocarro, Kanters, Edwards, Casper, & McKenzie, 2014). Research has shown that intramural sports programs have higher participation rates than intermural sports (Drake et al., 2015; Kanters, Bocarro, Edwards, Casper, & Floyd, 2013), promoting more optimal access and inclusivity.

### **Influence of Quality Relationships**

Finally, this research highlights that coaches, peers, and siblings were instrumental in participants' involvement in sports. Specifically, siblings and peers encouraged participation in unstructured sport, while coaches and peers influenced sport involvement in organized sport. While the DMSP (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) places an emphasis on parental support for sport participation in childhood, with coaches and peers being more influential in adolescence, it is interesting to note that participants in this study had different experiences. Indeed, for these individuals, peers, siblings, and coaches all served as the most fundamental influencers throughout childhood and adolescence, during which time parents had minimal/varying involvement. While extensive research has focused on the importance of parental support in youth sport (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008), these findings suggest that there may be value in focusing more on parents being emotionally supportive (i.e., not acting as a barrier), rather than feeling required to be

practically involved (e.g., engaging in unstructured sport with their children, seeking out opportunities for organized sport, attending practices and games). This finding is noteworthy and promising, given that families' socio-demographic conditions often prevent youth from experiencing sport (e.g., financial and time constraints). From a research perspective, it would be beneficial to revisit the roles of social influences (e.g., parents, peers, siblings and coaches) on sport take-up, particularly in childhood (e.g., sampling years, 6-12 years old), amongst a wider range of socio-demographic groups. From a practical perspective, it is likely that in order to create a context for all youth to participate, with modified expectations of parents' involvement and support, broader contextual and cultural shifts within youth sport would be necessary.

Another finding worthy of additional exploration relates to Rahu's experience of being negatively confronted (i.e., called "useless") by peers during soccer tryouts. In line with recent research on positive growth from negative experiences (e.g., Tamminen Holt, & Neely, 2013), Rahu's negative experience served as a motivator for him, to the point that he invested time into improving his skills, and made his school team the following year. These findings highlight how adversity may foster resilience, in line with research showing mental toughness being an effective coping strategy to overcome sport challenges (e.g., Anshel & Kaissidis, 1997; Kim & Duda, 2003). Further exploration of the complexity of negative sport experiences, and the associated individual, social and contextual factors that may contribute to positive outcomes would be valuable.

### **Transitions into Leadership Roles**

Finally, many of the participants, including those who withdrew from sport programs, transitioned to leadership positions (e.g., coach, referee, administrator), which kept them involved in sport, and provided them with an opportunity to 'give back'. While sport participation typically declines with age due to time, program availability, and personal commitments (Freysinger & Ray, 1994; Lim, Warner, Dixon, Berg, Kim, & Newhouse-Bailey, 2011; Lunn, 2010; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills, & Järvelin, 2003; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), athletes are often encouraged to transition into

leadership roles within the sport system, to support the next generation of athletes (Sport for Life Society, 2016). Findings suggest that participants who transitioned into these roles were making an important contribution in fostering youths' lifelong involvement in sport, while also modeling and providing opportunities for youth to take on organizational, managerial, and leadership tasks (De Knop et al., 1995; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Wolman & Fraser-Thomas, 2017). Research in the field of youths' positive development through sport suggests that sport participation can facilitate 4/5Cs (i.e., competence, confidence, connection and character/caring; adapted by Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014, from Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestsdottir, ... & Smith, 2005), and that the attainment of these 4/5 Cs can lead to the development a sixth C – “contribution - to self, family, community, and to the institutions of a civil society” (Lerner et al., 2011, p. 6). However, contribution has received limited focus in the research on positive youth development through sport (e.g., Personal Assets Framework; Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016). It may be beneficial for further research to explore the relationship between youths' leadership, contribution, and positive developmental outcomes; specifically, if and how "contribution" may be considered within positive youth development and sport models/frameworks.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs, with a focus on understanding their sport development journeys and the psychosocial factors that influenced their journeys. Overall, this research highlights how participation in sport (i.e., unstructured and organized) was facilitated through social support (i.e., of peers, coaches, siblings, parents), and the provision of local accessible programming (e.g., schools, community sport clubs). Furthermore, socio-demographics (e.g., gender, immigration, socio-economic status) and broader processes, such as Canadian sport culture and normative practices (e.g., gender norms) shaped their sporting experiences, highlighting the importance of examining sport participation and development from a socio-ecological perspective.

This research highlights the importance of providing opportunities for children and youth to participate in diverse range of sports activities that are accessible (e.g., subsidized and inclusive) and visible (e.g., local and well-promoted) within the community, particularly within unique neighbourhoods such as NIAs, with higher rates of newcomers to Canada, and higher rates of lower-income. Additionally, this research demonstrated that young people appeared to transition into leadership roles within sport (e.g., coach, referee and administrator) as a result of encouragement and positive experiences, highlighting the importance of providing athletes with opportunities to develop a sense of identity as an athlete and sport leader, and perhaps more important, develop a sense of meaning for sport in their lives (Tamminen et al., 2013).

Furthermore, this research illuminates the challenges of making overgeneralizations about sport participation and development experiences, as youths' journeys were greatly influenced by structural and social environments. These findings reinforce the need to move away from one-size-fits all approaches within sport psychology (Blodgett et al., 2015; Duda & Allison, 1990; Krane, 1994, 2001; Ryba, 2005; Ryba et al., 2010). As such, the blended theoretical approach utilized in this study (e.g., sport psychology and sociology) offered an important lens to critically examine factors influencing sport participation. Lastly, it is acknowledged that there is a risk of overgeneralizing findings, as they may not represent the specific needs of other individuals and groups. Therefore, it is encouraged that sport psychology continues to examine various socio-demographic groups that are not represented within current research, in order to ensure that voices which are often silenced are heard, and the diverse factors influencing all youths' sport journeys are explored.

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## **Chapter Six:**

### **“All the Immigrant Families Here are Working Pretty Hard”: Perceived Parental Influence on Sport Participation in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

This paper will be submitted to a sport psychology journal (e.g., International Journal of Sport Psychology, Psychology of Sport and Exercise) as: Wolman, L., Fraser-Thomas, J., & Nakamura, Y. (2019). “All the immigrant families here are working pretty hard”: Perceived parental influence on sport participation in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas

### **Abstract**

Parents play a fundamental role in children's access, socialization, motivation, and behaviour in sport (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). As such, this study explored perceived parental support for sport participation among youth and young adults living in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) (i.e., Toronto communities that have higher rates of low-income, poor housing, immigrants, visible minorities, and reliance on social support; City of Toronto, 2014). Research was guided by Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and postcolonial feminism (PCF; Mills, 1998; Racine, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 youth and young adults. Using an inductive-deductive analysis approach, data were interpreted within the lens EST and PCF to critically examine proximal (e.g., interpersonal relationships) and distal processes (e.g., social structures and institutions, changes over time), which influenced perceived parental support for sport participation in NIAs. Findings offer insight into perceived parental support for sport participation, preferences for parental involvement, settlement issues that challenged parental support, and subsequent settlement considerations. This research highlights the benefits of adopting an interdisciplinary approach (e.g., sport psychology and sociology) to uncover complexities of parental support for sport participation.

*Keywords:* youth sport, parental support, sport participation, immigration settlement, under-represented groups, cultural sport psychology, postcolonial feminism

**“All the Immigrant Families Here are Working Pretty Hard”: Perceived Parental Influence on Sport Participation in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

Sport participation can facilitate unique physical, psychological, and social benefits among young people, such as a sense of belonging and identity, enhanced education and skill development, improved health and wellness, increased civic pride, engagement and cohesion, as well as increased economic development and prosperity (Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Walseth 2006; Weiss, 2001). However, exclusion can often occur in sport, as reflected by low representation of various groups (e.g., females, individuals of lower socioeconomic status, Indigenous persons, newcomers, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ, etc.) (Denison & Kitchen, 2015; Government of Canada, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2013). Various scholars have cautioned a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to sport research and practice, which can contribute to the exclusion of marginalized voices, stereotyping, and reinforcement of power and privilege within sport. Given that sport participation rates have been on the decline for the past two decades (Statistics Canada, 2013), there is value in expanding our understanding of take-up and continued participation in sport for a wider range of individuals and groups, particularly for those underrepresented in sport.

As parents play a fundamental role in children’s access, socialization, motivation, and behaviour in sport (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Woolger & Power, 1993), this study examined perceived parental support for sport participation amongst youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) (i.e., neighbourhoods identified by the municipality as having higher rates of low-income, unemployment, poor housing standards, newcomer settlement, visible minorities, and use of social support, compared with the city average; City of Toronto, 2014). The research took a blended theory approach, drawing from both sport psychology and sociology disciplines. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) is used to frame the participants’ sport participation experience within personal, social and

structural contexts. Further, the research was guided by postcolonial feminism (PCF; Mills, 1998; Racine, 2003) to critically examine the complex and intersecting factors that influenced perceived parental support for sport participation. This paper is part of a larger research project exploring lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults in Toronto NIAs.

### **Parental Roles in Children and Youths' Sport Participation**

Fredricks and Eccles (2004) highlighted the importance of advancing research examining parental involvement in sport because (a) parents are highly involved and visible in youth sport, (b) sports are a very public arena in which parents can provide immediate and specific feedback, and (c) parents can influence their children both positively and negatively in sport contexts. The *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), a prominent conceptual framework that outlines sport development pathways, offers insight into the role of parents in children's and youth's sport initiation and development.

The DMSP (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) proposes three trajectories of sport participation: recreational sport through sampling, elite performance through sampling, and elite performance through early specialization. The first two trajectories are based on the foundation of the sampling years, between ages 6-12 years, where children participate in various sports and engage primarily in deliberate play (i.e., sport engagement where rules are modified, based on the age or skill level of the athletes; Côté & Hay, 2002). These years are typically marked by parents' providing opportunities for children to sample a wide range of sports that are fun, stimulating and exciting. From the sampling years, youth may transition into the recreational years (ages 13+) where they may continue to focus on sports for enjoyment and health, without aspirations to reach an elite level (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Hay, 2002). Alternatively, youth may advance to the specializing (ages 13-15) and investment (ages 16+) years, gradually decreasing their involvement in other activities, increasing their focus on one specific sport, and increasing their engagement in deliberate practice activities (i.e., focused training designed to improve performance; Ericsson, Krampe

& Tesch-Roemer, 1993), with the goal of attaining elite performance. During the specializing and investment years, parents take on a more supportive role, rather than leading youth sport involvement by providing resources (e.g., financial and time), encouragement (e.g., attending games) and advice (e.g., how to overcome setbacks). The final trajectory of the DMSP, elite performance through early specialization, suggests some athletes begin specialization as young as six years old (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016), with parents investing more heavily in their child's sport and development from an earlier age (e.g., enrollment in deliberate-practice programming, hiring an elite coach). While the DMSP offers a framework for understanding parental roles throughout youth development, extensive research has focused specifically on parents' support and influence on their children's sport participation.

### **Parental Support Behaviours Influencing Children and Youth's Sport Participation**

Hellstedt (1987) proposed three types of parental support: under-involved, moderately involved, and over-involved. Under-involved parents are described as parents who lack emotional, financial, or functional investment. Moderately involved parents provide direction and support, which may include making personal sacrifices. Over-involved parents provide support, which can be described as excessive, with the aim of ensuring their child's success in sport. Hoyle and Leff (1997) further explored parental involvement (pressure and support), examining its impact on children's enjoyment, performance, and self-esteem in sport. The study proposed that parental support is directly associated with youths' enjoyment and performance, suggesting that good performance leads to increased enjoyment only if parents are a positive part of the experience. Similarly, Babkes and Weiss (1999) examined parental attitudes and behaviours in relation to competitive soccer players' motivation, enjoyment, and perceptions of ability. The study supported the hypothesis that children who perceive parents' attitudes and behaviours as more supportive toward their sport involvement had higher perceptions of competence, intrinsic motivation, and sport enjoyment. Additionally, these outcomes were more likely to be achieved when support was provided in the form of instruction, attendance, and

perceptions of reasonable expectations to perform. Research has also found that parent expectations and beliefs can influence a child's effort and performance level (Eccles & Harold, 1991). For instance, exaggerated expectations (e.g., yelling) can lead stress and anxiety for young athletes (Power & Woolger, 1994), whereas positive behaviours demonstrating support (e.g., clapping and cheering) can contribute to success and enjoyment in sport (Fredericks & Eccles, 2004).

In their review, Côté and Hay (2002) suggested five forms of support that contribute to positive sport behaviours such as self-esteem, competence, and achievement. These include emotional support, informational support, companionship, tangible support, modeling, and expectations. Emotional support refers to the comfort and security children receive from social agents (e.g., parents), particularly during times of stress and anxiety (e.g., injury, being cut from a team), which reinforce feelings of being cared for, acceptance, and self-worth. Informational support signifies the provision of guidance and advice (e.g., explaining rules, giving instruction). The degree of sport-specific informational support from parents is greatly associated with children's enjoyment in sport. For example, too much or too little can have a negative impact on continued participation. Next, tangible support relates to resources (e.g., travel, financial) available to the athlete. The fourth form of support is companionship, which refers to the relationship between the parent and child, which is fostered through common interests (e.g., attending sports events, playing unstructured sport together). Research has also found that parents' own experiences and achievement in sport can model a lifestyle that promotes sport participation and achievement.

### **Social Context of Parental Roles and Support**

Despite the well-documented significance of parental support for sport participation, much of the research in sport does not take into consideration social factors and often is not representative of diverse groups. For example, little research has focused on how class and socioeconomic status shape the ability for parents to provide and support their children's sport participation. Indeed, a criticism of sport psychology research in general is that its methodologies are traditionally homogenous, positivist

and institutional, which can limit understanding of behaviours associated with sport participation (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon, & Fisher, 2015; Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005). Therefore, further consideration needs to be given to contextual conditions that influence parental support for sport participation.

It is recognized that socio-cultural factors (e.g., social class, gender, immigration status) are often key determinants for youths' sport participation and performance. For example, scholars have argued that gender stereotypes are learned and reproduced within the family unit, which can affect sport participation, as stereotypes often favour sons' participation over daughters' (Coakley, 2006; Trussell & McTeer, 2007). As well, it is widely recognized that a family's socioeconomic status (e.g., parents' education, income) can be a strong determinant of a child's participation in sport and physical activity (Clark, 2008; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; Lareau 2002). Holt and colleagues (2011) examined low-income parents' and their children's perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participation in youth sport. Although the parents recognized the psychological and social benefits of children's sport involvement, many parents faced barriers to providing support described as lack of time, scheduling demands, and restricted finances. Immigration settlement has also been suggested to influence parents' influences on their children's sport participation, with parents reporting feelings of intimidation seeking and registering for sport programs due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Social Planning Toronto, 2016; Reardon-Anderson, Capps & Fix, 2002). Governmental agencies have recognized disparities in sport participation amongst immigrants, newcomers, and diverse communities. In Canada's largest city, the municipality highlighted the need to reduce systemic barriers and support increased participation in sport within NIAs (e.g., City of Toronto, 2017).

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Given that sport participation rates in Canada have been on the decline for the past two decades (Statistics Canada, 2013), there is value in expanding our understanding of youth take-up and continued

participation in sport for a wider range of individuals and groups, particularly for those underrepresented in sport. As parents play a fundamental role in children's access, socialization, motivation, and behaviour in sport (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2008; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Woolger & Power, 1993), drawing upon EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and PCF (Mills, 1998; Racine, 2003), this study examined perceived parental support for sport participation amongst youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) in Toronto.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research drew upon Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and postcolonial feminism (PCF; Mills, 1998; Racine, 2003) to critically examine the proximal (e.g., personal characteristics, social support, sport settings) and distal (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems) factors influencing participants' sport journeys. Drawing upon EST allowed for an understanding of how participants' sport participation experiences were framed within personal, social, and structural contexts. Furthermore, PCF allowed for the exploration contextual conditions (e.g., proximal and distal factors) more critically. PCF draws attention to issues of power by exposing inequities related to an individual's social position (e.g., gender, race, and class) resulting from the process of colonization and post-colonization (Racine, 2003). PCF acknowledges that colonial and imperial relations continue to have a major influence on social, economic, and political structures (Mills, 1998). This approach was particularly important within the Canadian context, given how sport and other social and institutional systems (e.g., immigration settlement, sport delivery systems) are based on British and French colonial values and structures that favour White, Anglophone men, and that influence inclusionary practices within sport (Field, 2012; Krebs, 2012; Simpson, James, & Mack, 2011). To apply PCF then, as Racine (2003) puts it, is to connect contemporary phenomena like immigration, health, and sport in this study with "new colonial ideologies" (p. 96). In the case of sport, which is inextricably tied to an idea of a 'Canadian national culture' that centers around Anglo-

Canadian values and whiteness, studying sport from a PCF lens highlights how ‘Other’ cultures (e.g., racialized immigrants) are positioned and framed as secondary or marginalized (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2015; Coleman, 2006; James, 2010; Mackey, 2002).

### **Research Methods**

Guided by the theoretical framework, this research draws on the lived experience, as it an effective method for exploring how people live through and respond to personal experiences, which includes exploring various aspects of a person's life and identity, even those not directly connected to the research question (Boylorn, 2008). As well, this focus on lived experience assumes that there is no definite reality; rather, knowledge is socially constructed, imperfect, and subjective (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, this approach can provide valuable insight into how the participants see themselves within a place or situation (Creswell, 2013), or as in the case of this research study that examines sport participation within a geographic area, the individual and collective experience of youth and young adults living in NIAs. Furthermore, this method was selected because it can provide a localized view and effective way to understand and address the experiences of marginalized, non-Western cultural groups (who have traditionally been silenced) (Swadener & Mutua 2008, Huss 2009).

As power imbalances often exist between the researcher and participants, the principles of community-based research were employed to encourage openness, trust, collaboration and reciprocity between the researcher and participant (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2005; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). These principles included undertaking the study in partnership with the communities, drawing on multiple sources of knowledge across disciplinary lines, and ensuring that the research was reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Holland, 2005). As such, various initiatives were implemented, which included engagement with local leaders, as well as involving participants within the research processes to gain local insight, support recruitment, and ensure that the researcher best reflected participants’ lived experiences.

## **Context and Participants**

Two NIAs were selected for the study, as they are geographically situated beside one another and have similar demographic characteristics (e.g., low-income, unemployment, newcomer settlement, visible minorities, young families and use of social support, and poor housing standards compared to the city average; City of Toronto, 2014) (See Appendix E: Table 1 for summary of demographics for both neighbourhoods). Following extensive discussions with community members and local organizations, it was recognized that both neighbourhoods also accessed shared key services (e.g., schools, library, community centre). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (i.e., engagement with local community sport clubs/program, neighborhood service agencies, and municipal governmental departments). Subsequently, snowball sampling (i.e., recommended by participants) was also utilized to recruit additional participants.

Participants included 16 youth and young adults ( $n = 8$  males,  $n = 8$  females) aged 16-21 years, who lived within the two selected NIAs and reported participating in sport at some point in their life (See Appendix E: Table 2 for participant demographics). The recruitment criterion of “participation in sport” was intentionally left vague, given that perceptions of sport participation have varying meanings to different people (Department of Canadian Heritage; 2010; Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014). As such, participants’ involvement in sport ranged from playing unstructured sport (e.g., “pick-up”) to organized sport (e.g., school or community club teams), and level of participation ranged from recreational (e.g., intramurals, house league) to competitive (e.g., school and community representative sport). Eleven of the participants shared that they were born outside of Canada (e.g., Afghanistan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and United States), whereas five participants were born in Canada; however, many of the Canadian-born participants disclosed that their parents were born elsewhere.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of participants’ sport journeys and the factors that influenced participation. Broad open-ended questions

were used to guide the interview, and to gain a general understanding of participants' views and experiences of sport, and probes were initiated as a means for follow-up (e.g., providing clarification of experience). Given that perceptions of sport may have varying meanings (Department of Canadian Heritage; 2010; Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014), participants were asked to define "sport" and "athlete" in order to help contextualize their views about sport and to frame their experience. Participants were also asked to imagine their life as a story and were encouraged to share their upbringing in relation to their sport involvement. In turn, participants reflected on their family (e.g., parents) when sharing stories about their upbringing. Participants were also asked several questions to complete the details of their sport/life story (e.g., conditions which would deter them from playing, memorable sporting moments, motivation for sport, and views on sport within the community, to relationships, programming, access, etc.). Most interviews took place face-to-face within the community of study (e.g., park, library, community centre); however, some were conducted by telephone by the request of the participant. All interviews were conducted in English and were digitally audio-recorded

As PCF recognizes that knowledge production is a collaborative process that strives to place the participant's voice at the forefront of the research (O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010), participants provided pseudonyms for themselves, which are used in the forthcoming results to protect their anonymity. As well, the primary researcher used various bracketing practices (e.g., journaling, analytic memos) throughout the research process to minimize risk of biases (McGannon & Johnson, 2009). Bracketing can be described as "a method that mitigates the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigor of the project" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). Further, the lead researcher engaged in journal writing after each interview, reflecting on the interview process and interactions with the participants, exploring power dynamics, interview techniques and content to improve facilitation and engagement with participants as the project progressed. Additionally, research adhered to regulations and policies set out under

institutional ethical research guidelines. All participants signed an informed consent form which detailed anticipated risks, confidentiality, and procedures for asking questions or withdrawing from the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews; which is a process of identifying, examining and drawing common themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, interviews were transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for review. Secondly, the transcripts were read and re-read for familiarity. Third, transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11.4.0 (QSR International Pty. Ltd), which was used to code interviews during the initial stages of the data analysis (i.e., inductive analysis). For example, codes relating to perceived parental support included “cost,” “commitments,” “lack of interest,” and “expectations.” As well, analytic memos were completed, where ideas, patterns, and connections of interest were noted, and later considered when developing categories and themes. Fourth, codes were grouped together into categories (e.g., “supportive parents”, “involved parents”) and developed into themes (e.g., “types of parental support”). During this stage participants’ feedback from the transcripts was considered, with the aim of assuring that developing themes represented participants’ experiences (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). For example, participants’ feedback highlighted that parental support for sport participation was a priority theme, which was congruent with the themes drawn from the inductive analysis.

Following the inductive analysis, a deductive analysis was used, which is a top-down approach, driven by the theoretical framework, providing a more detailed analysis for some aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research took a blended approach, drawing upon relevant theory in both sport psychology and sociology. Specifically, EST (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and PCF (Mills, 1998; Racine, 2003) were used to critically explore socio-ecological processes influencing parental support for sport participation. Further, as parental support was a significant theme that emerged during the inductive analysis process as influencing sport journeys, these experiences

were explored in more depth by examining how this social support has been framed within sport psychology literature (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2008; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Woolger & Power, 1993).

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, a multilayered bracketing process was adopted to assist in balancing tensions and reduce the risk of the researcher imposing their own values, opinions and experiences on the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Reflexive journals and analytic memos were utilized throughout the research process, which assisted in recognizing emerging themes early in the research process, catching thoughts, and making connections and comparisons between the interviews. Member checking was employed, as a “way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). As well, participants provided pseudonyms, which are used in the paper as a means to exercise agency by deciding what best represented them.

## **Results and Discussion**

Through interviews, participants shared prominent moments in their sport participation journeys, and factors that influenced these experiences. Table 3 (See Appendix E) provides a summary of participants’ sport journeys. Although no two participants’ journeys were the same, there were commonalities amongst their sport initiation, involvement, and dropout (if applicable) experiences. Eleven of the 16 participants initiated their overall sport involvement through unstructured sport (n=6 during childhood, n=5 during youth) through the encouragement of peers and siblings. Most (n=13) were first introduced to organized sport through school programming (i.e., intra- and inter-school teams), and through the encouragement of coaches and peers. Specifically, two participants became involved in organized sport in early childhood (0-5 years), nine in childhood (i.e., 6-13 years, during elementary/middle school), and five in adolescence (i.e., 14+ years, during high school). Eight of the 16 participants were not participating in organized sport at the time of data collection, due to competing priorities; namely, their focus on academics.

Parents emerged as a key factor influencing participants' sport journeys. Interestingly, parents were perceived to have minimal influence on participants' initial involvement in sport; however, participants reflected that they would have preferred their parents to have more involvement in their sport journey, particularly during childhood. As past research has highlighted the fundamental influence of parental support on sport participation (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008), the following section explores (a) perceived parental support for sport participation, (b) preferences for parental involvement, (c) settlement issues that challenged parental support, and (d) subsequent settlement considerations.

### **Perceived Parental Support for Sport Participation**

Participants' perceptions of parental involvement in their sport led to the emergence of three categorizations: (a) supportive - uninvolved, (b) supportive - involved, and (c) disapproving of their child's sport participation (See Appendix E: Table 4 for an overview of parental support). It is acknowledged the challenges and potential limitations of categorizing behaviour and actions, given that lived experiences are fluid, complex, and dependent on circumstances (e.g., life changes), therefore it is recognized that each group is part of a continuum, which potentially overlaps with one another. The intention of the three categories is to examine collective characteristics that provide insight into the behaviours and actions by parents, which may facilitate/impede sport participation.

**Supportive - uninvolved.** Half of the participants (n=8) discussed their parents being supportive, but not involved in their sport. Generally, participants started participating in organized sport in childhood/youth through the school system and were influenced by peers, siblings, and coaches/teachers. Overall, participants felt their parents were pleased they were being active; however, parents were perceived as not typically seeking out opportunities for them to be involved in sport activities. As Tommy described it, "my parents are pretty supportive, but they don't ever like come out and say it, 'Hey, you should go play for Ontario'." Similarly, Mustafa stated:

They would encourage me to go and play in the evening, but nothing organized... It's not that

they would not encourage me to join, it was, “Go do it and, if you want to, join a team.” It wasn’t like they were pushing me to join a team or be in a league or something.

Youth within this category generally felt supported and encouraged by their parents to participate in sport, but did not feel that they were pushed to pursue sport in structured settings, or at higher levels.

**Supportive - involved.** Seven participants described their parents as supportive and involved in their sport endeavors (n=7). All seven started participating in organized sport in childhood (e.g., pre/elementary school) through community-based programs and the school system. Participants with supportive-involved parents described how their parents provided them with encouragement and opportunities to participate in sport. As Gold recounts:

My mom wanted to us to be more involved in the community, so we looked into it [programs]. She went to different places and checked to see if they had sports in the area and through that she just wanted her kids to be involved in sports. She wanted us to be active. She did not want us to be staying at home, just sitting there. She wanted us to be out there and she wanted us on our feet, and she said it was a way of meeting new people and it is a way of seeing what you’d like to do.

Gold’s quote highlights that she felt her mother valued sport participation and its ability to foster personal development (e.g., community involvement, expanding social networks, living a healthy lifestyle, self-discovery).

Similarly, Halimah described how her father facilitated her sport participation by recognizing her talent and interest in sport, and provided her with opportunities to advance her skills. In particular, she recalled her father’s support when she wanted to try out for a competitive club team:

One day we were driving past, and we see everyone in the same uniforms and like practicing and we’re like, “Whoa! What’s that?” And I’m like, “I want to do it!” Then basically he [father] just googled it [club name] I guess...he contacted a coach and was like, “Hey like my daughter is like 11-12 and she would like to play with you.”

Whereas Gold's mother looked for sport opportunities for her children, in Halimah's case, her father responded to her explicit interest in community club sport and enabled her participation.

In other cases, participants described how parents provided encouragement by attending games and engaging in sports as a family (e.g., watching sports together, playing pick-up games together), which was often driven by their parents' own interests and past involvement in sport. For example, Priyanka shared, "My mom was very encouraging. She came to all my sporting events. All of them - almost of all of them - up until there was no more (laugh)." Bill shared a positive experience engaging in unstructured sport with his father and brother:

One of my best experiences was playing with him and my brother on just the field. It was just one of my best experiences. Just felt like bonding, the three of us, playing, going to Tim Hortons after - just felt very connected.

Sophia explained how playing unstructured sports with her father also provided her with a sense of sport competence and confidence:

I think it made me very confident in my abilities and having that person there with you and telling you are also good and being able to keep up with him in a certain sport increased my confidence, you know, to actually continue on playing.

While participants grouped into the category of having supportive involved parents generally suggested that parents facilitated their sports participation, and that this in turn led to other benefits such as a sense of confidence, participants in this category had different experiences, with parents sometimes playing differing roles with regards to their involvement. For example, many participants described engaging in unstructured sport participation solely with their fathers, a finding explored later in this paper. Further, while Bill described a lack of engagement by both his parents due to time constraints and a lack of interest in sport, he emphasized the significant role his mother played in initiating his sport involvement, when she received a flyer in the mail for a soccer program:

My mom told me about it [community soccer league] actually. It came in the mail and she had

some relatives sign their kids up and she asked me if I wanted to sign up. My mom is neutral about it. She would not pressure me to play sports. She would not say, “Don’t play sports.”

Bill’s experience emphasizes that the characteristics of supportive-involved parents exist along a continuum. Although all parents within this category were considered actively-involved, their level of involvement varied, with some parents seeking out opportunities, and others responding to opportunities as they arose.

**Disapproving.** One participant shared experiences that could be described as disapproving of sport, whereby his mother acted as a barrier to participation. Zack described his mother’s lack of interest in sport, concerns for his safety (e.g., fear of him getting injured), and concerns of sport interfering with his academics. As Zack shared,

I did not [play school sports] because my mom was against the idea of playing in the school team and getting injured...I tried to talk with my dad because he was an athlete as well when he was young, but he’s like, “I’m okay with it as long your mom is okay with it.” At first, I tried to sneak [playing on a school team] in any way, but then I thought, “No. It’s a bad idea. What if I get caught or what if I get injured actually?” and then my mom is going to find out.

For this particular participant, parental approval limited his opportunities for participation, and evidently, also limited his ability to advance to higher levels of performance within sport. At the time of the study, this participant was not participating in structured sport, as it was the summer following graduation from high school. However, he had interest in trying out for post-secondary sport (e.g., varsity or recreational programs), as long as his mother approved.

**Understanding perceived parental support.** Given that all of participants in this study with the exception of one perceived their parents as supportive of their sport participation, this research reinforces the fundamental role of parents in youths’ sport participation (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). However, findings may present an alternative understanding of what parental support may “look like” throughout childhood and youth. While the DMSP (Côté, 1999, Côté

& Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) suggests parental involvement (e.g., tangible, emotional support) is particularly important during the sampling years (between ages 6-12 years), as this is when parents typically provide children with a wide range of opportunities to engage in sports that are enjoyable, stimulating, and exciting, many youth in this study began participating in sport later in their childhood and youth, through school programming (e.g., intra/intermural sports), and were encouraged to take up sport by individuals other than parents (e.g., peers, siblings, school programs). Specifically, findings of this study suggest that while tangible support (i.e., practical and financial involvement; Côté & Hay, 2002) may be beneficial during the sampling years, child and youth sport involvement may still be feasible without this level of involvement from parents, particularly at non-elite levels. From a practical perspective, it may be more effective to reinforce to parents the value of offering companionship support (e.g., attending games) and emotional support (e.g., talking about sport) to their child, when extensive tangible support is not feasible. Furthermore, this research demonstrates that forms of parental support may differ across levels of participation (e.g., elite, non-elite). Much of the research on parental support has been conducted within high performance sport settings. Instead, this study reflected on pathways related to recreational and non-elite competitive sport at local and community levels.

### **Preferences for Parental Involvement**

While findings indicate that youth felt supported, participants also suggested that they would have preferred for their parents to be more involved in their sport participation (e.g., attending games, seeking opportunities for participation, spending time engaging in sport together). For example, Bill (parents supportive – involved) shared, “I was isolated from my dad [due to his work commitments], so I think if he was more in my life, one of the things that would have happened is that we’d play sports more often.” Participants often perceived parents from other neighbourhoods in Toronto as being more involved, as they frequently commented on the visible presence of others’ parents at games. For example, although Halimah’s parents were supportive and involved in seeking out sport opportunities

for her, they were often unavailable to attend games due to other commitments:

Playing rep [sport], you have all the soccer moms and dads...they [parents] all have the same benches and they're like cheering and giving snacks out, and I'm like, "My parents did not come to crap"...I always sort of wanted that but I didn't get that...

Similarly, Ali (parents supportive - uninvolved) described how his parents rarely came to watch him play sports, as they were too busy working: "they've [parents] seen me play all of three times in five years, cause they just got busy and other stuff like that. Yeah. So our parents just aren't really there for a lot of it." He shared that the support with which he was provided was very different to that which he perceived to be provided within other neighbourhoods in the city, saying "We look at the other sidelines - like just facing [neighbouring city], which isn't too far from us - every parent's there."

Generally, participants felt that greater parental involvement would have positively influenced their sport experience; this finding is in line with research showing parental involvement is associated with higher perceptions of youths' competence, intrinsic motivation, and sport enjoyment (Babkes & Weiss, 1999). Participants commonly made comparisons to 'others', perceiving that parents from other neighbourhoods had more time and resources to support their child's sport participation compared with participants in NIAs. Past research has shown a family's socioeconomic status (e.g., parents' education, income) can be a strong determinant of a child's participation in sport and physical activity (Clark, 2008; Holt et al., 2011; Lareau 2002), suggesting that children's sport participation can be associated with class status. However, findings of this study highlighted additional factors influencing perceived parental support for sport participation, within NIAs. Specifically, perceived lack of parental engagement and support for sport involvement (e.g., attending games, seeking opportunities to play) was often attributed to issues related to social and institutional structures (e.g., immigration, sport culture) in Canada; these findings are examined in more depth in the following section.

## Settlement Issues That Challenged Parental Support

All participants shared how their parents were immigrants to Canada, which they felt influenced parental involvement. Participants often reflected on the perceived challenges their parents faced throughout immigration and settlement in relation to emotional, time, and financial constraints, suggesting these constraints likely impacted their involvement in sport participation. As such, this research provides interesting insight into how processes of immigration settlement influenced parental support from the perspective of youth living in NIAs.

**Lack of time and/or finances for sport.** Collectively, participants were cognizant that the processes of immigration were challenging for their parents, and this was seen to impact parents' support for their child's sport participation. As Tommy (parents supportive – uninvolved) shared:

It's just that all the immigrant families here are working pretty hard just because they are here, and they've given up a lot to be here. So that has a lot of pressures on, I don't know, the youth and the parents themselves. So, you know, like the topic of sport is brought up but never openly discussed.

Tommy astutely observed how immigrants within NIAs had “given up a lot” during the settlement process and that there were subsequent pressures on parents and children. In Tommy's view, parents subsequently worked very hard and families did not discuss sport. Likewise, Jin (parents supportive – uninvolved) described how his father's experiences with settlement had caused a lot of stress, and while his father used to play cricket in his country of origin, he discontinued upon immigrating to Canada:

Not [playing sports] when he got here. He had a lot of responsibility to his family and stuff like that. He was just, doing his work. He was really tense about his family, wanting to raise them because of where he came from back home. So, transitioning here is really heavy - it's really stressful too. He would have done it [played sports] if he had a good background in Canada. But he has to do everything on this own [here in Canada] and it did not make sense [to play sports].

According to Jin, his father could not participate in sport after arriving in Canada in large part because he was seen to be taking on the responsibility of immigration settlement for the family, which limited his availability to pursue activities of interest. Tommy's comments in relation to his father were not uncommon among participants, highlighted the strong influence fathers were seen to have on sport participation, but were often constrained due to immigration settlement issues.

In addition to financial constraints, factors related to family and the distribution of tasks/responsibilities at home were also discussed as influencing parents' ability to be involved in participants' sport journeys. Many participants described scenarios where mothers were viewed as being responsible for the family, which often included caring for multiple children, while fathers were more likely to be working long hours outside of the home. As such, parents were seen to be often unavailable to attend their child's sports activities. Bill (parents supportive – involved) explained the situation that was common on his team within the NIA:

So for my teammates, parents have a lot of kids at home - two parents, five kids, one is working a full time job, one is a full time stay at home mom and then they have a lot of younger kids too, so it makes it hard for them to come and support probably their oldest son, who is actually playing in the soccer league out here, right? They have four kids and they have to take care of them, so that makes them [the child/athlete] feel discouraged.

Here, Bill reflected on many of the intersecting factors influencing his and others' parental support within NIAs (i.e., immigration settlement, income, families with multiple young children), which is reflective of the demographic profiles of NIAs (City of Toronto, 2014).

**Awareness of sport opportunities.** Participants also suggested their parents likely encountered challenges in accessing sport programs. Some felt parents' unfamiliarity with many of the popular sports in Canada may have contributed to their parents' lack of engagement in their sport participation. As Sophia (parents supportive – involved) noted:

Basketball is a sport - like it's more Western. I guess because a lot of people aren't from...their

background isn't Canadian, like their background isn't a Western place...so those are not sports that people [from my country] think, "Oh, let's focus on these."

Participants felt that a lack of knowledge of popular sports in Canada influenced their parents' abilities to know where to seek out sport opportunities for their children. Tommy (parents supportive – uninvolved) described the lack of information available about sport programming within the local community, when his family first arrived in Canada:

So, when we did get here, the first few years...it was probably just that I didn't know and my parents didn't know where the soccer clubs were and stuff...around this neighbourhood. There wasn't anyone going around, going like, "Hey, come try rugby," or "Hey, come try soccer"...That would have really helped because I probably would have tried it and stuck to it.

Mustafa (parents supportive – uninvolved) further described how he felt immigrant families were unfamiliar with the various recreational opportunities available in Canada, which were quite different than those in their countries of origin:

Now I know a bunch of people who go canoeing as a family, but that's not at all something that happens in [this NIA] - probably because it's a lot of money as well. It's not something they [parents] are exposed to at all...they wouldn't know where to go canoeing. The only place they [parents] can think of is like the Toronto Harbourfront. They are not familiar with Algonquin Park, Muskoka...like anything in there...They would see the first thing on Google, which is tourist [information], so they would not know of any local spots...the Canadian cultural thing.

Tommy and Mustafa point out parents' – and their own initial lack of knowledge about specific sport and recreational activities. Their quotes demonstrate the challenges immigrants may face in understanding the nuances of a new culture and the impact it can have in engaging in unfamiliar activities. In addition, Mustafa speculates that new immigrants would not even know of specific recreational spaces. It is apt that he describes new immigrants as tourists in their own country because

of this lack of familiarity, which may perpetuate feelings of being ‘other’, compared with the dominant culture (i.e., Canadian-born individuals).

Overall, findings of youths’ perceptions of factors influencing their parents’ support of their sport participation are in line with previous work highlighting barriers to leisure and recreational activities amongst immigrant communities; these barriers including financial challenges, language difficulties, unfamiliarity of activities, and feelings of discrimination and exclusion (e.g., Aizlewood, Belevander, & Pendakur, 2006; Institute for Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Tirone & Pedlar, 2000; Yan & McCullagh, 2004; Yu & Berryman, 1996). Indeed, many newcomers struggle to integrate due to systematic issues and racial discrimination relating to finding skill-appropriate employment, affordable childcare, safe quality housing, access to language services, appropriate transportation, and other recreational and cultural activities (Alboim & McIsaac, 2007; City of Toronto, 2001; City of Toronto, 2013; Fleras, 2015). This highlights how distal socio-ecological processes (e.g., immigration settlement) not directly related to the sport environment can influence sport participation and development. As such, further research is needed gain a deeper understanding of effective approaches for increasing sport participation amongst newcomers to Canada. These processes may include recognizing and addressing broader issues (i.e., immigration settlement) which act as barriers for immigrant parents to support and engage in their child’s social life, such as through sport activities.

### **Subsequent Settlement Considerations**

Participants were conscious of the perceived challenges parents faced in relation to immigration settlement and other commitments (e.g., work, family). As such, some participants limited their sport involvement, as they did not want to contribute any additional financial strain to their parents, while others chose to prioritize academics over sport participation, as they were aware of the sacrifices their parents had made.

**Limited pursuit of sport activities.** Many of the participants were particularly mindful of the financial constraints parents faced with settlement and were reluctant to cause any further financial

strain. In some cases, participants suggested parents were willing to provide opportunities for their children, yet participants elected to withdraw or not pursue sport activities due to perceived financial constraints. As Ali (parents supportive – uninvolved) explained:

Financially, it just wasn't as sustainable trying to keep me engaged in sports. We did swimming classes 'til it started being... it wasn't free anymore and then I stopped that... I made sure the ones [sport activities] I got into were all free programs. I would never try to find a program or go into one knowing that I have to pay for it.

Similarly, Bill (parents supportive – involved) withdrew from karate, as he was concerned about the financial strains that it placed on his parents:

It [karate class] was about \$500 every couple of months. Five hundred dollars and it was skyrocketing too, as I upgraded my belts ranks, right? 'Cause we would have to purchase equipment from them too, so you need to practice lessons and when you want to upgrade to a belt, you need a one-on-one lesson with the instructor, and back then, it was really pricey. So, I started off and my parents were like - they considered it and did not want to let me down, so they said, "Okay, we'll put it through for a month" and then they said, "Okay for a couple months". Five hundred dollars was okay with them, but then we started to realize it was becoming a financial burden for my parents... it was mostly a feeling I had. They never told me [that]. But then my brother seemed to get interested in it too, so I saw that kind of worrying them in a sense, right? It was mostly me and it [karate] just kind of faded away. I went to orange belt and I took a little break on my side; they were taking a little break on their side. We wouldn't talk about karate and let it sort of fade away a little bit and then we did not really talk about it again. That was probably when I was nine or ten years old.

Bill's narrative illustrates the complexities of sport participation under circumstances of financial constraint. His pride in upgrading his belt ranks was complicated by his recognition that his parents were in a difficult financial position. While Bill's participation and success in karate as a

financial burden was never made explicit to him, it was something he could sense. Furthermore, Bill could see that his parents were worried when his brother expressed an interest in karate. Thus, at the age of nine or ten, Bill made the decision to stop karate, describing the decision as “mostly me”, highlighting that some children may shoulder some of the decisions of their participation.

**Prioritizing academics.** Many participants discussed the value their parents placed on academics, and how this influenced their sport participation. Some youth described how they sacrificed their sport involvement in order to focus on academics, as they did not want to cause additional stress for themselves or their parents, while others continued their involvement in sport, but felt pressured to achieve academic success. Sivasan (parent supportive – uninvolved) dropped out of sports in high school to focus on his studies, as he felt obligated to succeed academically:

I wanted to keep playing for the soccer team, but I decided to put my future in front of the soccer... My mom always said to me, “Of course you can do both if you want, but you do your studies first and then whatever time you have left, you can use that to play sports or enjoy yourself”... when you’re the only person that’s going to university in your family, right? So, you want to make sure that you’re...you do the best you can, so you don’t want anything interfering in your studies. So that’s why [I withdrew from sport] and I want to succeed... That’s why - is the studies.

Sivasan had clearly weighed his sport participation against his commitment to succeeding academically, with the latter being prioritized as more important than soccer, particularly in his mother’s eyes. In his deliberation he also seemed connected to his identity as the first and only person to be pursuing higher education in his family. Previous scholars have highlighted that immigrant parents’ focus on education and careers influences their child’s sport participation (e.g., Tirone & Pedlar, 2005; Yan & McCullagh, 2004). The value parents placed on their children’s education in Canada could be shaped in part by parents’ own challenges in having their educational and professional

qualifications recognized following migration, due to the devaluation of credentials and discrimination (City of Toronto, 2013; Oreopolous, 2009).

Collectively, these findings highlight the bi-directional effects of broader socio-ecological processes on children and youths' sport participation and development. Perceived parental challenges associated with immigration settlement indirectly shaped participants' decisions for sport participation by not seeking opportunities for sport, and by prioritizing academics over sport, particularly if participants believed participation would potentially further burden parents.

### **Conclusion**

This research offers rich narratives of youth and young adults' sport experiences within NIAs, a demographic group that has been under-studied within the field of sport psychology. This research supports previous work, which recognizes parental support as being a fundamental component of youth and young adults' sport initiation, particularly in childhood (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Specifically, parents' provision of resources (e.g., time, finances) and involvement (e.g., attending games) was perceived to be influential to participants' sport journeys. This finding echoes past work suggesting five forms of support (i.e., emotional support, informational support, companionship, tangible support, and modeling and expectations; Côté & Hay, 2002) that contribute to positive sport behaviours such as self-esteem, competence, and achievement. Collectively, findings suggest that while tangible support (i.e., practical and financial involvement; Côté & Hay, 2002) may be the 'gold standard' during childhood, child and youth sport involvement may still be feasible without this level of involvement from parents, particularly at non-elite levels. From a practical perspective, it may be beneficial to reinforce to parents the value of offering companionship support (e.g., attending games) and emotional support (e.g., talking about sport) to their child, when extensive tangible support is not feasible. While findings of this study outline differing forms of parental support, it is recognized that there are limitations to engaging in categorization; categories were developed and

utilized only as a guide to explore similar characteristics of parental support and the impact this support had on participants' sport journeys.

Utilizing an interdisciplinary approach (e.g., sport psychology and sociology) revealed the complexities of parental support that extended beyond typical or desired parental behaviours. Firstly, this research demonstrates that forms of parental support may differ across sport trajectories (e.g., recreational sport through sampling, elite sport through sampling, elite through early specialization; DMSP; Côté, 1999, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), as this study reflects pathways related to recreational and non-elite competitive sport, which differs from research focusing on more high performing athletes (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008). Secondly, this research illuminates distal factors (e.g., immigration settlement and Canadian sport culture) perceived to have influenced parental support for sport participation within NIAs, highlighting that social and institutional environments may act as a barrier to immigrant parents in their ability to support their children's engagement in civic activities such as sport. Furthermore, perceived parental challenges with settlement had a subsequent effect on participants' sport participation decisions, demonstrating bi-directional complexities and effects of wider social issues on sport participation and development.

Although these findings may be insightful for researchers and practitioners examining similar populations (e.g., newcomers in urban spaces), they may not be generalizable to other NIAs in Toronto or other communities in Canada, given that participants' experiences are not only influenced by personal characteristics (e.g., race, gender, class), but are positioned within historical, economic, political, social, and cultural contexts (O'Mahoney & Donnelly, 2010). Additionally, this research provides retrospective accounts of sport participation among youth and young adults; therefore, it may not be a reflection of current challenges facing immigrants or those living within NIAs today. This study examined youths' sport experiences and parental influence through the perspectives of youth and young adults. This approach does not discredit the need to examine parents' perceptions; rather, the findings highlight the bi-directional relationships that shaped youths' sporting experiences.

For example, while children and youth sometimes perceived that their parents were not involved in their sport, it appeared that the topic was often not broached because the children were aware of other stresses their parents were experiencing. Therefore, it is recommended that further research explore parental support for sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs, through various lenses and/or from diverse perspectives (e.g., parents, children, siblings, coaches, sport leaders, community leaders), and utilize alternative methodological approaches (e.g., interviewing, journaling) to continue gaining a richer understanding of these sport experiences, athlete trajectories, and support systems, in typically under-studied populations.

Finally, given that sport psychology has been criticized for taking a primarily homogenous, positivist, and institutional approach, in turn potentially limiting understanding of sport behaviours (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Blodgett et al., 2015; Ryba, 2005; Ryba & Wright, 2005), it is recommended that further research be conducted to continue to advance understanding of the experiences of children and youth within underrepresented communities, and that this research be conducted over time (i.e., longitudinal study designs), with the aim of gaining a broader understanding of parental support, involvement, and influence on children and youths' sport participation and development. There is also value in further probing the many factors that appear to be influencing parental support in relation to children's sport participation and performance – some of which were highlighted in this study's findings (e.g., immigration, awareness of sport programs) – but some of which may have yet to be uncovered and understood.

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## **Chapter Seven:**

### **“It’s Not That Good, but It’s Better Than Nothing”:**

#### **How Space Influences Sport Participation Among Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto**

#### **Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

This paper will be submitted to a journal addressing sport and social issues (e.g., Exercise Journal of Sport and Social Issues) as: Wolman, L., Nakamura, Y., & Fraser-Thomas, J., (2019). “If I maybe started rugby a bit earlier, I don’t where I could have been right now”: The lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto Neighbourhoods Improvement Areas

### **Abstract**

Although sport settings are fundamental to sport participation and development, simply providing, improving, and maintaining public sport spaces may not automatically result in positive psychological and social benefits, especially for those for whom sport and sport spaces are structured in exclusionary ways. This research examines how neighbourhood spaces facilitate or impede sport participation among youth and young adults living in two Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) in Toronto. Five focus groups were conducted with 27 young adults (n = 19 males, n = 8 females), drawing from socio-ecological perspectives (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), postcolonial feminism (e.g., Mills, 1998) and spatial theory (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991) to frame and critically examine the complex and intersecting factors influencing the use of spaces for sport. Findings highlight how proximal (e.g., socio-demographics, social support, sport settings/space) and distal (e.g., culture, institutions, normative practices, wider social issues) processes influenced participants' access and social inclusion within spaces used for sport both inside and beyond the NIAs.

*Keywords:* Neighbourhood spaces, spatial analysis, sport development, sport participation, sport geography, sport settings, sport spaces

**“It’s Not That Good, but It’s Better Than Nothing”:**

**How Space Influences Sport Participation Among Youth and Young Adults Living in Toronto**

**Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

In 2014, the City of Toronto identified 31 of 140 neighbourhoods in Toronto as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) based on an assessment of five key domains: physical surroundings; economic opportunities; healthy lives; social development; and participation in civic decision-making. While there are potential benefits of institutions (e.g., government) identifying, addressing, and investing in the specific needs within diverse neighbourhoods, Villegas (2018) argued the identification of NIAs could be viewed as a means push neoliberal ideologies of the ‘good citizen’, without acknowledging the institutional and social processes that contribute to the marginalization within these communities. The socio-demographic compositions of NIAs (i.e., working class, racialized, and immigrant communities) demonstrate that how marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities continues to be mapped out both materially and symbolically across Toronto, due to experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and surveillance (Galankis, 2016; Nicholas & Braimoh, 2018; Teelucksingh, 2006, Villegas, 2018).

To support the success of NIAs and other neighbourhoods across Toronto, the *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy 2020* (TSNS 2020; City of Toronto, 2016) was established, an approach that includes ensuring that services, programs, public spaces, and amenities are accessible and used by residents. Recognizing that “sport participation significantly contributes to the quality of life for both Toronto residents and communities” (City of Toronto, 2017, p.1), the municipality of Toronto also launched *Sport Plan*, a guide for increasing sport participation within the Greater Toronto Area, which included “the delivery of quality sport programs, increase awareness about community sport and promote inclusive opportunities for participation” (p. 4). A major recommendation for the plan was the development of inclusive sport, as the municipality recognized that there are lower participation rates and greater barriers amongst various socio-demographic groups (e.g., Aboriginal peoples, children and

families with low income, girls and women, immigrants and newcomers, LGBTQ2+, residents of NIAs, older adults, persons who are homeless or under-housed, persons with disabilities, and youth). Through engagement with key stakeholders (e.g., residents and local organizations), the plan recommended developing and implementing “progressive policies and practices that reduce systemic barriers and support increased participation in sport by diverse communities” (City of Toronto, 2017, p. 21).

While scholars have cautioned using sport as a panacea, given its exclusionary practices that favour hierarchical social structures that exist within sport and society (Coakley, 2011; Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2009; Spaaij, 2009), there is widely published evidence that sport participation can foster various psychological and social benefits, such as belonging, sense of identity, education, skill development, health, wellness, civic pride, cohesion, and economic prosperity (Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012, Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Walseth 2006; Weiss, 2001). One way that presumably increases sport participation, especially among under-represented groups is to improve the quality and accessibility of public sport spaces. Although sport settings are fundamental to sport participation and development, simply providing, improving, and maintaining public sport spaces may not automatically result in positive psychological and social benefits, especially for those for whom sport and sport spaces are structured in exclusionary ways. For example, a sport space may negatively influence sport participation and physical activity because of accessibility (e.g., fees, membership, travel), infrastructure (e.g., quality facilities), opportunities (e.g., time), seasonal conditions (e.g., temperature, daylight, rain/snow), and safety (e.g., crime) (Alexandris, & Carroll, 1997; Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Davison, & Lawson, 2006; Giles-Corti & Donovan, 2002; Humpel, Owen, & Leslie, 2002; Santos, Matos, & Mota, 2005). Together, these findings suggest that social, cultural, or normative factors may influence access to and experiences of physical sport spaces. To have a safe, welcoming and appropriate place to play sport is nonetheless a key first step.

Given that NIAs are a relatively new identification, there is limited research that sport participation within these neighbourhoods. Recognizing the importance of sport settings on participation, this research examines how neighbourhood spaces facilitate or impede sport participation among youth and young adults living in NIAs in Toronto. This research utilizes a critical and socio-ecological approach to examine the complexities of how physical spaces and places for sport within NIAs are conceived, experienced, negotiated, and resisted.

### **Conceptualization of Sport Settings**

The *Personal Assets Approach to Youth Sport* (PAF; Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016) identifies variables necessary for the design and delivery of sport programming, including appropriate settings. Appropriate settings are described as the physical sport context which supports youths' need to "play, develop skills and have fun" (Côté et al., 2016, p. 249). The PAF highlights six sport setting features, which include: (1) A safe environment in which youth develop; (2) an appropriate structure in which children experience a stable environment; (3) the availability of opportunities for skill building; (4) the integration of family, school and community efforts; (5) access to different sport contexts; and (6) community-size (Côté et al., 2016, p. 249, p. 251). The first four features were drawn from the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's (NRCIM; 2002) book, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, a highly regarded resource within the field of Positive Youth Development (PYD), whereas the last two elements were recommended by the authors and are more specific to sport. These six features primarily address personal, social and structure features within sport settings, but do not account for distal processes (e.g., normative practices), which are arguably integral to access and social belonging. Interestingly, two features from NRCIM were not included in the PAF, including opportunities to belong, and positive social norms, both of which address wider contextual factors influencing experiences within and along the boundaries of sport settings. This failure to include broader structural factors within sport settings (as defined by PAF) can reinforce hegemonic normative practices and continue to support those

individuals who have the economic and cultural capital to reap the benefits of PYD outcomes through sport. Furthermore, this focus on physical spaces fails to account for the meanings associated with and the experienced of those spaces, as it has been argued that sporting places are classed, gendered, and racialized (Fusco, 2005; Krebs, 2012; King 2005). Therefore, the subsequent section provides a more critical perspective of how space and place influence sport participation and development.

### **Sport Spaces and Sense of Place**

Vertinsky and Bale (2004) suggest that space and place are “central dimensions of sport” (p. 1). Space can be viewed as the spatial parameters used for sport, which includes the built (e.g., facilities) and natural (e.g., landscape) environment (Bale, 2000, 2002). Sport spaces can differ depending on how they are used, such as achievement spaces that are focused on production and results (e.g., stadiums) and are governed by rules and regulations, experimental spaces for fun and play (e.g., parks, streets), and recreational/hygienic spaces are centered on personal fitness and recreation within sports facilities (e.g., community centres).

In contrast to space, as sense of place “shapes the play, while also providing a context for differing experiences and social interactions within and beyond it” (Vertinsky, 2004, p. 8). Although sport settings may appear to be objective, homogenous and pure, the way sport is conceptualized, designed, provided, occupied, and controlled is shaped by politics, history, and ideology (Bale, 2000, 2002; Gustafson, 2006; Lefebvre 1991; Lefebvre & Enders, 1976), which often reproduces and reinforces hegemonic normative practices that often favours white, male, middle-upper class, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005). Krebs (2012) explored the reproduction of colonialism in contemporary Canada by examining the intersection of nationalism, race, gender, and space. He contended that ice hockey rinks in Canada remain racialized and gendered, continuing to impose colonial values by maintaining the “hegemony of white, masculine subjectivity to which all other subject positions must refer” (Krebs, 2012, p. 81). Although marginalized groups (e.g., females, immigrant newcomers,

Indigenous peoples) play hockey, often accessibility (e.g., rink times) is limited and social exclusion is exercised which subsequently reinforces “masculine entitlement to the space of the rink” (Krebs, 2012, p. 98). While Krebs addresses sport inequities within the Canadian context, it is unclear if these processes of racialization, gendering, colonization, and othering also occur in other sporting contexts (e.g., sport, level, activity) and geographic locations (e.g. rural/urban areas).

Although spaces and places for sport are constructed by spatial and social boundaries, scholars such as Vertinsky (2004) suggested these processes are not static. For example, the emergence of parkour in Paris, France, was a response to redefining the “use and meaning of urban space, urban life and forms of embodiment” (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2011, p. 112-113). The sport provided a sense of place for those who felt traditionally excluded from mainstream sports due to hegemonic normative practices. Although the popularity of the sport led to institutional regulations such as fencing on roofs, this provided new obstacles for users to incorporate into their sporting practice, demonstrating resilience, and the desire to adapt spaces to meet the needs for participation. The dynamic production of spaces and places also shape identity formation. As Teelucksingh (2006) argued, claiming space entails “subjectivity, agency and the process of “becoming” subjects.” (p. 21). Thangaraj (2015), for instance, demonstrated how Brown only basketball spaces provided South Asian American men with a means to show their masculinity and cultural citizenship, and challenge hegemonic normative practices of masculinity, class, race, and citizenship that they experienced within other sporting circles (p. 29). Although some forms of oppression were resisted, the study highlighted the exclusion of individuals and groups (e.g., women, queer masculinities, and working-class) within these Brown only basketball spaces continued, illuminating the complexities of hierarchical sport practices.

### **Neighbourhood Spaces and Places**

Malone (2002) argues that spatial boundaries, such as neighbourhoods construct “identity in the places we inhabit and they organize our social space through geographies of power” (p. 158). Toronto offers interesting spaces to examine and provide insight into how racialized power is produced,

maintained and challenged, given the city's racial and ethnic diversity (Teelucksingh, 2006). Galankis (2016) explored how racialization was an everyday reality for youth living in an urban racialized neighbourhood in Toronto, an area which spans two NIAs, manifesting in the form of social tensions, poor planning decisions, and over-policing, which impacted how the youths engaged with public spaces within the neighbourhood. Interestingly, as a result of these lived experiences, many preferred to use spaces elsewhere in Toronto (e.g., downtown) due to concerns for safety within their own neighbourhood. Some young males recommended the provision of sporting activities (e.g., basketball tournaments) in their community to foster inclusive and safe spaces within their neighbourhood.

Indeed, Rac's (2014) study of an Aquatic Centre in Regent Park, another area identified as an NIA in Toronto, highlighted how a physical activity space could be designed in inclusive and welcoming ways. Specifically, Rac (2014) noted that structural design (e.g., universal changing rooms, privacy screens and variation amongst the pools) and program elements (e.g., free, female-only programs) contributed to the accessibility of centre for a range of residents from various socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The report outlined a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to the design and implementation of accessible and socially inclusive spaces for sport and physical activity, such as the need for extensive public consultation, understanding the community context, programming that is free of barriers to participation, inclusive physical design, and the importance of swim culture education. However, we need to be cautious of simply concluding that offering sport as a means to improve more complex and wider social issues, particularly within communities that are deemed 'at-risk' or 'needing improvement.'

For instance, Fusco (2007) examined how youth, space and play within urban Toronto were conceptualized within policy texts and healthified consumer spaces. She illuminated various projects in Toronto acted as a means of control and governance of 'at-risk' youth, by providing "spaces of salvation" (p. 51), without considering the everyday experiences and complexities of life within these neighbourhoods, which includes the racialization and marginalization of youth in urban centres.

Specifically, she argued that these policies and initiatives reinforce hegemonic and normative practices, and often do not “acknowledge the socio-political and cultural production of space or the substantive (people, lived, heterogeneous) geographies of those spaces.” (p. 51).

Albeit not an urban city, van Ingen, Sharpe and Lashua’s (2018) studied the stigma of living in a “disadvantaged” (p. 209) neighbourhood in Niagara, Ontario, Canada and how this influenced young people’s feelings of belonging and social inclusion within certain neighbourhoods, school, and sport settings. The paper examined broader factors influencing youth, such as poverty, which the authors attributed to structural inequalities associated with colonialism, racial and gender discrimination and neoliberal government policies. The authors suggested that these processes contributed to the stigmatization and socio-spatial marginalization of young people within the neighbourhood, perpetuating experiences of ‘Othering.’ In addition, the study examined the use of neighbourhood spaces for sport, suggesting that few engaged in organized sport due to challenges associated with access (e.g., cost), family commitments (e.g., caring for siblings), and reinforcement of social norms (e.g., gender), which particularly influenced Muslim female participation, highlighting the importance of examining the intersection of various social markers on sport participation. Muslim female participants described being more engaged in a teen program run by the local housing authority and partnering organizations, as they felt a sense of support and belonging compared with other spaces where they felt socially excluded (e.g., unstructured sport settings, spaces outside of the neighbourhood).

Although the studies by Fusco (2007), Rac (2014), and van Ingen et al. (2018) illuminate contextual factors influencing access and the use of sport spaces in Toronto urban neighbourhoods, and in the case of van Ingen et al (2018) what counts as meaningful sport participation within a ‘disadvantaged’ neighbourhood, there is limited research examining neighbourhoods, their impact on sport participation and development in general, and the lived experience of how residents navigate and negotiate spaces for sport. Furthermore, it is unclear if these issues relate to children and youth’s

experiences within urban spaces, such as Toronto NIAs, which likely have different contextual factors shaping a sense of place, and use of spaces for sport.

### **Rationale and Purpose**

Given Toronto's diverse ethnic landscape (Teelucksingh, 2006), this paper specifically examines how neighbourhood spaces facilitate or impede sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto (NIAs). Exploration of sport participation amongst youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs provides a dynamic platform, as social processes that have contributed to identification and boundaries of these neighbourhoods. This research is part of a larger study exploring the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young people living in NIAs, with a broad focus on youths' sport development pathways, psychosocial influences and neighbourhood spaces.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research utilized a socio-ecological approach, drawing from Ecological Systems Theory (EST; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to identify and explore proximal and distal processes that influenced perceptions and uses of spaces for sport in NIAs. Proximal processes refer to personal characteristics, settings, and interpersonal relationships related and experienced by the developing person (e.g., relationship, sport settings), whereas distal processes indirectly influence the developing person (e.g., normative practices, culture, institutions). Furthermore, as highlighted by Holt, Neely, Slater, Camiré, Côté, Fraser-Thomas, ... & Tamminen (2017), experiences of individuals and groups may differ depending on personal characteristics (e.g., socio-demographics, personality traits). Using a socio-ecological approach is beneficial to understanding sport journeys, as it helps identify *what* influences sport participation, which includes factors that may be beyond the developing person's control. Furthermore, postcolonial feminism (PCF) and spatial theory (Lefebvre, 1991) were used to examine proximal and distal processes more critically. PCF pays attention to power by exposing inequities related to an individual's social position (e.g., gender, race, and class) resulting from the process of colonization and post-colonization (Racine, 2003). PCF acknowledges that colonial and imperial

relations continue to have a major influence on social, economic, and political structures (Mills, 1998). Furthermore, scholars such as Malone (2002), Razack (2000), and Teelucksingh (2006) have examined the relationship between imperialism, colonialism, race, and space, highlighting how ethnic minorities within Canada continue to be mapped out both materially and symbolically, limiting access to power and resources for various marginalized groups. The PCF lens is particularly important within the Canadian context, given how sport and other social and institutional systems (e.g., immigration settlement, sport delivery systems) are based on British and French colonial values and structures that favour white, Anglophone men (Field, 2012; Krebs, 2012; Simpson, James, & Mack, 2011). As Razack's (2000) study demonstrates, this can extend beyond the sporting field. Her investigation of the murder of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman, by two white, middle-class, male university athletes, found that race, masculinity, and sport protected and validated the men's behaviour, whilst constructing Indigenous women as being a life "worth very little" (p. 129). Indeed, Razack (2000) brings into sharp relief how (sporting) spaces shape and are shaped by power relations that racialize and marginalize certain ethnic groups.

A related point of departure for this study is the recognition that spaces and places for sport are socially constructed, produced, maintained, and resisted. To understand these processes, this study draws on Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of (Social) Space*. His framework identifies three interconnected forms of social space: Spatial practices, representations of space, and, spaces of representation. Spatial practices refer to how material and physical spaces are perceived and reflect human activity, behaviour, and experience. Spatial practices can generally be drawn or mapped out (e.g., sports gymnasiums and fields) and involve everyday activities and routines, such as playing sports. The second form of social space is representations of space, or how space is conceived, imagined, and constructed, which in turn is shaped, regulated, and controlled by representations of power. Lastly, the third component is spaces of representation, also known as the 'lived' space. Lived spaces reveal social struggle (e.g., discriminatory practices), and in doing so provide a platform for

oppositional practices and resistance (Keith & Pile, 1993). Various scholars have used a Lefebvrian spatial approach to examine how power is produced, reinforced and challenged within public (e.g., Malone, 2002; Teelucksingh, 2006) and sport spaces (e.g., Fusco, 2006; van Ingen, 2002). This form of spatial analysis compliments both ecological systems and PCF approaches, as it strives to examine the complexities of experience as individuals and groups move in, out, and around the periphery of sport spaces and places.

### **Research Methods**

Guided by the theoretical framework, this research draws on the lived experience, as it an effective method for exploring how people live through and respond to personal experiences, which includes exploring various aspects of a person's life and identity, even those not directly connected to the research question (Boylorn, 2008). As well, this focus on lived experience assumes that there is no definite reality; rather, knowledge is socially constructed, imperfect, and subjective (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, this approach can provide valuable insight into how the participants see themselves within a place or situation (Creswell, 2013), or as in the case of this research study that examines sport participation within a geographic area, the individual and collective experience of youth and young adults living in NIAs. Furthermore, this method was selected because it can provide a localized view and effective way to understand and address the experiences of marginalized, non-Western cultural groups (who have traditionally been silenced) (Swadener & Mutua 2008, Huss 2009).

Principles of community-based research (CBR) were employed to encourage openness, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity between the researcher and participant (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2008; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). This approach involved undertaking the study in partnership with the communities, drawing on multiple sources of knowledge across disciplinary lines, and ensuring that the research was reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Holland, 2005). For example, prior to and throughout the study, a significant amount of time was spent meeting with local leaders to

build trust and to gain a deeper understanding of the neighbourhoods, such as how sport spaces are used, ways of living, and the issues facing the community.

### **Context and Participants**

Two NIAs were selected for the study based on their demographic characteristics and use of shared services (See Appendix E: Table 1 for summary of demographics for both neighbourhoods). Both NIAs have a relatively high percentage of residents who are born outside of Canada, compared with the average of Toronto, with most of the residents having immigrated from Southern and Eastern Asia. Most residents of both areas have a mother tongue (e.g., Urdu, Gujarati, Farsi) different to the official language of Canada (English or French), at a rate that is considerably higher than the city overall. Residents within both communities spend a greater percentage of their income on housing compared with others living in Toronto; for many, their housing does not meet the National Occupancy Standards (e.g., exceeding maximum living capacity per bedroom, City of Toronto, 2014). As well, more residents have lower-incomes, compared to the City of Toronto's average. Furthermore, various stakeholders, including participants, suggested residents viewed the two neighbourhoods as one community. Participants were youth and young adults who were a) residents of two selected NIAs, (b) between the ages of 16-25 years old and (c) participate in sport, including participants who may not have been playing sport at the time of the study (See Appendix E: Table 2 for participant demographics). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (i.e. engagement with community sport clubs, local organizations and municipal government departments), followed by snowball sampling (i.e. recommended by participants).

### **Data Collection**

Five focus groups were conducted with twenty-seven 16-21 year-olds (n = 19 males, n = 8 females). Each focus group had between two and ten participants, depending on availability, and took place within the NIA (e.g., library, school). The benefits of using focus groups compared with one-on-one interviews is that they can provide richer and deeper insight on topics in a shorter period of time

through social interactions between participants (Rabiee, 2004). A semi-structured discussion guide was used, drawing from the theoretical frameworks chosen (i.e. PCF and spatial theory). Primarily, the discussion guide was directed by Lefebvre's (1991) three interconnected forms of social space: spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation. To initiate discussions around spaces used for sport, a mapping exercise was used. Participants were provided with large-scale maps of both NIAs (provided by the City of Toronto), which included sports spaces as identified by the City of Toronto (e.g., Parks and Recreation). Sport spaces were marked to help the participants orient themselves and assisted in moderating the discussions and probing about spaces designated for sport in the NIA.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on the NIAs of study, as identified by the City of Toronto. Questions included "Do these boundaries best represent the neighbourhood you live within?"; "How do you view [name of neighbourhoods of study]?"; "Is this different from how it is perceived by non-residents?"; and "How are neighbouring communities similar/different?" The intention of this discussion was to understand how participants viewed their neighbourhoods and areas that surrounded them. Second, participants were provided with approximately 30 minutes to examine and place pins on the maps where they had engaged in sport. As participants were reviewing the maps together, it initiated several discussions between themselves, such as recalling sporting memories within the spaces and clarifying the location of spaces used for sport. Following this exercise, participants were asked questions such as, "I noticed that many of you use this space [pointing to a location on the map] for sport. Tell me about it..."; "What types of sports do you play here?"; "What do you like about playing sports here?"; and "How can the space be improved?" These questions were used to initiate discussions, allowing participants to share experiences and express opinions about the spaces used (and not used) for sport. Additionally, participants were asked if there were any other spaces used for sport that were not identified on the maps. This led to an engaging conversation among participants on alternative spaces used for sport, highlighting participants' motivation for sport participation and the desire and

ability to claim space, which parallels Lefebvre's analysis of spaces that are lived, along with other lived experiences shared by participants during the interviews.

### **Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews; which is a process of identifying, examining and drawing common themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, transcripts were read and re-read for familiarity. Second, transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 11.4.0 (QSR International Pty. Ltd), which was used to code interviews during the initial stages of the data analysis (i.e., inductive analysis). For example, codes included "availability" "cost" and "quality". Fourth, codes were categorized (e.g., "physical access") and developed into themes, such as "use of designated sport spaces". Lastly, themes were reviewed again, utilizing deductive analysis, a top-down approach driven by theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This deductive analysis was guided by relevant work in both sport psychology and sociology to examine the impact of space on sport participation within NIAs. Sport psychology frameworks such as PAF (Côté et al., 2014, 2016) recognize that activities, relationships, and settings, which are proximal processes, can support positive outcomes in sport. Furthermore, PCF and spatial theory were utilized to critically examine broader social and institutional processes influencing how spaces used for sport are constructed, perceived, and experienced.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, a multilayered bracketing process was adopted to assist in balancing tensions and reduce the risk of the researcher imposing opinions and experiences on the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). As such, a multilayered process for bracketing was utilized throughout the research process, which included: (a) recognizing the researcher's position, (b) reflexive practices, and (c) member-checking with participants. Reflexive journals were kept throughout the research process, which explored power dynamics, interview techniques, and content to improve facilitation and engagement with participants as the project progressed. As well, analytic memos were utilized during the analysis phase, which assisted in recognizing emerging themes early in the research process, catching thoughts, and making connections and comparisons between the interviews.

Furthermore, member checking was employed, as a “way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants’ experiences” (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). Lastly, pseudonyms are used for participant names and neighbourhoods within the paper, to protect the identity of the participants. Riverside and Greendale are fictional names representing the two NIAs of study, whereas Luton and Greenwich represents neighbourhoods, which participants referred, however are not identified as NIAs by the City of Toronto. Collectively, the methodological approaches utilized for this study were centered around conducting research in partnership with participants, rather than on them.

### **Results/Discussion**

The focus of this paper was to explore how neighbourhood spaces facilitated impeded sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto NIAs. As such, the following themes explore how participants perceived and used spaces for sport within Toronto NIAs, perceptions and uses, which were influenced by proximal (e.g., socio-demographics, social support, sport settings/spaces) and distal (e.g., culture, institutions, normative practices, wider social issues) processes. The first theme examines the participants’ most desired space for sport: designated sport spaces. For many, use of spaces for organized sport was limited, due to access (e.g., cost) and feelings of social belonging. However, when available, designated sport spaces were used by participants for unstructured sport, which was mainly in the evenings. As the second theme highlights, this further constrained participants’ use of spaces for sport, due to concerns for safety within the NIA. In response, as the third and fourth themes illuminate, when spaces were free and perceived as safe, they were readily used by (certain) participants, whereas others left the neighbourhood and/or adapted non-sport spaces to seek accessible and inclusive sport spaces. Finally, the last theme explores the impact of designated sport space within the NIA that was designed to meet the needs of (some) participants. All five themes are interconnected, as lack of access and inclusion in one space often led to unexpected places for sport.

### **“Not From My Neighbourhood”: Designated Sport Spaces Used by Outsiders**

Collectively, participants described how spaces designated for sport within the NIA (e.g., permitted and private sport spaces) viewed as being used primarily by non-residents. The participants identified permitted spaces as those that required permit (e.g., fees to access) and were owned by municipality and school boards, which included indoor and outdoor spaces, such as courts (e.g., volleyball, basketball), fields (e.g., baseball, soccer), pools (e.g., swimming), and ice rinks (e.g., skating, hockey). It was perceived that priority of the space was given to permit holders (e.g., school teams, community sport clubs and organizations); however, when available, it was used for unstructured sport. When participants were asked how they knew users of permitted spaces were from other neighbourhoods, they often made reference to socio-demographics (e.g., race, social class). For instance, Tommy shared his observations about permit holders:

The only people that we saw get a permit were the white kids from Luton that would come with their parents and then [the facility would] have the actual lights on ... we would end [playing unstructured sport] at like 8:00-8:30pm, and then they would all roll up in their cars and start playing and we'd have to leave obviously.

In this quote, Tommy uses race (“white kids”) and social class (“roll up in their cars”) to highlight those who were in a position to obtain a permit and have access to a well-lit space for organized sport. Because of how participants perceived their own neighbourhoods, white families arriving by car was evidence of ‘not being from the neighbourhood.’ As a result, Tommy and his peers would have to give up this sport space in their neighbourhood for these outsiders, thereby limiting their own sport participation.

Similarly, Lana shared how she engaged in free-skate at the local ice rink; however, the space was often used by non-residents for organized ice hockey:

Even that space [ice rink], you will see people who are not from the community who come in to use that space. Like they're playing hockey. They have leagues, right. Some people, yeah, are from the community, but there are people from outside, I think.

Like Lana, other participants shared how they used the rink for skating; although, few engaged in organized hockey programming, due to the perceived high-costs and lack of interest in/awareness of the sport growing up. As Tommy shared, "My parents weren't familiar with it [ice hockey] just personally, and again, looking back at it now, a lot of us misunderstood how expensive the sport hockey can get. So, I was just not even considering that avenue." Furthermore, Lana's quote also suggests that she felt different from the people from outside the community who come into (her) neighbourhood and use the ice rink for organized sport and more specifically, ice hockey, a traditionally Canadian sport; it is something "they" are playing in their leagues. Therefore, ice hockey arena within the NIA is constructed as a space of privilege, favouring those who have the economic (e.g., money) and cultural (e.g., Canadian) capital to engage in the sport. This finding is similar to the work of Krebs (2012), who argued that ice hockey rinks in Canada are spaces of entitlement and exclusion, which has led to unequal access and feelings of exclusion amongst various marginalized groups.

In addition to permitted spaces, private sport spaces were described as areas that are owned by clubs (e.g., golf, tennis), and often required a membership to use. Users of the golf course were described by participants as "white," "old," "male," "retired," and as having "nice cars" and "nicer clothes." Here, socio-demographics (e.g., age, gender, race and social class) and tangible assets (e.g., nice cars and clothes) are used as identifiers of those who use the space. Furthermore, some were not even aware that the golf course was within the geographic boundaries of the NIA. As Ali shared, "As kids, we'd just look at it as like an outside space. Driving by, I would look at it. I didn't [pause]. For the longest time as a kid, I didn't even know it was a golf course. It was like the signage isn't very good, and we just drove by and saw it was a big space." At first, Ali suggests that the structural design

(e.g., signage, visibility of space) contributes to the inaccessibility of spaces. However, when coupled with negative perceptions of a space being used by certain socio-demographic groups, it is evident that the space is constructed as one of privilege, and is exclusive and inaccessible.

Although accessibility (e.g., cost) was perceived to be a significant barrier to utilizing designated sport spaces for organized sport outside of school, participants described how there were clubs and organizations in the neighbourhood that provided subsidized and free programming, which increased their use of sport spaces for organized sport within the NIAs. Amanda shared how a local coach arranged for her and other local players to receive a subsidy for membership to a local softball club:

Yeah, so she [community coach] made a connection with the Luton league and was like “Hey can I put 1-2 girls per team from the Riverside/Greendale area for \$5 or for free?” so those kids [from other neighbourhoods] were paying \$80-90, we were always put in, like charity.

Although providing subsidies increased Amanda’s access to the team, she was very aware of her social position as an individual of lower social class to her peers. Similarly, Tommy shared how he joined the tennis club through subsidized programming arranged through his school,

[In] Elementary school, one time they [class] went on a trip to use them [tennis club] or something, and they got a little demo and I was like, “Okay, whatever, we’ll sign up” and it was like, I don’t know, \$50 or \$60...that year that we played, we went there every single day just to like take advantage of it...you’d find us there every night and we didn’t even know what we were doing but we just were there getting better.

Tommy’s quote illustrates how addressing economic barriers (e.g., subsidized programming) can provide entry into a space and opportunities to develop sport skills. It also resulted in regular sport participation, as he went to the club every day. However, Tommy dropped out of the program once the subsidized annual membership was up for renewal, due to cost and the lack of social connection with other users of the facility. He commented “I never saw anyone else from Greendale at the tennis club that I knew personally [Researcher: So, who was there?] People from outside. Outside meaning not

Greendale.” For Tommy, being the only participant from Greendale appeared to influence his sport participation and particularly amongst athletes from other neighbourhoods, he did not feel like he belonged. This feeling of isolation could have been exacerbated by the realization that all the other participants were from outside of the neighbourhood.

Moreover, Rebecca shared how she briefly joined the private tennis club, but felt unwelcomed:

The [members] majority were not from my neighbourhood, for the bulk of it. It was mainly people coming from Luton because that tennis club is a paid club, you have to be a registered member and I did not go back after the first day. The coaches were not from the neighbourhood. I guess it was a style thing or maybe I just did not enjoy the sport. That could be it. I definitely did not feel it was welcoming.

Rebecca does not specify what exactly made her feel unwelcome. She felt that this was due to “style” or her lack of enjoyment; however, it is telling that she also assumed that most participants were from the more affluent Luton neighbourhood since the club required a membership fee. Her sense of difference is evident from her observation that the majority of the members were from Luton or not from the neighbourhood, including the coaches. This subsequently led Rebecca to not return and she discontinued participating within this sport space.

In contrast to Tommy’s and Rebecca’s isolating experiences participating in spaces that were primarily dominated by non-residents, Amanda shared how she was able to navigate and construct a sense of belonging within these teams. She explained how her sense of competence and confidence contributed to her development of social connectedness with teammates who were predominantly from other neighbourhoods:

I don’t have trouble making friends with people from outside of the area. I never had any trouble with it. I am very social and also I was good at softball, so by the end of it, the league organizer said I was the best pitcher in the league because I had just gotten good at it. From that

already, people were like “I want her on my team, I like her, she’s good,” so I never had any problems.

Amanda’s interpretation of her experience suggests that talent (e.g., skills) can activate or contribute to feelings of social belonging and acceptance from people outside of the neighbourhood, particularly within the field of sport. Likewise, Schinke, Gauthier, Dubuc, and Crowder (2007) suggested that sport talent could support athletes’ social adaptation within new team environments (e.g., advancement). In other words, if you are skilled enough to be on a team, you are more likely to be accepted, regardless of your differentiating attributes. While Amanda’s talent in sport and her skill with socializing and “making friends with people from outside of the area” may have facilitated her sense of acceptance, that she could enter the space was first and foremost dependent on receiving a subsidized membership.

Indeed, the process of social belonging appears to be more complicated than earning acceptance through one’s talent. For example, Amanda and her friend Halimah, who played on many community-based teams together, shared their experiences participating in a soccer club that was based in the NIA:

Amanda: Remember when we played soccer for [name of sport club]? They play at the [local] field but everyone is from Luton.

Halimah: We were the only people of colour.

Amanda: We were the only people from Riverside...I walk here and they have to drive, because it’s right by our house.

Despite being within walking distance from the field and thus playing in a sport space that is in their neighbourhood, Amanda and Halimah found themselves to be the only people from the NIA and the only people of colour in the soccer club. Like Tommy, Amanda and Halimah use race as a means to identify difference between themselves and teammates from other neighbourhoods, suggesting that few individuals from the NIA utilized permitted spaces for organized sport. This finding highlights how the boundaries of NIAs and movement within them are racialized, suggesting that there is a hierarchy of

race within sporting practices, which reinforce hegemonic normative practices and shape (the lack of) representation within organized sport spaces.

Interestingly, both Amanda and Halimah shared how they would change their demeanors when interacting with peers who lived outside of the NIA.

Amanda: The way that I talk changes when I am with people not from the area. When I am with white people from middle class families, I change my composure. So I have never had a problem speaking with them. You know it to [interrupted]

Halimah: Yeah

Amanda: It comes second nature to me. I don't even notice it until someone tells me.

Halimah: They [team mates] would look at us. We would get the stares but like again, as Amanda said, it's like a switch. I just speak, not in a different way, it just comes out nicer.

Amanda: We have a slang we learned in high school.

Halimah: So, we are a little more upright, but yeah, you get the stares but when me and [Amanda] would play they would be like "Oh eh they *can* play"

Amanda and Halimah indicated that they change the way they speak and carry themselves when interacting with people not from the neighbourhood. They describe this shift as automatic and not even noticeable until someone points it out. Nevertheless, it is evident that the two women were aware of their differences that initiate this shift, as exemplified from "the stares" they would get. This conversation between Halimah and Amanda highlights the negotiation of power that informs their sense of belonging when they are a minority within a sports setting. Both felt the need to perform a particular identity and assimilate to the dominant group in order to be socially accepted on the team, which was mainly comprised of white and middle-class females.

In summary, this theme illuminates the power institutions have on who has access to spaces to engage in sport, which was perceived to be individuals who had the economic and cultural means (e.g., middle-upper class, white) to obtain permits. This reinforces that spaces for sport are raced and classed,

which echoes the work of prominent scholars exploring the dominance of whiteness within sport spaces (e.g., Fusco, 2005; Krebs, 2012; King 2005). This dominance influenced participants' access to sport opportunities and feelings of social inclusion, further reinforcing a discourse of marginalization, which is already constructed by the identification of NIAs.

### **Concerns for Safety: “Get Home Before Dark”**

Due to lack access and feelings of belonging within organized sport programming in designated sport spaces, participants often used these spaces when they were available for unstructured sport, which was mainly in the evenings. However, many participants shared concerns about safety within the neighbourhoods, particularly Riverside in the evening, which shaped their involvement in sport. Parents were perceived to be particularly worried about safety within the NIA, which influenced their support for sport participation. For instance, Matthew shared how his mother was more comfortable with him participating in organized sport: “My mom would ask, ‘Where are you going? Who are you playing with?’ and if you can say this organization is running basketball, yeah, it’s fine.” This example reflects how perceived parental concerns could shape and restrict some participants’ use of spaces for sport within the NIA and suggests that parents were perceived to be more comfortable with spaces that had supervision (e.g., organized sport). However, this preference posed a challenge, as many described the lack of opportunities for organized sport participation within the NIA due to physical (e.g., cost) and social (e.g., exclusion) barriers.

Some participants shared their parent’s concerns with safety. Ali, for example, recounted an experience he had whilst participating in sport within the NIA when he was younger:

They [community centre] did drop-in basketball on Mondays and Wednesdays. I used to come here for a while and then I stopped because one time I was coming back late at night and I kind of got mugged ...so my mom wouldn't let me go there anymore.” For Ali, this shaped his sport experiences later on, as he was mainly engaged in organized sport.

Participants' concern for safety was also perpetuated by the lack of appropriate lighting within non-permitted spaces. Participants from the third focus group shared:

Lana: Why I was saying that the Riverside tennis court feels safer is because all those lights. Weirdos don't hang out around there. You know what I mean?

Researcher: Is there a lot of spaces in Riverside and Greendale where there's light to play sport?

Anjali: Not really. That field above the tennis courts, that's not lit up, is it?

Lana: No.

Anjali: Growing up, you'd hear stories about people getting mugged up there [soccer field]. You know, like [interrupted]

Lana: Shot.

Anjali: Shot or whatever. All of that. Like you know, just people hanging out. So, having it lit up would probably be something that could limit that. Which would make like parents more agreeable.

This discussion demonstrates how participants together constructed some spaces for sport within the NIA as being 'unsafe' by sharing stories they heard "growing up" (e.g., childhood). This suggests that concerns for safety (e.g., anti-social behaviour, crime) within the NIA are shared amongst residents and have been a long-standing concern that has not been addressed by the appropriate institutions (e.g., local agencies/organizations, government). To address safety concerns, some participants suggested that local sport spaces should provide adequate lighting, so residents could feel safe within these spaces and engage in sport for longer hours, such as in the evenings.

Provision of adequate lighting in the evenings was particularly important for participants of Muslim faith because during the month of Ramadan, their availability for sport participation was limited to evenings. Ali explained:

A lot of these kids, especially for the Islamic kids during Ramadan time and stuff. The morning time, they're passed out because they're hungry. Nighttime is when you see all the kids come out and being lively. So, if they have a place to go and play sport at night, like it would just be popping all over the place.

This quote suggests that the provision of spaces for sport in Toronto are based on the assumption that there is a universal way in which individuals and groups live their daily lives, including when they engage in sport. By recognizing the significance of addressing spatial needs of residents within this NIA, it is evident that light within spaces used for sport in the evenings would be beneficial.

Building on the previous theme, participants had limited access to quality and safe spaces that were designated for sport within the NIA. Although cost and social connection influenced organized sport participation, safety was a particular concern for participation in unstructured sport, given the availability of space was mainly in the evenings. This finding is consistent with past work that suggests that safety concerns (e.g., fear of crime, road safety), especially within deprived and racialized neighbourhoods, may act as barriers to engagement in activities, such as sports within public spaces (e.g., Holt et al., 2008; Galankis, 2016; van Ingen et al., 2018). This highlights the importance of people working within institutions understanding and addressing wider social issues and providing an infrastructure that enables residents to safely navigate spaces for sport within their own neighbourhood (Galankis, 2016).

### **Access to Space: “The Field is Always Packed”**

In addition to permitted and private sport spaces, many shared how there were public sport spaces (e.g., turf fields, tennis court) that did not require a permit that were often used by community-based sport organizations for organized activities and residents for unstructured sport. Many participants described these spaces as being of poor quality due to the lack of regular maintenance and/or supervision. As Tommy shared, “The basketball nets in Greendale were never put up, even

though basketball was a popular sport within the neighbourhood” (Figure 1; Picture of basketball nets in Greendale). However, many described using these spaces sport because they were available. For example, David described playing unstructured soccer at a local turf field in Greendale and commented, “It’s not that big. It’s not that good, but it’s better than nothing,” suggesting young people within the NIA make do with substandard sport spaces, due to the hierarchy of participation which favours individuals who are in an economic and social position to access quality sport spaces.



*Figure 1. Picture of basketball nets in Greendale taken by researcher, December 16, 2018*

In light of the cost of permitted spaces and concerns with safety, these spaces were popular amongst children and youth from the neighbourhood, regardless of the quality:

Ali: That [non-permitted turf] field is always packed. You have like all the Afghan kids playing soccer there every day, 24/7. There’s a couple of basketball nets next to it. So, they [Afghan kids] switch around once in a while.

Researcher: Do you feel like you could just show up or [interrupted]

Ali: Oh, no, to be honest, you’d know them.

Tommy: You have to come with friends.

Ali: Or you’d come with a group of people willing to play.

Similar to other public spaces that did not require a permit, this field was used frequently and regularly, especially by a particular group of children who are described as being there every day. When asked about how to access these spaces for unstructured sport, Tommy and Ali both suggest that it is dependent on social networks, specifically being peers with the groups engaging in unstructured sport, in this case, the “Afghan kids.” Interestingly, Amanda also commented on the Afghan boys participating within this soccer space in Riverside, saying that they were “ridiculously good at soccer and they are almost always playing pick-up games there.” When asked if she was interested in participating in the space, she said, “We [her and her friends] would never be confident enough to go ‘Hey can we use the field, can we use half the field?’” Amanda’s perception of this unstructured sport space highlights the further struggles that many female participants described in accessing spaces within the NIA for unstructured sport, as many felt socially excluded from unstructured sport, due to the dominance of males within the space (See Chapter Eight for a critical analysis of gendering of unstructured sport).

Due to the lack of availability of ‘safe’ and quality spaces for sport within the NIA, many participants ventured to sport spaces outside of the community for both organized and unstructured sport. Overall, these spaces were described as well maintained and often provided additional amenities that community spaces lacked (e.g., access to light, bathrooms, etc.). For instance, Matthew described how he played unstructured softball at a baseball diamond outside of the community, as it provided lights in the evenings:

I go play sometimes softball. We play under the lights [Researcher: Is that pick-up or] Yeah, just pick-up. But I forget what the fields called. I think [Greenwich]. But they have lights there on the baseball field. So, we go over there until 11 pm. [Researcher: And who goes there? Like people from here go down there?] We just organize from here and then we drive there. [Researcher: So why do you guys leave the community? Just for the quality?] Because they have the lights there, yeah, because you can’t really play anywhere here.

Like Matthew, other participants left the community to seek sport spaces that better met their needs. In this case, the outside space provided lights that enabled Matthew the flexibility of playing sports in the evening within a quality space, an option that was often not available in public spaces within his own community. Matthew's desire to utilize spaces outside his neighbourhood parallels Galankis' (2016) study, which highlighted how youth within a racialized neighbourhood in Toronto preferred to engage in activities outside their neighbourhood due to social tensions, poor planning decisions, and over-policing.

In summary, this theme demonstrates how when spaces within the NIA were accessible (e.g., available and safe), some participants ceased participation or sought opportunities elsewhere, regardless of the quality, maintenance, and location. As well, this theme highlights the importance of social belonging within spaces, as participants mainly engaged in these activities with peers from the NIA. However, it is acknowledged that spaces were never fully accessible and inclusive. Although public spaces within the NIA were widely used for unstructured sport, this setting was dominated by males, which is consistent with previous work that highlight how unstructured sport is a site where gender norms are constructed and reinforced (Trussell & McTeer, 2007; van Ingen et al., 2018). As a result, female participants' use of public spaces for sport, particularly to engage in unstructured sport within the NIA, was constrained (See Chapter Seven).

### **Claiming of Space: "Signs That Say No Ball Playing"**

Due to the overall lack of physical and social access to spaces for sport, there were various instances where participants adapted spaces within the NIA to meet their needs for sport participation. As David shared:

Under every building, there is a sport going on. Residential buildings. The little green parkish area. They play soccer, cricket. Those are the starting points of most little kids' sport. For example, if a kid is 6-8 years, they are going to start off from there. They start to go to the parks, because at that age, 6-8 years they [parents] don't want to go too far from home.

Similarly, other participants shared how they used spaces around residential areas (e.g., apartment buildings) for sport participation, particularly in childhood, as they were visible by their parents, minimizing their safety concerns. These accounts illustrate how spaces for unstructured sport do not necessarily need to be mapped out or measured; rather, they need to be available, local, and safe. As space around residential buildings were not designed for sport participation, some participants described how they adapted the spaces to mark sport boundaries/scoring targets, such as “light poles,” “flower pots,” and “shoes.” Ironically, Anjali explained, “We have signs that say no ball playing. So, people use that for basketball.” (Figure 2: “No Ball Playing in This Area” sign located on an apartment building in Greendale) While the spaces around their apartment buildings were not intended for sport, the participants’ experiences illustrate the ways in which the participants adapted and reconfigured the space. In doing so, participants were able to exert their resistance to challenges they experience accessing other spaces within neighbourhood (e.g., less safe spaces, exclusion, availability). As well, it demonstrates how participants asserted their agency to adapt spaces to meet their needs for sports participation.



*Figure 2. “No Ball Playing in This Area” sign located on apartment building in Greendale taken by researcher, December 16, 2018.*

Another example of adapting local spaces within the NIA for sport was the parking lot in Riverside. Many described cricket being a sport of interest amongst residents of the NIA, as Imad commented, “Everyone [newcomers] is coming from Pakistan. They play cricket. 95% is cricket.” However, it was evident from participant experiences that spaces available for sport within the community were designed for certain sports; therefore, those interested in playing or practicing cricket were restricted. Imad was a particularly competitive cricket player who played the sport at a high level (e.g., post-secondary school and club). He shared his frustration with the lack of quality spaces to train and play cricket within the NIA:

So, for cricket you need grass, good grass. People dive into stuff. You can scratch your hand and everything. We can't work on that. I would like to work on my field[ing], but I can't work because there is not good grass. It's union [municipality], and if you call the union to fix the grass, they are going to say no. They charge a lot. It's not worth it.

Imad's quote highlights how sport spaces within Toronto urban neighbourhoods have been traditionally designed to meet the needs of the dominant culture by institutions (e.g., schools and government), which are greatly influenced by Canada's colonial past and may not meet the changing needs of communities (e.g., newcomers). As a result, Imad had difficulty finding appropriate sport spaces for cricket in the NIA. Due to the lack of appropriate spaces to play cricket and the lack of limited availability of lit sport spaces in the evenings, cricket was often played on surfaces that were not intended for the sport, such as parking lots, as it was an alternative space that met the minimum requirements to play (e.g., smooth surface, lighting, etc.). As Sarfraz explained:

In the month of Ramadan when opening our fast, we just get the night, where we can eat and stuff. We used to do night tournaments at the parking lot because it has light. A parking lot's light could be used as a resource for us. Parking lot cricket. I also played soccer in the parking lot many times during Ramadan.

This passage illustrates how some participants were creative in adapting spaces that were not designed for sport, to meet their needs for involvement. For participants, the use of the parking lot addressed needs for accessibility and safety, whilst satisfying practical needs of the sport (e.g., smooth surfaces for a cricket ball).

Participants had to adapt existing sport spaces because such spaces have been traditionally designed to meet the needs of the dominant culture by institutions (e.g., schools and government). Cricket, though, is not considered a ‘Canadian’ sport. Historically, cricket has been an imperial game (Wagg, 2005) and thus was introduced to ex-British territories (e.g., Caribbean countries, India and Pakistan) as a means for making a distinction between those who were “civilized and primitive,” by teaching “Englishness to an elite group” (Diawara, 1990, p. 838). As a result, many Commonwealth countries have embraced this sport as part of the national culture. Although cricket was popular amongst British immigrants in Canada within the nineteenth century, its popularity declined over time due to its elitism and the rise in interest in baseball and other American sports (Cooper, 1999; Kaufman & Patterson, 2005). Therefore, the particular resurgence of interest in cricket, particularly within these NIAs, highlights the fluidity of immigration trends, which bring forth differing cultural needs and interests relating to sport participation, trends that until recently have not been considered when designing and implementing community-based sport programming and spaces.

This theme demonstrates how participants resisted and exercised their agency by modifying spaces not designed for sport. In doing so, they were able to participate in sport, and challenge exclusionary practices within sport (Lareau 2002; Thangaraj, 2015). Although these alternative uses of space can be viewed as still being relegated to a ‘marginalized’ space, these acts can also be interpreted as a ‘claiming’ of space where participants exerted subjectivity, agency, and power (Teelucksingh, 2006). For many, the use of these and other spaces for unstructured sport proved influential to their take-up and development in sport, as many used it as a stepping-stone to organized sport (particularly in school; see Chapter Five for an in-depth analysis).

### **Meeting (Some) of the Needs of the Community: “We Have a Cricket Field”**

Recognizing the need to develop sport spaces that meet the needs of the residents, a sport organization was established in recent years within the community to provide sport programming for children and youth within the two NIAs. The organization emerged through an eco-project to implement an irrigation system within the local middle school’s outdoor space. This initiative led to the development of a cricket field at the school, based on community interest in the sport, and the lack of cricket fields across Toronto. The cricket space was described as having lighting, batting cages, a sound system and other equipment, which participants described as providing a “professional feeling.” In addition, Imad shared how he was pleased with the cricket field, which enables him to work on his skills:

For cricket, you need skills, like the ball should travel, so here at [community organization], the [cricket] ball travels. Right? Small grass and it’s hard. The ground is hard. Other grounds, the municipal law says that you can’t cut the grass below some certain centimeters but at [community organization] there is no law because it is [school] property so the ball travels here. So that’s the biggest difference. Here, the pitch is good. Some places, the ball stays low and the environment does matter, so there is a big difference.

Imad’s feedback on the cricket space demonstrates how appropriate spaces for sport (e.g., “small grass”) enable him to work on his cricket skills within his neighbourhood, which contributed to his continued participation and development. This further highlights the importance of providing spaces that meet the needs of residents’ interests in sport.

Through the years, the sport organization expanded to include camps, multisport and arts programming; all of which is provided at the middle school grounds. As well, the organization has priority over permitted sport spaces (e.g., gymnasium, outdoor basketball court, cricket field), outside of school hours. Participants described how the organization had a significant impact on sport involvement within the neighbourhood. As David shared,

The fields at [middle school] before were rarely being put to use after school hours and now that we have this field, so many leagues play here and people just come here to play for fun, unstructured sports. Our multisport court is being used, our batting cage is being put to good use; people just come to use the track as well.

Clearly, as demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Alexandris, & Carroll, 1997; Davison, & Lawson, 2006; Humpel et al., 2002; Santos et al., 2005) an accessible, well-lit, high quality sport space is associated with increased sport participation.

Nonetheless, not all participants utilized the facility and some raised concerns about its accessibility. Some commented how the resources were not evenly distributed amongst the sport options available through the organization, suggesting that the investment in cricket was considerably more than the multisport program. Ali was never involved in the community program as a participant, and shared his concerns that the program may exclude people due to its particular focus on cricket:

I just hope that the people running [organization] right now don't kind of take over and make that a cricket exclusive space. Because it's a really good space. Just to isolate it and make it into a cricket space will be a little bit selfish.

Thus, while an organization may appear to be providing access to sport programming, which in turn increases participation in sport within the community, perceptions of exclusion and unequal distribution of resources/services are still imminent. This highlights the challenges of being a fully inclusive space that meets the needs of a wide group of individuals and groups.

Again, this highlights the crucial role institutions have to foster accessible and inclusive sport spaces and places by reducing physical and social barriers and providing programs and facilities (Rac, 2014). Furthermore, this theme challenges the need for spaces that are culturally relevant to the residents on participation, as the legacy of colonialism have traditionally shaped sport spaces in Toronto and perhaps Canada. As this theme demonstrates, the provision of a cricket facility within these NIAs had an impact on participation and performance on some participants, given the interest in

the sport amongst some residents. This highlights the challenges and importance of addressing all needs of access and inclusion with a neighbourhood.

### **Conclusion**

This research examined how space influenced the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young people living in Toronto NIAs. Participants took us on a journey, through space and time, sharing perceptions and experiences of spaces that shaped their sport participation and development. Drawing from EST, PCF and ST, this paper critically examined the complex and intersecting factors influencing the use of spaces for sport, revealing experiences of belonging, exclusion, and resistance.

This study highlights how proximal processes such as socio-demographics (e.g., class, gender, race), social support (e.g., peers, coaches), and sport settings/space (i.e., provision of sport space infrastructure such as cost, availability, quality, safety) influenced participants' access and social inclusion within spaces used for sport inside the NIA. Specifically, participants shared how they had limited access to designated, quality and safe spaces for sport due to the cost and lack of connection with the sport setting (e.g., activity, participants). These findings are congruent with sport development literature that recognizes that social support and sport settings are key elements that contribute to positive youth development experiences in sport (e.g., PAF, Côté et al., 2014, 2016).

In addition to proximal processes influencing the use of spaces for sport within NIAs, this study demonstrates how broader social processes such as culture (e.g., sport, nationalism, ethnic), institutions (e.g., government), normative practices (e.g., hierarchical structures), and wider social issues (e.g., anti-social behaviour, crime,) shaped and were shaped by these proximal processes. It is argued that racial superiority (whiteness) and cultural hegemony (middle-upper class Canadians) framed participants' access and social inclusion within designated, quality, safe spaces for sport within the NIAs, which parallels the work of prominent scholars exploring whiteness in sport (e.g., Fusco, 2005; Krebs, 2012; King 2005). When spaces were available and perceived as safe, it continued to be a site of exclusion, as

females felt less comfortable accessing spaces for unstructured sport. These experiences of exclusion within spaces for sport within the NIA highlight how institutions (e.g., municipality), which are responsible for supporting ‘stronger neighbourhoods’, continue to be influenced by colonial values and structures, which favour hegemonic normative practices, at the expense of social development. As a result, children and youth within NIAs are limited with their opportunities for sport participation within their neighbourhoods. This process contributes and reinforces the social and structural construction of NIAs, which is perceived as marginalized and ‘problematic’, based on physical boundaries, socio-demographics and measured social outcomes. As well, it highlights that this construction is often beyond an individual’s control.

Some institutions addressed challenges of access with subsidized programming for residents of NIAs and the development of spaces that met (some) community needs and interests, which for some, provided more opportunities to participate in sport within the NIA. However, increased access did not alleviate some participants’ experiences of social exclusion and ‘othering’ within these sport settings. For some, feelings of exclusion led to withdrawal, whilst others felt the need to socially assimilate to the dominant group. As well, others left the NIA to seek other accessible and inclusive sport spaces, while others adapted existing non-sport spaces within the community. This claiming of space highlights how children and youth within NIAs are invested in sport participation and development, and therefore, were resourceful in seeking and developing spaces that met their needs for participation. However, given the benefits gained from sport participation and development, children and youth should have access and feel socially included within their own neighbourhood.

In conclusion, this paper presents the interconnection between proximal and distal processes, which influenced physical access and social inclusion within spaces used for sport within the NIA. Frameworks such as the PAF (Côté et al., 2014; Côté et al., 2016), which provide guidance on variables necessary for the design and delivery of programming that contributes to youth involvement and development through sport, may want consider incorporating a more socio-ecological and critical

approach to providing accessible and socially inclusive environments to foster PYD outcomes (e.g., incorporating all eight components of optimal sport environments as recommended by the NRCIM, 2002).

Although increasing access and awareness to sport opportunities and spaces would be beneficial, given the various benefits gained from participation, wider social processes framing NIAs must be prioritized by institutions (i.e., increasing economic opportunities, physical surroundings, and social development). Future research may want to examine the impact of *TSNS 2020* on engagement in civic activities, such as sport within NIAs, given the physical, psychological, and social benefits of sport participation (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012; Walseth 2006; Weiss, 2001).

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## **Chapter Eight:**

### **“It’s an Imaginary Line that Just Exists”: The Gendering of Unstructured Sport in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

This paper will be submitted to a journal addressing sport and social issues (e.g., Exercise Journal of Sport and Social Issues) as: Wolman, L., Nakamura, Y., & Fraser-Thomas, J., (2019). “It’s an Imaginary Line that Just Exists”: The Gendering of Unstructured Sport in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas

### Abstract

Unstructured sports provide a range of benefits such as the development of physical, social and leadership skills (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, Davids, Renshaw, & Button, 2013; Coutinho, Mesquita, Davids, Fonseca, & Côté, 2016). As well, it provides a means for access to sport participation, particularly for those with limited resources, and a means to challenge exclusionary practices within sport (Lareau 2002; Thangaraj, 2015). Although limited in scope, previous research has suggested that gender appears to be the primary determinant of unstructured sport participation (e.g. Trussell & McTeer, 2007), as hegemonic masculine discourses continue to be practiced in sport, discourses which favour white, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Messner, 2002). This research explored the lived experience of sport participation amongst young people living in two Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). Although unstructured sport provided access to sport participation and development, as individuals reflected on their journeys thus far, their interpretation of these experiences was mediated by hegemonic masculine discourses, which facilitated or hindered their participation. The study included semi-structured interviews (n=16) and focus groups (n=27). Drawing on Messner's (2000) tri-level analysis of gender, this paper illustrates how: (a) males are gatekeepers to unstructured sport; (b) gender norms are reproduced outside of sports; and (c) the reinforcement gender norms by institutions influence participation within unstructured sport settings.

*Keywords: unstructured sport, gender norms, sport participation, hegemonic masculinity*

## **“It’s an Imaginary Line that Just Exists”: The Gendering of Unstructured Sport in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas**

There are various sport development processes, pathways, and outcomes that contribute to continued sport participation, enhanced performance, and personal development (Côté, Strachan, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007); therefore, it is important that researchers continue to understand factors contributing to athlete entrance, retention, and advancement in sport (Green, 2005). Unstructured sports (e.g., street-games) are participant-led activities that provide a range of benefits such as enjoyment, skills development, and socialization and leadership skills (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, Davids, Renshaw, & Button, 2013; Coutinho, Mesquita, Davids, Fonseca, & Côté, 2016). Unstructured sport provides access to sport involvement, particularly for those with limited resources, and a means to challenge exclusionary practices within sport (Lareau 2002; Thangaraj, 2015). Nonetheless, gender appears to be the primary determinant of unstructured sport participation (e.g. Trussell & McTeer, 2007), as hegemonic masculine discourses continue to be practiced in sport, discourses which favour white, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Messner, 2002). This is reflected in the lower participation rates amongst women and girls compared to their male counterparts due to lack of social support, access, and opportunities, females in leadership positions, limited media coverage of female sport, social stigma, and challenges associated with life (e.g., careers, motherhood) (CAAWS, 2012a, 2016; Department of Canadian Heritage, 2010; Donnelly, 2016; Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005; Frisby and Millar, 2002). Furthermore, challenges for sport participation amongst females are often further compounded for other disadvantaged groups (e.g., LGBTQ2+, disability, ethnic minorities, newcomers, Indigenous communities, and so on; Canadian Heritage, 2010), highlighting the importance of exploring intersectionality and sport participation, with the purpose of creating more inclusive sport environments and practices.

This research explored the lived experience of sport participation amongst young people living in two Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), which have higher rates of low-income,

unemployment, newcomer settlement, visible minorities, use of social support, and poor housing standards, compared with the city average (City of Toronto, 2014). Although unstructured sport provided access to sport participation and development, as individuals reflected on their journeys thus far, their interpretation of participation within activity was influenced by hegemonic masculine practices. As such, this research was guided by Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis of gender and postcolonial feminism (PCF) to critically examine how gender boundaries are activated and enforced within and outside of sport settings, which influenced participants' unstructured sport participation. This paper is part of a larger research project exploring lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults in Toronto NIAs.

### **Unstructured Sport Participation**

The *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014) describes processes, pathways, and outcomes associated with overall sport participation and performance throughout childhood and adolescence. Particularly during early childhood (e.g., sampling years, ages 6-13 years), deliberate play activities, which are “intrinsically motivating, provide immediate gratification, and are specifically designed to maximize enjoyment” (Berry, Abernethy, & Côté, 2008, p. 688) have been shown to influence and enhance long-term sport motivation and performance (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002). Coutinho and colleagues (2016) suggested that both organized and unstructured sport could be forms of deliberate-play activities. Organized activities (also known as structured sport) focused on deliberate-play are said to include practice activities that are focused on enjoyment, where athletes are engaging in activities that may lead to implicit learning (Maxwell, Masters, & Eves, 2000). In contrast, unstructured sport (i.e., playing hockey in the streets with peers) is a type of deliberate play activity that is informal, participant-led, often spontaneously created, and has a high degree of variability compared with organized activities, enabling participants to invent, adapt, and negotiate rules, which can facilitate improved skills and performance (e.g., motor learning), along with socialization, leadership, and

organizational skills (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016). Although participation in unstructured sport may provide specific development benefits, Coutinho and colleagues (2016) highlighted how this activity has been understudied within the field of sport psychology. For example, it cannot be assumed that unstructured sport participation is experienced and utilized in the same way by all, or that it is free of history or the impact of social and political forces; therefore, a more careful examination of how unstructured sport and sport, in general, are conceived and experienced is needed.

### **Values of Western Sport**

First, the benefits of deliberate play like unstructured sport are often referenced in relation to its impact on long-term sport participation and performance in organized sport (e.g., DMSP; Côté, 1999, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), without consideration for what we mean by sport and organized/structured sport. We need to examine how Western sport has been constructed and is now valued. For instance, in Canada, there is a greater focus on high-performance sport and the development of elite athletes at the expense of investing in broad-based participation (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Livingston, Tirone, Smith, & Miller, 2008; Schimank, 2005; Harvey, 2013). Thibault and Harvey (2013), argued that although government funding for sport has increased, overall participation in organized sports continues to be on the decline, suggesting that the funding has mainly been used to support high performance sport, which includes investing in elite athletes and coaches, and organizing/hosting international games. This emphasis on achievement within organized sport likely has had an impact on broad-based sport participation. For example, there has been an increase in organized sport programs for young children over the last few decades (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Sell, 2004), which may be associated with the desire to equip young children with quality early learning experiences (Stirrup, Duncombe, & Sandford, 2015), as well parents' eagerness to provide their children with a 'head start' in sport performance through early specialization (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993; Wiersma, 2000).

## **Hegemonic Normative Practices**

Furthermore, scholars have argued that organized sport in Canada has been shaped by the process of colonization, and therefore, reproduces and reinforces hegemonic normative practices, which favour white, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, Messner, 2002; Schimank, 2005). Kidd (2013) provides a historical overview of the development of modern sport in Canada, suggesting there was a shift from folk-games to the emergence of organized sport (e.g., formation of sport clubs and institutions, standardization of rules and regulations) in the nineteenth century, to support middle- and upper-class young males to have successful careers in “business, government, colonial administration and the military by instilling physical and mental toughness. Obedience to authority and loyalty to the ‘team’” (p. 555). As a result, opportunities for participation were not equally distributed amongst varying groups. Kidd argues that females were often discouraged from participating, to preserve the masculinization of males. In addition, females were denied access to sport facilities and programs, and instead encouraged to engage in sports which “enhance femininity” (p. 556) such as swimming, tennis, and gymnastics. Krebs (2012) argued that hockey in Canada favours white males through imposing colonial values that reinforce hegemonic normative practices. He contends that the sport is a representation of “entitlement, exclusion and exception,” (p. 96) and a cultural center for white Canadian men, arguing that hockey is in fact both gendered and racialized. For example, he suggests females are not provided with the same opportunities in hockey (e.g., reasonable rink times) and although minority groups do engage in hockey, they often emulate the bodies of white male hockey players, which highlights the lack of diversity represented in Canadian sport.

## **Gender Norms in Sport**

Many scholars have highlighted that sport are social sites where gender norms continue to be reinforced (Duncan, 1996; Massey, 1996; McDowell & Sharpe, 1997; Rendell, Penner, & Borden, 2000; Vertinsky, 2004; Wigley, 1992). It is widely published that sport participation rates amongst

women and girls are lower than their male counterparts due to lack of social support (e.g., parents and peers), access and opportunities (e.g., programming, facilities, safety concerns), role models (e.g., limited women in leadership positions, lack of media coverage of female sport), social stigma (e.g., the sexualisation and objectification female bodies, dominance of masculinity in sport, assumptions of women's interest and skills), and life transitions (e.g., prioritizing other responsibilities and interests) (CAAWS, 2012a, 2016; Department of Canadian Heritage, 2010; Donnelly, 2016; Trussell & McTeer, 2007; Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005; Frisby and Millar, 2002). Messner (1992) describes sport as a “masculine institution” (p.159), where there is an unequal distribution of power, prestige, and resources between genders, which is reproduced and reinforced through social interactions (e.g., peers), institutions (e.g., sex segregation of teams), and culture (e.g., media, professional athletes). It is a space where hegemonic masculinity operates, which Connell (1995) defines as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (p. 77). Within sport, we can see this gender configuration operate in scheduling, for example, where females are provided considerably less favorable ice rink times to participate in hockey, compared to males (Krebs, 2012). Such practices reinforce the higher status of men and sporting masculinity.

Given these structural and social barriers that are often associated with organized sport, for some individuals and groups, unstructured sport activities provide a means for access to sport involvement. Indeed, Lareau (2002) examined the effects of social class on children's participation in organized and informal leisure activities and highlighted that children from lower SES families were more likely to participate in unstructured sport activities due to limited financial resources compared with middle-class families, who were more likely to enroll their children in organized activities. Furthermore, scholars such as Thangaraj (2015) describe how unstructured basketball provided a means for South Asian Americans males to develop basketball skills, an opportunity to socialize with

co-ethnic peers, and challenge normative practices (e.g., race, class, masculinity and citizenship).

Nevertheless, while unstructured sport may offer a way to overcome financial barriers to sport, and even some exclusionary practices, hegemonic masculinity still operates as an organizing principle for girls' and boys' unstructured participation. Trussell and McTeer's (2007) study indicated that gender was the strongest predictor for unstructured sport participation; citing young males were more likely to engage in these activities compared with girls. The study suggested that gender stereotypes that are learned and reproduced within the family unit, likely encouraged male sport participation compared with females. However, a limitation of the study is that it was quantitative in methodology; therefore, it did not allow for greater understanding about participant experiences or meaning, such as how factors influencing participation differed between genders. Thus, while gender has been recognized as a significant marker of unstructured sport participation, there is risk in oversimplifying, as factors influencing participation may differ depending on varying and intersecting socio-demographic markers (Kalman-Lamb & Abdel-Shehid, 2017; Thangaraj, 2015). It is recognized that overall sport participation amongst females are often further compounded for other disadvantaged groups (e.g., LGBTQ, disability, ethnic minorities, newcomers, Indigenous communities, etc.; Department of Canadian Heritage, 2010). For example, South Asian American women are often discouraged and excluded from unstructured sport, due to gender, ethnic, and religious based stereotypes and when women do participate, it is often gender-segregated (Thangaraj, 2015). The Institute for Canadian Citizenship (2014) recognized that gender plays a role in immigrant parents' support for sport participation in that some sports may be deemed acceptable or inappropriate for their daughters, a differentiation which may not reflect the sports played by the 'dominant' culture (e.g., ice hockey). Therefore, further research is needed to examine the complex personal, social, and structural elements that influence unstructured sport involvement, using an approach that takes gender and its intersections with other factors, into account.

## **Rationale and Purpose**

Participation in sport, particularly during childhood and adolescence is associated with various physical, psychological, and social benefits (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), therefore it is crucial that we, as researchers, have a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms. This research explored the lived experience of sport participation amongst young people living in Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs), which have higher rates of low-income, unemployment, newcomer settlement, visible minorities, use of social support, and poor housing standards, compared with the city average (City of Toronto, 2014). Although unstructured sport provided access to sport participation and development, as individuals reflected on their journeys thus far, their interpretation of these experiences was mediated by hegemonic masculine discourses, which facilitated or hindered their participation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research utilized a socio-ecological approach and drew from postcolonial feminism (PCF) to critically examine the proximal (e.g., personal characteristics, social support, sport settings) and distal factors (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems) influencing participants' sport journeys. Utilizing a socio-ecological approach is beneficial to understanding sport journeys, as it helps identify *what* influences sport participation. This research draws upon Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis of gender, as it encourages the exploration of specific socio-ecological processes that activate and enforce gender boundaries within sport settings and broader social systems, which in-turn influenced sport participation. This tri-level analysis includes interactional, cultural, and structural levels. Messner suggested that these levels "are simultaneously and mutually intertwined processes, none of which supersedes the others" (p. 767), and therefore, should not be seen as a linear process. The interactional level refers to how individuals perform gender, whereas the cultural level (e.g., symbols) can reinforce and further perpetuate differences between individuals and groups. Lastly, the structural level examines how gender norms are reproduced and reinforced within institutions.

Furthermore, postcolonial feminism allows one to explore contextual conditions (e.g., proximal and distal factors) more critically. PCF pays attention to power by exposing inequities related to an individual's social position (e.g., gender, race, and class) resulting from the process of colonization and post-colonization (Racine, 2003). PCF acknowledges that colonial and imperial relations continue to have a major influence on social, economic, and political structures (Mills, 1998). This approach is particularly important within the Canadian context, given how sport and other social and institutional systems (e.g., immigration settlement, sport delivery systems) are based on British and French colonial values and structures that favour white, Anglophone men, and give rise to exclusionary practices within sport (Field, 2012; Krebs, 2012; Simpson, James, & Mack, 2011). To apply PCF then, as Racine (2003) puts it, is to connect contemporary phenomena like immigration, health, and sport in this study with “new colonial ideologies” (Racine, 2003, p. 96). In the case of sport, which is inextricably tied to an idea of a ‘Canadian national culture’ that centres around Anglo-Canadian values and whiteness, studying sport from a PCF lens highlights how ‘Other’ cultures (e.g., racialized immigrants) are positioned and framed as secondary or marginalized (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2015; Coleman, 2006; James, 2010, Mackey, 2002).

### **Research Methods**

Guided by the theoretical framework, this research draws on the lived experience, as it an effective method for exploring how people live through and respond to personal experiences, which includes exploring various aspects of a person's life and identity, even those not directly connected to the research question (Boylorn, 2008). As well, this focus on lived experience assumes that there is no definite reality; rather, knowledge is socially constructed, imperfect, and subjective (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, this approach can provide valuable insight into how the participants see themselves within a place or situation (Creswell, 2013), or as in the case of this research study that examines sport participation within a geographic area, the individual and collective experience of youth and young adults living in NIAs. Furthermore, this method was selected because it can provide a localized view

and effective way to understand and address the experiences of marginalized, non-Western cultural groups (who have traditionally been silenced) (Swadener & Mutua 2008, Huss 2009).

As power imbalances often exist between the researcher and participants, this research employed the principles of community-based research (CBR) to encourage openness, trust, collaboration, and reciprocity between the researcher and participant (Cahill, 2007; Conrad & Campbell, 2008; Cutworth, 2013; DeLemos, 2006). The CBR principles employed included undertaking the study in partnership with the communities, drawing on multiple sources of knowledge across disciplinary lines, and ensuring that the research was reciprocal and mutually beneficial (Holland, 2005). For example, prior to and throughout the study, a significant amount of time was spent meeting with local leaders to build trust and to gain valuable insight about the community, which provided a deeper understanding of the neighbourhoods, such as how sport spaces are used, ways of living and the issues facing the community.

### **Context and Participants**

Two NIAs were selected for the study (See Appendix E: Table 1 for summary of demographics for both neighbourhoods), based on their demographic characteristics (e.g., low-income, unemployment, newcomer settlement, visible minorities and use of social support, and poor housing standards) and use of shared services (e.g. schools and library, community centre). Furthermore, various stakeholders, including participants, suggested residents viewed the two neighbourhoods as one community. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling (i.e., engagement with community sport clubs, local organizations, and municipal government departments), followed by snowball sampling (i.e., recommended by participants). Study participants were youth and young adults who were a) residents of two selected NIAs, (b) between the ages of 16-25 years old, and (c) participate in sport. "Participate in sport" was intentionally kept vague to include participants who may not have been playing sport at the time of the study (See Appendix E: Table 2 for participant demographics).

## Data Collection

To understand the lived experience of sport participation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 participants (n=8 males, n=8 females) to gain an understanding of participants' sport journeys and the factors that influenced participation. Most interviews took place face-to-face within the community of study (e.g., park, library and community centre); however, some were conducted via telephone, by request of the participant. Broad open-ended questions were used to guide the interview, to gain a general understanding of participants' views and experiences of sport and probes were initiated as a means for follow-up (e.g., providing clarification of experience). Participants were asked to imagine that their life was like a storybook, and that each chapter was a stage in their life (e.g. childhood, youth, young adulthood), which encouraged them to provide a chronological account of their life and experiences in sport. This included insight into their family life, upbringing and relationships, and for some, settlement in Canada. As there may be limitations in providing a retrospective account of a memory, participants were also asked to share sporting moments, and motivations and conditions for participation, to provide further context to their experience.

Additionally, five focus groups were conducted with 27 participants (n = 19 males, n = 8 females) to examine how unstructured sport spaces are constructed, understood, and experienced by the participants. Recognizing that sport spaces are a site of social processes, tensions, contradictions and social inequalities (van Ingen, 2003), the interview-guide drew upon Lefebvre's (1991) *The Production of (Social) Space*, as it is an effective approach for exploring how space is socially constructed, produced, and maintained (van Ingen, 2003). His framework identifies three interconnected forms of social space: spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and spaces of representation (lived space). Participants were provided with geographic maps of the communities of study and were asked to place a pin on spaces they utilized for sport. A semi-structured interview guide was then used to guide the discussions on how spaces were used and perceived for sport participation

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in English; interviews were digitally recorded. As well, this research adhered to regulations and policies set out under institutional ethics. Thus, all participants signed an Informed Consent Form, which detailed anticipated risks, confidentiality, and procedures for asking questions or withdrawing from the study.

### **Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews and focus groups, which is a process of identifying, examining and drawing common themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim, and NVivo 11.4.0 (QSR International Pty. Ltd) software was used to analyze the data. Transcriptions were then read and re-read for familiarity. Participants of the semi-structured interviews were sent their transcripts by email and encouraged to review the document and provide comments on emerging themes. Second, transcripts were further re-read, and an inductive approach was employed to develop initial coding. Inductive analysis is a bottom-up approach, which is data driven, reducing the risk of researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, initial codes included “cultural norms” “gender”, “peers” and “parents.” These codes were then categorized and developed into themes such as “gendering of unstructured sport.” As well, analytical memos were completed, noting down ideas, patterns and connections of interest. Third, key words and concepts grouped together to form sub-themes. Fourth (where applicable), sub-themes were combined to develop themes that addressed the primary objective of the study.

Following the inductive analysis, a deductive analysis was used, which is a top-down approach, which is driven by the theoretical framework, providing a more detailed analysis for some aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research takes a blended theory approach, drawing on relevant work in both sport psychology and sociology. As unstructured sport was a significant theme that emerged during the inductive analysis process as influencing sport journeys, this experience was explored more in depth by examining how this activity has been framed within sport psychology literature (e.g., Adler & Adler 1994; Chow et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016). Furthermore, PCF and

Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis was used to critically explore socio-ecological processes influencing unstructured sport participation, such as quality relationships and institutional processes.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, a multilayered bracketing process was adopted to assist in balancing tensions and reduce the risk of the researcher imposing their own values, opinions and experiences on the research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflexive journals and analytic memos were utilized throughout the research process, which assisted in recognizing emerging themes early in the research process, catching thoughts, and making connections and comparisons between the interviews. Member checking was employed, as a "way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92). As well, participants provided pseudonyms, which are used in the paper. It is acknowledged that this does not alleviate the issue of stereotyping; however, participants were able to exercise their agency by deciding the name to represent them.

Collectively, the methodological approaches utilized for this study were centered around conducting research in partnership with participants, rather than on them. One of the key findings from analysis was the impact of unstructured sport on overall participation. However, through a rigorous analysis process, it was evident that the lived experience of unstructured sport differed greatly amongst different socio-demographic groups of participants. Therefore, the intention of this paper is to critically unpack these experiences, drawing from the theoretical framework to understand the factors influencing participation.

## **Results**

Findings from this study suggest that unstructured sport served an important role in providing an accessible pathway to participation for many children and youth within NIAs. However, when examining the intersection of gender, involvement in unstructured sport varied greatly. As such, these key findings are examined critically and in greater depth.

### **Influence of Unstructured Sport on Overall Sport Participation**

Table 3 provides a summary of interview participant sport journeys (See Appendix E). Eleven of the 16 participants initiated their overall sport involvement through unstructured sport, which was fostered through the encouragement of peers and siblings. For many, unstructured sport increased access to sport participation, providing participants with opportunities to develop competence in sport in a supportive learning environment. These findings are consistent with literature that suggests that deliberate-play environments (e.g., unstructured sport) can facilitate physical, social, and leadership skills (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016), which can contribute to continued sport participation and performance in later years (e.g., DSMP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016). Furthermore, most participants shared how they began organized sport in late childhood/youth, due to differing sport environments in their country of origin, the lack of awareness and accessibility of sport programming within the NIA, limited parental involvement, and the late start of sport opportunities in school. However, participation in unstructured sport, particularly in childhood, acted as a stepping-stone to organized sport involvement. This finding suggests that unstructured sport can provide a pathway to sport participation, particularly for communities with limited resources (e.g., time, money) and involvement from parents (e.g., lack of interest, awareness of programs) (Lareau, 2002). However, when examining the intersection of gender, involvement in unstructured sport varied greatly, as males (n=8) participated considerably more in unstructured sport compared with female participants (n=3). Therefore, the following section critically examines how gender boundaries are activated and enforced, particularly within unstructured sport settings, leading to an imbalance of sport opportunities provided particularly to females living within these NIAs.

### **Gendering of Unstructured Sport Participation**

This research argues that the lived experience of unstructured sport participation was influenced by hegemonic masculine discourses, which are often present within sport settings and the wider society (e.g., Duncan, 1996; Massey, 1996; McDowell & Sharpe, 1997; Rendell, Penner, & Borden, 2000;

Vertinsky, 2004; Wigley, 1992). Drawing on Messner's (2000) tri-level analysis of gender this section illustrates how: (a) males are gatekeepers; (b) gender norms are reproduced outside of sports; and (c) the reinforcement of gender norms by institutions influence participation within unstructured sport settings.

**Males are gatekeepers.** Messner (2000) describes how active agents construct the 'performance' of gender (e.g., participants and non-participants of unstructured sport). Given that unstructured sport spaces are constructed social sites, and that unstructured sport is participant-led (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016), the governance of inclusion (and exclusion) is left to the discretion of the participants themselves. Therefore, this paper argues that interactions between participants and non-participants framed the boundaries of unstructured sport participation in NIAs, where males were viewed as gatekeepers, given their dominance in the setting and the lack of participation amongst females.

Firstly, male participants generally described participating in unstructured sport with other male peers. None of the males shared experiences where they questioned or disputed females' participation in unstructured sport; however, it appeared that they viewed it as 'normal' to participate in activities with mainly other males. As Mustafa described, "If you come to the soccer field, there are no girls...if you come to the basketball court, there were no girls...that's why I just played with guys." Based on Mustafa's comment, it seems that the girls simply needed to show up to play, and he would have played soccer or basketball with them. Missing from his statement is the recognition that gatekeeping occurs within unstructured sport in subtle ways, therefore, the passivity of inclusion (i.e., just show up) suggests gender norms are part of the hegemonic discourse that are most often assumed and accepted rather than something resistant or challenged.

For some female participants, this hegemonic masculine norm was viewed as being very challenging to dispute. As Rebecca put it, "it's a gender thing, an imaginary line that just exists." Although some females had an interest in unstructured sport, many felt intimidated by males to pursue

participation. For example, Dahlia, who began participating in organized sport in grade five when she joined an intramural volleyball team at school, shared how during school breaks (e.g., recess), she had a particular interest in participating in unstructured sport. However, she felt intimidated by male peers. She explained:

A lot of the time like you wanted to play soccer, it's usually like the same group of ten boys just on that whole patch between the two goal posts, and they're [males] just there...so whenever you wanted to even go up, first of all you felt like really bad just asking, "Hey, can I join" because they would have just looked at you and been like, "No".

This quote suggests that there is a hierarchy within unstructured sport, which is based on those who are perceived to use it most often, which many described as males. They may be viewed as having an unquestioned claim to a sport space, like the "...whole patch between the goal posts." Although Dahlia never shared any experiences where male peers declined her request to participate, it is clear that she perceived the "ten boys" as the gatekeepers for the space and assumed rejection would be the outcome, which consequently made her feel apprehensive for even asking to join.

As such, participants felt they needed to be 'invited' or 'granted' permission to enter unstructured sport spaces when they were not peers with the dominant group engaging in unstructured sport. For example, in grade 8, Dahlia described how a male peer brought in a Frisbee to school and they began tossing it around during classroom breaks (e.g., recess, lunch), and over time, other peers began to join them, so they were able to play unstructured ultimate frisbee games. She shared:

Well, I don't think it was really anyone ever asking [to play unstructured sport]. I just think I just saw it [the Frisbee] and I was like "Hey, what's that?...and he's like, "Oh, yeah, I won this from this thing and I was wondering if like people want to toss it" and I was like, okay, yeah, I'll come. So, I went and some of the other people from my class went. I think a bunch of our class was like just standing around doing nothing, and they like kind of saw us doing it and so a couple of days later, they like started joining in too.

Although this peer was perceived to be more inclusive of who joined him in unstructured sport, again, this ‘invitation’ to play was initiated by a male, which reinforces male dominance within this setting. Regardless, the opportunity for participation had a significant role in Dahlia’s sport journey, as it acted as a springboard for pursuing involvement in competitive organized sport, both in high school and community club sport.

In contrast, some females sought and demanded opportunities for unstructured sport, which was generally facilitated through having a male dominant peer group. Both Amanda and Sophia described having more male friends growing up, which they perceived to provide them with more opportunities to participate in unstructured sport. Amanda described how she developed friendships with males in physical education class, sharing “they [male peers] were mainly my friends from class...we had done stuff in gym class, and they already knew that I was sporty. So, they didn’t hesitate to like join me in.” As a result, she felt comfortable approaching male peers to participate in unstructured sport during school breaks (e.g., recess). Amanda shared:

A lot of people would refer to me like as a tomboy just because I was always engaged in a sport of some kind...So most of the sports that I’d been doing like would be playing like at recess with my friends. Mainly guys because the girls didn’t seem to participate in sports as competitively...I was very close friends with a lot of guys growing up, just because I played sports extensively with all of them.

Whereas Amanda’s sport participation was facilitated by and also helped foster a network of male friends and fellow sport participants, Sophia began her sport journey through participating in unstructured sport with her brother:

Me and my brother used to go downstairs and just you know kick a soccer ball, or a tennis racket, or basketball, or go somewhere play. That’s how it [sport involvement] really started for me, having that person there with me and playing against them, and being really like competitive even though it was a friendly game.

This quote highlights that, in addition to peers, siblings can influence participation in unstructured sport. Although the role of siblings within unstructured sport has been understudied, research has shown that siblings contribute positive experiences in sport, overall, which includes role modelling (Coleman, Cox, & Roker, 2008) and skill development (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2008). For Sophia, playing sports with her brother led to her involvement in unstructured activities with male peers at school. She recalled:

I was really like one of the girls who always used to play with the guys you know, because the girls would be like sitting and talking I'd be playing soccer or playing tag, or some sort of sport...so it really pushed me towards sports, actually making me kind of one the top players in my school...I was always a tomboy so I really didn't enjoy hanging out with the girls that much because what they wanted to do, I didn't want to do. It just so happened that the boys did what I wanted to do...I have always been the social type, so I have never had an issue going up to them [male peers] and saying "Can I play?" or involving myself in it, if I could.

While Sophia states that she did not find it difficult to approach male peers to ask to participate, it is clear from the quote that even among Sophia's social circle, sport was the domain of boys.

Furthermore, these excerpts shared by Sophia and Amanda demonstrates how gendered ideas of sport participation are reinforced in unstructured sport settings, as they both recognize the dominance of males within these environments. Therefore, this suggests that if/when females play unstructured sport; it is most likely with male peers. This is a finding consistent with literature exploring 'tomboy' and 'sporty girl' identities (Jeanes, 2011; Paechter & Clark, 2007). Paechter and Clark (2007) suggested that the 'tomboy' identity is a "girl who spends considerable (though variable) proportion of her time participating in activities that are usually associated with masculinity, and who rejects some of the conventional trappings of femininity" (p. 318). Furthermore, as Epstein, Kehily, Mac An Ghaill, and Redman (2001) highlighted, females who are accepted into male sport spaces exert competence (e.g., skills) are seen as the exception to what is 'normally' expected of girls and femininity.

As well, the experiences of Sophia and Amanda demonstrate how gender norms are not only reinforced in unstructured sport, but also frame their understanding of their own experiences in sport in relation to others (e.g., female peers), as female peers were understood as being disinterested in sport based on their lack of participation and actions around unstructured sport spaces (e.g., sitting and talking). Several female participants described how female peers outside of organized sport were disinterested in sport in general, which affected their involvement in unstructured activities. As Amanda shared, “Because we are girls, there are not that many girls we can message and say ‘Hey, do you just want to go play pick up?’ like, no one thinks about that.” As well, Halimah described, “Peers outside of sport, hated sports, very, very girly, very girly and in sports there were a lot of guys, a lot of guys.” Halimah’s comments suggested that her understanding of sport is based on gender norms, and that the peer group reinforces this understanding.

Overall, this section highlights that unstructured sport is gendered and constructed as the ‘natural’ domain for males in NIAs. For male participants, involvement within unstructured sport (with other males) was an accessible opportunity to be involved in sport, whereas less female participants felt comfortable seeking opportunities for participation. When females did participate, it was mainly with male peers. As well, this research illustrates the impact that siblings and peer groups have on unstructured sport participation, which supports the core characteristic of deliberate-play activities (e.g., participant-led, Côté et al., 2003; Côté & Hay, 2002). These meaningful relationships have been recognized as providing a positive motivational climate for sport participation (Cervelló, Escartí, & Guzmán, 2007; Ntoumanis & Vazou, 2005; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006; Vazou, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2006); however, their role within unstructured sport participation has been understudied. Therefore, it can be suggested that for some females, gender norms can make participation in unstructured sport more challenging, especially if their social group primarily consisted of females or those perceived to not be interested in sport.

**Gender norms reproduced outside of sport.** In addition to the “performance” of gender, Messner (2000) suggests that cultural symbols carry “encoded gender meanings,” which foster the construction of “gender divisions and boundaries” (p. 26). These cultural symbols may be activated in early childhood and further reinforced in youth. Female participants often shared experiences where they felt judgment from parents and the wider neighbourhood (e.g. residents) due to their gender, which prompted many female participants’ discomfort and desire to engage in sport and physical activity within public spaces, including unstructured sport, particularly as they got older.

For instance, Rebecca was a focus group participant who decided to stay during one of the breaks, when everyone left the room to share her experiences in sport, as she appeared to be uncomfortable sharing it with the rest of the group, who were mainly comprised of males. She explained how gender norms might be taught in early childhood, which subsequently influences involvement in sport:

Maybe it’s just the way girls are grown up. From a young age, girls will always be bought Barbies or dolls and stuff. It’s very rare for parents to buy them a baseball and stuff. Don’t get me wrong; there are parents who do that. Gender roles play a huge role in how girls grow up and how girls get involved in male dominated things or supposedly male dominated things. It’s just there. I have a little brother and he plays a lot more sports than me.

Particularly telling is Rebecca’s observation that her younger brother is more actively involved in sport than she is, which she believes is related to traditional gender roles and the challenges that girls may encounter when entering a male-dominated space or activity, challenges that she feels her younger brother did not encounter. Rebecca’s interpretation of gender roles highlights how parents’ view of gender norms can affect the degree and types of resources and support for sport that are provided for children. This is concerning, given that parents play a fundamental role in children’s access, socialization, motivation, and behaviour in sport (e.g., Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Not surprisingly, Trussell and McTeer (2007) suggested that gender norms are likely learned in early

childhood within the family unit, which can negatively influence involvement in unstructured sport later in life.

Similarly, Halimah also had an awareness of gendered expectations, which was particularly perpetuated by her mother. Halimah was engaged in a great deal of organized sport, both at school and playing for community sport clubs. However, after two years of playing soccer for a community sport club in her youth, she discontinued, stating: “I left because it got too expensive and that’s because I was getting a little older and when I got my thing at that age. You know, my mom was like ‘You need to relax like, calm down!’” When asked to clarify what she meant by “thing,” Halimah shared, “Yeah, my womanly thing. I changed at thirteen.” She then proceeded to provide a more detailed explanation:

I’m still Brown per se. We still have that little bit of, you know my mom especially so she’s like “You’re a girl, you can’t play with a lot of guys. You can’t. You need to relax. You’re growing...you’re a woman now! So you need to like, act more womanly!”

This excerpt suggests that for Halimah, entering puberty was a time when gender norms were particularly reinforced. There is a clear emphasis on the female pubescent body as different and therefore once a female becomes a ‘woman,’ her role in society changes, which influences her actions and interactions with others. This in turn highlights the binary-divide between males and females. The expectation that female sport involvement should be restricted after puberty further reinforces the hegemonic discourses prevalent in sport and beyond. Furthermore, by Halimah explicitly pointing out that she is “still Brown per se,” suggesting that gender norms within NIAs are influenced by other socio-demographic markers (ie., race/ethnicity).

Gendered expectations were further emphasized through perceptions of surveillance by parents and neighbourhood residents, which led to feelings of discomfort and frustration amongst some female participants. In general, participants perceived the neighbourhoods as unsafe, particularly in the evening, which for some shaped their involvement in sport. While male participants, like Matthew,

noted that his mother expressed concern for his safety, this was especially heightened for female participants in particular. For instance, Halimah described a time when her mother followed her as she walked within neighbourhood:

I feel like my mom is so stereotypical. “Don’t go out to late, you don’t know what’s going to happen.” Even one day, she was in the car and I was walking and she was staring at me walking and I’d seen a couple of guys and they were all Black, let’s be real, and I said hi to all of them, because I knew them and she was so shook. She was like “What if they would have done something!” I was like “I am from the area, I am 20. I grew up here. It’s fine.” My mom does not feel safe, but my siblings and me; we feel safe.

By following Halimah as she walked in the neighbourhood, her mother perpetuated the notion that she needed ‘protecting,’ even though she felt safe being in the neighbourhood she lived in. This highlights the potential tensions between generations (mother-daughter), suggesting that a range of potential proximal and distal factors likely influenced her mother’s personal journey. It is telling that Halimah explicitly points out the Blackness of her male acquaintances, and the subsequent anxiety expressed by Halimah’s mother that they could “have done something.” It is arguable that, for Halimah’s mother, Black men within the NIA were perceived to pose a threat to her daughter’s safety, which may be related to the portrayal and criminalization of Black masculinity in the media (Abdel-Shehid, 2005) or the construction of NIAs being ‘unsafe’ and ‘marginalized’ (City of Toronto 2014). Teelucksingh (2006) argues, race continues to be mapped both materially and symbolically, particularly within urban spaces, suggesting there are no safe spaces for people of colour in Canada” (p. 11). As a result of this fear of safety, particularly amongst interactions with certain racialized groups, Halimah’s movement in public spaces, be it walking or playing sport, within the neighbourhood felt restricted.

In addition to her mother’s strong views about gender norms, Halimah shared how she also felt a sense of surveillance from neighbourhood residents. She described how she would never run the

streets within the NIA, preferring the ‘valley,’ which was a ravine nearby. When the primary researcher responded with her own preference for running in more public spaces, Halimah shared:

Okay well you’re not really known here, so for you, you’ll be fine. They’ll be like, “Oh she’s just running, oh typical you know, they just run”, but for me, oh my goodness like seeing a Muslim girl run is a big thing...I know everyone here cause I grew up here. People just stare and I think that’s really annoying but people stare so much so I usually when I run I run down there [the valley]...I think I think it comes to people talk a lot of shit...people aren’t happy. They don’t like the fact that my parents let us play so much sport. It’s also to that cultural mindset because we’re not cultural. Going, “Whoa [Halimah] plays soccer, whoa like [Halimah] runs.” I think growing up it was always hard too. I always did stuff outside of the community because the community was not supportive of whatever we did.

Halimah suggests that there was set of expectations imposed on her, that an outsider (e.g., the primary researcher, by virtue of non-residence and potential other social markers) would not be expected to follow, again highlighting how gender norms are influenced by other socio-demographic markers, in this case religion and culture. This feeling of judgment and surveillance for not conforming to perceived Muslim female ideals influenced Halimah’s choices for physical activity in public spaces within the NIA.

Similarly, Rebecca felt a sense of surveillance and judgment by community members with regards to sport participation. She spoke of how she felt uncomfortable participating in sport within the NIA:

Over here [Toronto] you can’t play in the street. [Researcher: What do you think it is?] I don’t know, rules and regulations, I guess? You get penalized here for doing that I guess.

[Researcher: Like, someone is going to come out and say don’t do that?]. Yeah, I guess or maybe it’s a cultural thing too, like girls [pause] I would not say [people are] judgemental but over here I am more afraid of what people may think of me. In my community, specifically in

my neighbourhood there are immigrants too...so you don't want to become too much in the limelight, that person who does that thing.

Rebecca offered various explanations (e.g., culture, immigrant community) for why she felt uncomfortable for participating in unstructured sport within public spaces. While she did not elaborate on a specific instance of being penalized, it is evident that she felt pressure to abide by particular social norms.

Halimah's and Rebecca's experiences highlight how gender norms outside of sport environments indirectly influenced unstructured sport involvement in NIAs. Specifically, these cultural symbols were activated by parents and community members, which reinforced the binary difference between males and females through the toys they were given and some females' feelings of surveillance. These interactions prompted many female participants' discomfort and lack of desire to engage in sport and physical activity within public spaces, including unstructured sport. As well, this highlights how gender norms are shaped by an intersection of various factors (e.g., socio-demographics, culture, media, etc.).

**Gender norms reinforced by institutions.** Lastly, Messner argues that structural contexts such as institutions reinforce behaviour (e.g., stereotypes, hierarchy, power). This research argues that institutional structures such as schools and government-funded facilities and programs (e.g. community centres) that provide opportunities for structured and unstructured sport participation, continue to perpetuate gender norms within these environments. Many participants described how school sports teams were sex-segregated, which may have contributed to perceptions of gender differences related to sport involvement. Dahlia was first exposed to co-ed organized sport in high school, when she began participating on the school's ultimate Frisbee team in high school. She shared:

It was hard at first because I was like, I don't know who to play with. At the beginning, like we had like 15 minutes of warm-up or whatever where we'd just like pick up the Frisbee and you'd

have to find someone to throw with. For the first bit, I always found myself just picking the nearest person of the same gender and going with them but luckily that started changing a little.

Again, this experience demonstrates another form of “performance” of gender. As this was Dahlia’s first experience in a co-ed sport setting, she instinctively pursued a practice partner of the same gender, as she felt comfortable doing so. Although this experience relates to organized participation, sex-segregation within school settings likely contributes to the construction of a gender binary (i.e., male/female), which seem to be operating within a wide range of sport settings, which includes unstructured sport.

In addition to school, government-funded programs (e.g., City of Toronto Parks and Recreation) provide opportunities for sport participation, including unstructured sport. Many participants, both male and female, described how drop-in programs (which are spaces intended for unstructured sport) provided by the municipality were not gender specific; however, they nonetheless perceived the programs to be geared towards males. In Dahlia’s words:

It’s free [community centre drop-in programs] but the sports won’t even say boys or girls, they don’t even say that because you are not allowed to do that, as it should be open, but all the guys come and you are not going to get girls...

Similarly, Ali shared:

They [community centre] have a separate girls’ one, I know that, like a drop-in thing...but the regular ones, it wouldn’t say it’s co-ed or not, but it was just assumed it was open but only guys showed up.

Dahlia’s and Ali’s quotes demonstrate how when not gender specific, ‘regular’ programming is presumed to be for boys and men, reinforcing that play-based sport is a male domain, and limiting female participants’ involvement in unstructured sport. This finding echoes the work of Cathy van Ingen (2003) who argued that inequalities within sport are not always visible within the physical landscape.

Collectively, these findings speak to how hegemonic masculine norms are inadvertently perpetuated by the very institutions that provide opportunities for mass participation. Although the intention of girls and women's programming is to provide more opportunities and to encourage marginalized (e.g., females) people to participate in sport, it may reinforce the assumption that 'regular' sport is for men and boys. Thus, the provision of time and space may not be enough to address gender inequities in sport, as the structure of sport is still based on colonial ideologies, which favour White, masculine bodies.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

This research supports the notion that participation in unstructured sport activities is beneficial to children and youth living in NIAs, as it can provide a means for exposure to sport and can be used as a pathway for organized sport, particularly for communities with limited resources (e.g., time, money) and support from parents (e.g., lack of interest, awareness of programs) (Lareau, 2002). However, when examining gender and unstructured sport participation, it became clear that hegemonic masculine practices mediated unstructured sport participation within NIAs. Drawing from Messner's (2002) tri-level analysis of gender construction, this research suggests that normative practices were reinforced by social interactions within the sport setting (e.g., participants, peers and siblings), gender norms reproduced outside of the sport setting (e.g., parents, community residents), and institutional structures (e.g., school, community-based programs/facilities) (Messner, 2000). Messner's tri-level analysis compliments socio-ecological approaches, as it examines proximal and distal factors to understand how gender operates in and through sport. Furthermore, this research supports Messner's approach gender analysis as, they are "simultaneous and mutually intertwined processes, none of which supersedes one another," (p.767), suggesting that these components work together to shape the participant experience in unstructured sport environments. However, a limitation of Messner's framework is that it centralizes gender as the primary variable influencing participation, therefore universalizing the experience and reinforcing the binary difference between males and females. As well, Messner's work utilizes this

framework to examine children's soccer environments within the United States, which are very likely to be influenced by dominant ideologies of gender and sport practices. In contrast, the current study highlights the importance of examining differing environments, as this study found specific circumstances that influenced youth and young adults sport participation within NIAs, which represents a specific racialized/classed group of individuals living within urban spaces in Toronto. For example, Messner suggests that 'popular culture' influences sport participation; however, this research illustrated that other cultural norms, be they related to ethnicity, religion, or immigration, contributed to female participation in unstructured sport within NIAs. This reinforces the need to contextualize understandings of sport experiences, by examining varying and intersecting socio-demographic markers (e.g., income, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, etc.; Kalman-Lamb & Abdel-Shehid, 2017; Thangaraj, 2015). Lastly, Messner presents the three levels as having equal impact, however, this research illuminates that each level holds differing levels of impact, as gatekeepers (e.g., peers) were most influential in producing and reinforcing gender norms, which influenced unstructured sport involvement, compared with institutions. Therefore, these levels are likely to vary, depending on the context, such as differing sport (e.g., format, sport, level) and cultural (e.g., socio-demographics) environments.

Furthermore, recognizing that hegemonic masculine practices mediated unstructured sport participation within NIAs, consideration needs to be made for how to make these and other sports spaces and programs 'safe' for females to participate, without further contributing to their exclusion. The challenge within unstructured sport is that they are constructed social sites, which are participant-led and informal, enabling participants to invent, adapt and negotiate rules (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow et al., 2013; Coutinho et al., 2016). But it is also precisely for this reason that narrow ideas of who may enter into and belongs in those spaces may be perpetuated because the participants likely construct these sites by drawing on gender norms that they have learned through social interactions, cultural, and institutional practices. Despite the bottom-up nature of unstructured sport, addressing gender

normalizing practices therein needs to take a top-down approach, by changing the culture of the systems that govern the institution of sport, which includes the media, public and private sector sport associations, and government at the local, regional, and national levels (Rowe, 1998). One of the biggest hurdles is that the foundation for modern sport in Canada (e.g., sports associations) has been greatly influenced by colonial structures and values which favour White, male, Anglophone bodies (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Field, 2012, Krebs, 2012). Therefore, there needs to be a significant shift with the culture and governance of sport. Some initial steps have been taken. For example, recommendations for addressing gender inequity in sport have included implementing equitable practices, increasing the representation of females in leadership positions (e.g., coaching, executive positions), highlighting and valuing more female athletes' achievements, and women's sport by the media and urging social support (e.g., family) for female sport participation (CAAWS, 2016; Donnelly, 2016; Sports Matters Group, 2011).

Moreover, Bryson (1994) described how there has been a desire to reclaim and revamp sport activities (e.g., female-only drop-in programs) so females can experience a sense of enjoyment, achievement and benefit from sport, and perhaps most importantly, does not further contribute to their oppression. However, this research highlights how female-only programs only further perpetuate the binary difference between males and females. Therefore, as Messner (2002) argues, the value placed on the 'athletic body' and 'sport' by social and institutional systems needs to be reconsidered, by acknowledging that gender encompasses a 'continuum of difference' rather than a binary opposite. This may be achieved through an increase of mixed-gendered sport participation opportunities, which places an emphasis on abilities, rather than relying on constructed gender roles.

Given that this study was exploratory in nature and did not specifically examine the lived experience of unstructured sport participation with a particular focus on gender, it is recommended that participatory-based methods be used to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence female participation in unstructured sport and to provide recommendations for developing more inclusive

spaces. Currently, unstructured sport participation has been understudied, particularly examining the intersection of gender. Therefore, it is recommended that sport research and practice continue to take into consideration the complex nature of identity, which includes interactions between multiple discourses (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.) and sport behavior, along with methodologies which places the participants voice at the forefront to understand the unique needs of populations that are often silenced or stereotyped within sport. Lastly, a limitation of this study is that the fluidity of gender and sexuality was not explored or discussed, which may be a result of power dynamics between participants and the researcher and the research process. Therefore, it is recommended that future research take into consideration a ‘continuum of difference’ when exploring sport experiences.

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## Chapter Nine: General Discussion and Concluding Remarks

*Sport is a highly structured and institutionalized world.*

*(Department of Heritage Canada, 2010, p. 23)*

This dissertation explored the lived experience of sport participation among youth and young adults living within Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) in Toronto, Ontario. This exploration included (a) understanding sport development pathways; (b) examining the psychosocial factors that influenced sport participation; and (c) understanding how neighbourhood spaces facilitated/impeded sport involvement.

Currently, there are great disparities amongst socio-demographic groups relating to access and inclusion to sport participation within Toronto (City of Toronto, 2017). However, there is limited academic research that examines the lived experience of youth sport participation within urban neighbourhoods in the city. Exploring the lived experiences of sport participation among youth and young adults living in Toronto's NIAs provides some insight into how structural and social boundaries are reproduced in sport.

Participants narrated their stories of sport participation, and took us on a tour of the NIAs, (e.g., behind the apartment buildings, onto basketball courts) to share meaningful factors that influenced their sport journeys. The forthcoming sections explore core findings in relation to sport participation in NIAs and broader sport participation and development literature. Overall, this dissertation challenges researchers and practitioners to move away from examining one-size-fits-all approaches to sport participation and development, as youths' sport experiences are fluid, complex, and contextual.

The three themes presented within the general discussion highlight the importance of acknowledging the lived experiences of socially marginalized groups with regard to sport participation. These experiences are often excluded from the dominant discourses surrounding sport and participation rates. While the data collected for this project brings to light the narratives and stories of these particular sport participants, they occupy social positions that have been traditionally ignored or made

invisible by the norms of sport participation. This research demonstrates that there is an opportunity for researchers and practitioners to learn from lived experiences, as these can provide contextualized understandings that are beneficial to initiatives aimed at social action (Eastmond, 2007; Shutz, 1972).

### **The (In)Visible Experience of NIA Residents**

The *(in)visible experiences of NIA residents* questions the identification of NIAs, which is based on social markers, rather than residents' lived experiences. While the intention of the *Toronto Stronger Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS 2020, City of Toronto, 2016)* is to support the development of stronger neighbourhoods within Toronto, which includes connecting “local people, relevant policies and processes, and the right investments” (p. 7). The process of identifying Toronto neighbourhoods based on Neighbourhood Equity Scores (Social Policy Analysis and Research, 2014) not only constructs a structural and social division between 'at risk' and 'strong' neighbourhoods, but this process also enhances the risk of broader social issues going unnoticed and ignored, perpetuating the notion that the lived experience of residents of NIAs is invisible and not a priority. This is concerning, given that socio-demographic profiles of NIAs, which have higher rates of lower-income, newcomers, and visible minorities compared with the city average (City of Toronto, 2014). Parallel work that has already been published recognizing social and systematic processes that have contributed to the stigmatization and socio-spatial marginalization of working class, racialized, and immigrant groups in urban Toronto (Galankis, 2016; Nicholas & Braimoh, 2018; Teelucksingh, 2006, Villegas, 2018).

Furthermore, the *TSNS 2020* (City of Toronto, 2016) has identified that sport and recreation can be a means for supporting the development of stronger neighbourhoods. In response, the municipality has made commitments to addressing access (e.g., fees), investing in facilities, promoting active living, and enhancing leadership in sport. Despite these efforts to reduce structural barriers to participation, there has been relatively no academic research investigating the lived experiences of NIA residents, the intended beneficiaries of these initiatives. Abdel-Shehid and Kalman-Lamb (2012) contended that sport is a reflection of inequality that is already prevalent in Canadian society, and if the sport experiences of

marginalized groups continue to be ignored, then these inequalities will continue to be reproduced. By focusing on the lived experience, this dissertation not only provided valuable insight into participants' sport journeys, but also framed these journeys within broader social contexts and spatial practices, such as the process of immigration settlement within Canadian urban cities.

**Wider social issues.** *Chapter Five and Six* highlighted how participant experiences were influenced by immigration settlement, as all the participants within the study were first- and second-generation immigrants. Many described how their sport participation journeys were constrained, particularly during childhood, due to differing sport environments in their countries of origin and parents' limited resources (e.g., money and time) and awareness of sport opportunities. Participants who immigrated to Canada often discussed the lack of organized sport provision in their country of origin, and/or political environments that limited their movement, particularly within public spaces within these countries. As a result, many moved to Canada with minimal experience of engagement in organized sports. Furthermore, male participants in these NIAs were particularly interested in cricket; however, the provision of sport spaces and programming within the NIA, particularly growing up, did not accommodate this sport, therefore constraining their opportunities for participation. This highlights how legacies of colonialism have traditionally shaped sport spaces in Toronto. Although, the shift of immigration trends within Toronto over the last few decades has likely brought forth differing cultural needs and interests relating to sport participation, for which current programming and spaces for sport may not accommodate.

In addition to participants' personal experiences of immigration settlement, many reflected on the perceived challenges their parents faced throughout immigration and settlement in relation to emotional, time, and financial constraints, suggesting these factors likely impacted their involvement in sport participation. Parents were seen to be less aware of the opportunities available for sport participation within their communities (i.e., in Canada, within their NIAs). These findings, consistent with past literature, highlight barriers to sport participation amongst immigrant families (Institute for

Canadian Citizenship, 2014; Yan & McCullagh, 2004; Yu & Berryman, 1996), as well as the challenges new immigrants face when integrating into the city's social, economic, and cultural landscape due to systematic issues and racial discrimination related to finding skill-appropriate employment, securing affordable childcare, obtaining safe and quality housing, accessing language services, navigating transportation, and participating in recreational and cultural activities (City of Toronto, 2001; City of Toronto, 2013).

However, exploring the lived experience provided deeper insight into the *impact* immigration settlement had on youth and young adults' sport participation, as many felt a lack of preparedness to engage in the sport activities that *were* available and of interest to them, which influenced their sport journeys. As well, factors related to immigration settlement perpetuated feelings of 'other' both within sport settings and broader social contexts (e.g., interactions with non-residents of the NIA), influencing participants' movement both within and outside of the NIA.

**The social divide of space.** In addition to processes related to immigration settlement, participants shared how their movement and interactions with others framed, and were framed, by the construction of NIAs. As Soja (2006) suggests, sense of place provides an important marker for how people relate and interact with each other. While not included in the manuscripts, participants provided descriptions of how they perceived the spaces they lived within the NIAs, which many described as being dense (e.g., high-rise apartments), low-income (e.g., community housing), unsafe, and drawing newcomers/immigrants from South Asia. This was juxtaposed to how they referred to neighbourhoods that bordered the NIA, which were described as "rich", "civilized", "[social] status", "expensive", and "white". As well, the geographic boundaries of the NIAs set by the municipality did not represent how participants viewed *their* neighbourhoods, which were based on their own experiences and perceptions of others' (i.e., non-residents) movement within these spaces.

This distinction and tension between residents and non-residents was represented in the use of quality and safe community spaces for sport within the NIAs. Participants described how spaces

designated for sport within the NIA (e.g., permitted and private sport spaces) were seen as being primarily used by non-residents, based on socio-demographic markers (e.g., class, race). In contrast, participants' use of these spaces for sport were limited, due to costs associated with community-based organized sport programming and the lack of availability of these spaces for unstructured sport due to concerns for safety, particularly in the evenings. These lived experiences illustrate that the provision of spaces for sport within NIAs were not being prioritized for NIA residents, suggesting institutions (e.g., municipal government, school boards) were more interested in capital gains, and supporting dominant groups that have historically had access to these spaces for sport. Furthermore, these findings highlight the impact of participants seeing those with economic and cultural privilege being able to move freely in and out of this 'at risk' neighbourhood, while participants' felt constrained within their neighbourhood, thereby perpetuating feelings of difference and exclusion, and reinforcing that the needs of residents of NIAs are invisible and not equally valued.

When access was addressed (i.e., subsidized programming) or not an issue (e.g., non-permitted spaces), participants experienced feelings of social exclusion within some sport settings. For example, some participants who were involved with organized sport programs that mainly drew non-residents described feelings of social exclusion within their own community, due to non-welcoming environments and a lack of social-connectedness with coaches and peers. Furthermore, although unstructured sport activities provided a more flexible means for participants to engage in sport with peers, females in particular described feeling excluded and intimidated to seek opportunities due to hegemonic masculine practices both within and outside of sport settings in NIAs, further constraining their involvement in sport. Due to lack of access and feelings of exclusion within these sport settings, many participants did not seek opportunities for participation, while others felt the need to socially assimilate to the dominant group. These experiences support previous work highlighting the challenges and social negotiation of bridging (i.e., people that may differ from one's self; Putnam 1993, 2000) within sport, particularly amongst racialized groups (Spaaij, 2012; Walseth, 2006). As well, this echoes

the work Nakamura (2012) and Thangaraj (2015) who contend that racialized immigrants are often perceived as “non-normative” and “foreign” within sport contexts, which reinforces stereotypes and reproduces exclusionary practices, often leading to ethnic-specific programs and leagues. As well, some participants adapted non-sport spaces (e.g., green space, parking lots) and/or left the NIA to seek spaces that met their needs for participation. Although adapting and seeking spaces demonstrates resilience and the desire to engage in sport, it also is perceived as constructing the message of relegation and marginalization, which for some may have negatively affected their sport journeys.

While engaged physical surroundings and healthy lives are key indicators of a ‘strong’ Toronto neighbourhood (City of Toronto, 2016), and addressing access (e.g., fees), investing in facilities, promoting active living, and optimizing leadership in sport *may* influence some residents’ participation in sport within NIAs, sport cannot and should not be seen as a panacea for wider social and systemic issues facing Toronto neighbourhoods. Scholars have suggested a cautionary approach when considering sport for development initiatives, raising questions as to whose standards they are being benchmarked against, and the consequences of not achieving them (e.g., Coakley, 2011; Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst 2009; Spaiij, 2009). This highlights the need for institutions (e.g., government, local organizations, and agencies) to prioritize and address wider social processes relating to economic opportunities (e.g., unemployment, low income, and social assistance), physical surroundings (e.g., safety), and social development (e.g., residential instability, ethnic concentration, dependency and material deprivation and post-secondary completion).

However, the benefits of sport participation and development have not been lost, as this research highlights that there were various positive outcomes gained from sport participation, which contributed to participants’ sense of belonging, development, enjoyment, and identity, particularly within inclusive and supporting sport settings. This highlights the importance of recognizing and listening to the lived experience of residents of NIAs to develop programming and spaces that meet their needs for participation. As demonstrated in *Chapter Seven*, the development of a cricket ground

within one of the NIAs had a significant impact on some participants' sport participation and development, given its focus on providing an accessible space that met the interests and needs of the community. This is an example of a bottom-up and resistant strategy that practitioners and researchers can learn from. This key finding supports Rac's (2014) report on access and equity of sports and recreation facilities, which recommends that the design and implementation of accessible and inclusive sports facilities requires extensive public consultation and comprehensive understanding of the community context. It is here that the residents, their needs, interests, and contexts, are visible, and where we see a sport space within the NIA that is being used, and most importantly claimed, by the residents. It is here where many feel at home. and have a sense of belonging.

### **The (In)Visible Athlete**

The second theme, the (in)visible athlete, questions how sport is conceptualized and valued within the Canadian context, which differs from some of the fundamental experiences of sport participation among residents of NIAs. This research demonstrates that children and youth living in Toronto NIAs *are* playing sport; however, their experiences may not reflect how sport has been constructed, recorded, and valued within sport culture in Canada, which places an emphasis on performance and organized sport structures (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Livingston et al., 2008; Schimank, 2005). As such, this research shows a dynamic and complex process by which participants came to understand their own sport experiences and how these were shaped by their own personal histories and biographies (Mills, 1958).

*Chapter Five* highlighted how unstructured sport was fundamental to many participants' sport journeys, as it provided participants with access to sport, and a learning environment to develop skills in a peer-led, flexible, and primarily inclusive environment. This activity was particularly beneficial for individuals with limited resources and minimal involvement from parents to engage in organized sport. However, unstructured sport is not represented within prominent reports detailing sport participation trends in Canada, demonstrating how institutional systems governing sport emphasize the development

of talent and high-performance sport (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Livingston, Tirone, Smith, & Miller, 2008; Schimank, 2005). For example, unstructured sport participation was not represented within the Statistics Canada's (2012) *Sport Participation 2010* report, which was based on data collection for the General Social Survey (2010) that asked respondents about their sport participation. The activities determined to fall within the scope of "sport" were based on Sport Canada's definition, which was,

An activity that involves two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition. Sport involves formal rules and procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills, and a high degree of difficulty and effort. The competitive nature of sport implies the development of trained coaching personnel. It does not include activities in which the performance of a motorized vehicle is the primary determinant of the competitive outcome. (p. 13)

The lack of inclusion of unstructured sport within this report devalues its importance, particularly given that unstructured sport has been shown to be beneficial to overall sport participation and development, especially during childhood (Adler & Adler 1994; Chow, Davids, Renshaw, & Button, 2013; Coutinho, Mesquita, Davids, Fonseca, & Côté, 2016). In overlooking unstructured sport, this report provides a narrow and misguided view of overall sport participation trends in Canada and places a greater value and pressure on investment in organized sport experiences. This likely benefits those with the economic and cultural means to access and who would feel socially included within these settings. As such, this dissertation supports the need for the development of more accurate and regular measures of sport participation, which include frequency, intensity, and demographics, as this data would enable more targeted support for increasing participation amongst individuals and groups (Donnelly, 2013).

The value of organized sport was prominent within participants' narratives in both the interviews and focus groups. *Chapter Five* highlighted that participants perceived their entry into organized sport as "late" compared with others (e.g., children from other neighbourhoods) due to

differing sport environments in countries of origin, limited awareness and/or access to community-based programming during childhood, parents' inability to provide time and/or money for sport, and the late start of sport programs within the school system (i.e. in upper elementary). Participants' perceptions suggested earlier exposure to sport contributed to 'others' advancement within sport, which was reinforced by experiences of competitive selection processes when participants went for trials of intra-school sport teams. Furthermore, *Chapter Seven* highlighted that priority of quality and safe spaces for sport were provided to permit holders, who utilized them to engage in organized sport, again, reinforcing a culture that favours competitive and organized sport structures. As a result, space for unstructured sport was constrained, constructing the message of relegation and invisibility of athletes interested and actively engaging in non-organized sport settings. Collectively, these findings suggest sport participation and development has been greatly influenced by how sport has been narrowly defined by those in a position of influence (e.g., government), which is exclusionary. As such, there is a need to widen our scope of exploration and understanding.

### **The (In)Visible Sport Pathway**

The final theme is the *(in)visible sport pathway*, which calls for a deeper understanding of broad-based sport participation and development. When considering participant sport journeys in relation to the *Developmental Model for Sport Participation* (DMSP; Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014), it was evident that participants' experiences differed from the trajectories proposed in the model. *Chapter Five* highlighted how most participants (particularly during their youth), were actively participating in a range of unstructured and organized sport activities without progressing to elite sport performance levels, which is not represented within the three key proposed trajectories of the DMSP. Côté (1999) acknowledged the limitations of the original study that initiated the DMSP, stating that it "provides a basis for making more accurate generalizations about the development of talent in sport." (p. 412). Therefore, the DMSP is more representative of the development of talent (e.g., elite sport), rather than broad-based and competitive sport participation,

fundamental levels of sport development (Green, 2005). This insight is crucial and long overdue, as scholars have highlighted the perpetual lack of investment on understanding and supporting broad-based participation (e.g., Donnelly, 2013).

Various scholars have highlighted the tension between the pursuit of excellence and broader positive outcomes through sport participation (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Beesley, Dickler, Harlow, Mosher, Preston, & Wolman, 2017; Spaaij et al., 2018). As illustrated throughout this dissertation, sport is inherently hierarchical and competitive (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Schimank, 2005); therefore, the priorities of pursuit of excellence are often not accessible and socially inclusive. Spaaij and colleagues (2018) highlighted the tensions between the promotion of diversity and inclusion, and the focus on performance within sport clubs, as it required a shift in resources, which many clubs could not and were not interested in investing in, as it was not their core business and were not markers of success. Clubs who were perceived to be more focused on inclusion were viewed as “not serious” about winning and developing talented players, highlighting that inclusion and access is viewed as an ‘initiative’, rather than being a fundamental right.

Therefore, consideration needs to be given to what is valued in sport at different levels (e.g., recreational, competitive, elite), and what constitutes broad-based programs. Ideally, the infrastructure of broad-based programs should be focused on providing opportunities (e.g., access, safe environments), and appropriate motives (e.g., development of competence, social networks, autonomy) for participation (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Green, 2005). It is likely that the socio-ecological factors influencing sport participation and development will likely vary depending upon sport development levels and contexts. For example, previous work has emphasized the role of parental support and involvement on sport participation and development in childhood (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008); however, this research has demonstrated that coaches and peers have a fundamental role in sport initiation and advancement during childhood, in the context of non-elite sport settings. Furthermore, when exploring the intersection of socio-demographics and sport participation,

experiences of the youth and young adults varied. *Chapter Eight* demonstrated how hegemonic masculine discourses (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2011; Messner, 2002) particularly shaped participants' unstructured sport settings. As a result, females felt less comfortable engaging in unstructured sport, which influenced their opportunities for overall sport participation. Hence, it is strongly recommended that future sport development research embrace a more socio-ecological and critical theory approach, as this will encourage the exploration of wider factors influencing positive development through sport.

### **Future Directions and Practical Implications**

The following are recommendations for future directions within academic and applied fields, with implications for increasing youth sport participation, as well as developing critical insights and practices.

**Investment in broad-based sport participation and development.** To my knowledge, there is no academic research that examines optimal environments for broader sport participation and development trajectories (e.g., non-elite competitive sport). Although identifying and understanding differing sport participation and development pathways is important, they must be interconnected. As Green (2005) highlights, broad-based participation is the foundation for developing competitive and elite sport performers; therefore, athletes are likely to transfer in and out of sport pathways through their journey through sport. This highlights the importance of having flexibility in defining trajectories, as some individuals are likely to not follow the traditional 'paths' defined within the DMSP (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2016; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014). As this research demonstrated, no two participants' journeys were the same, reinforcing that experiences are fluid, complex, and indefinite. Furthermore, it is likely that factors influencing sport participation and development vary between development levels and contexts, which should encourage a deeper understanding of how sport is conceived. Specifically, the dynamic elements (e.g., engagement in activities, quality relationships, and sport settings) that foster the development of optimal and appropriate environments, which then foster

positive development through sport should be considered (i.e., sport participation, enhanced performance, and character development) (Personal Assets Framework, PAF; Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016).

Additionally, it is advised that approaches to access and social inclusion be more explicitly incorporated into sport development research frameworks. It cannot be assumed that all individuals have the same resources, support, and opportunities to engage in sport. The *Personal Assets Approach to Youth Sport* (PAF; Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014; Côté, Turnnidge, & Vierimaa, 2016) provides a strong platform to explore and understand optimal environments for children and youth to experience positive developmental experiences through sport. Although the framework does recognize personal, social, and structural features within sport settings, it does not account for distal processes (e.g., normative practices), which are arguably integral to access and social belonging. Therefore, in order to foster PYD outcomes (then the bracket point), frameworks such as the PAF may want to consider incorporating a more socio-ecological and critical approach to providing accessible and socially inclusive environments to foster PYD outcomes (e.g., incorporating all eight components of optimal sport environments as recommended by the NRCIM, 2002).

From a practice perspective, providers of broad-based programming (e.g., schools, community-based sport programming) may want to consider reviewing their philosophy, approach, and delivery of sport programming, such as focusing on opportunities for learning and development (e.g., emotional, social, physical, cognitive) within a safe (e.g., physical, emotional) and supportive (e.g., staff, community) environment. This could include developing policies and protocols that foster accessible and socially inclusive environments, such as cultural competence training for coaches and physical education teachers, as well as rules about team selection processes depending on age. Furthermore, programs and facilities may want to consider widening their programming to include a variety of sports (e.g., culturally relevant), levels (e.g., intra/intermural), and times (e.g., before, during and after school) in order to maximise student participation.

Furthermore, the provision of spaces for sport within neighbourhoods should meet the needs of its residents, with consideration to accessibility, safety, and the provision of quality spaces. Accessing local spaces during appropriate times for sport participation should be prioritized for residents. Furthermore, fees for local programming should be manageable for residents. Lastly, adding, upgrading, and providing continued maintenance of facilities and equipment should be considered to ensure that spaces are safe and utilized. For example, well-lit, multipurpose and artificial sport surfaces, as well as indoor facilities in the area may increase sport participation, as a wide range of sports to be played within various weather conditions.

**Exploring sport journeys.** There are challenges to exploring sport journeys through lived experiences given that it is based on participants' recollection of how they viewed their experience, and information that they chose to share. However, taking a positivist approach to exploring sport journeys also presents challenges, as this approach assumes that there are markers and boundaries which frame the experience. Longitudinal and quantitative methods may have provided more of a chorological account of participants' experiences; however, this approach poses other challenges, including making overgeneralizations of participant experiences. In reality, experiences are fluid, complex and dependent on various contexts. As well, when participants shared their experiences, their journeys were often not complete, as participants continually grow, develop, and experience life, which may or may not include involvement in sport in the future.

It is recommended to continue using decolonizing theories, such as postcolonial feminism and spatial theory, and methodologies such as narrative inquiry, discourse analysis, and participatory action research, as they are effective approaches for understanding and addressing sociocultural inequity and contextualized understandings by empowering individuals and communities who have traditionally been excluded or marginalized by the dominant society (Blodgett et al., 2015; Cahill, 2007).

**Increasing representation.** This dissertation highlights the importance of increasing representation within sport participation and development research, particularly among groups that

have been under-studied and under-represented in sport literature. Similar to scholars such as Light, Harvey, and Memmert (2013), and Storm, Kristoffer, and Krogh (2012), who drew on the DMSP to examine sport participation and development within other countries, it is argued that sport development pathways are unique to the individual, are culturally situated, and are dependent on the sporting context (e.g., setting/structure). Therefore, it is recommended that scholars continue to expand the range of individuals and groups represented within sport development research. This includes not just examining socio-demographics as an independent variable, or represented as unusual or different (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Duda & Allison, 1990; Ryba, 2009); rather, by providing a platform for individuals and groups to speak as equals (King, 2005).

Although this research may be of interest to scholars and practitioners examining populations with similar demographics, this research may not be generalizable to other NIAs in Toronto or other communities in Canada, given that sport participation and development is influenced by a range of socio-ecological processes that are often unique to the individual. Additionally, these experiences are retrospective and framed by time, as the participants that were recruited were between youth and emerging adult. Therefore, it may not be reflective of the lived experience of children and adolescents living within the NIAs in this present day. For example, since the data collection of this research, many initiatives have been launched within the community to develop sport programming and spaces with the purpose of increasing sport participation within the neighbourhoods and NIAs in general (e.g., City of Toronto Sport Plan, 2017). Finally, this study examined youth and young adults' sport experiences from participants who self-identified as individuals who participated in sport; therefore, this research only provides insights to those who did participate and does not represent those who did not play sport. To get a deeper understanding of this topic, it is recommended that further research consider expanding this work to examine the lived experience from diverse perspectives (e.g., non-participants, parents, children, siblings, coaches, sport leaders, community leaders), and utilize alternative methodological

approaches (e.g., participation action research) to continue gaining a richer understanding of these sport experiences, athlete trajectories, and support systems, in typically under-studied populations.

**Research approaches.** This dissertation utilized a blended theory approach, drawing from mainly sport psychology and sociology of sport to provide an appropriate analysis of the findings. This approach is unique, as fields such as cultural sport psychology have conventionally drawn from foundations of sociology, history, and philosophy rather than sport psychology, given the differing pedagogical approaches between humanities, social sciences (e.g. qualitative and critical) and psychology which has been traditionally more positivist, scientific, and quantitative in nature (Ryba & Wright, 2005). Drawing from these two sport disciplines was particularly challenging, as there were constant tensions and negotiations of the choices I made in relation to style (e.g., language used), formatting (e.g., manuscript vs. chapters), and level of analysis (e.g., micro/macro processes).

However, this research demonstrates the benefits of marrying these to fields together, as it suggests that social and structural processes that are often beyond an individual's control influence behaviour. From a sport psychology perspective, this research used a socio-ecological approach to explore proximal (e.g., self, social support, sport environments) and distal (e.g., normative practices, institutional systems) processes that shaped sport journeys. Secondly, postcolonial feminism and spatial theory were used to critically examine the complexities of perceptions and experiences of sport. Therefore, utilizing these two disciplines through a socio-ecological perspective enabled me to examine the specific factors influencing sport participation and performance within NIAs. Although it may appear that many theoretical frameworks are used for this dissertation, they should be considered as pieces of a puzzle, to gain a more in-depth and complex understanding of sport involvement. Utilizing PCF theory was particularly beneficial, as it encouraged the exploration of how power and privilege, such as the legacies of colonialism, have shaped lives and sporting practices of residents of NIAs.

## Reflections and Concluding Remarks

From inception to the development of this dissertation, this research has been committed to community-based and reflexive practices to strive to best represent the lived experience of the participants. As such, methodological approaches were adapted to ensure that the dissertation best represented the participants lived experience. Moreover, this dissertation enabled me to grow as a researcher, sport administrator, and individual. As a researcher, I have gained exceptional knowledge on best practices on conducting research with participants, rather than on them, which has inspired me to continue working within the field of social development. As a sport administrator, I have learned that it is my responsibility to provide accessible and inclusive environments, as I am in a position to ensure that the best supports are in place for a wide range of sport participation and development needs. As a coach, it is also my responsibility to not make any assumptions about my athletes, and to take the time to develop trust, get to know them, and support their personal sport pathway. Lastly, as an individual, it is my responsibility to be a better listener, give up power, break glass ceilings, move mountains, and champion for equity.

Lastly, findings from this research have been shared with a wide range of local and regional sport and community development agencies and organization, which will continue well after graduation. In addition, the manuscripts will be submitted to the appropriate journals in the coming months. It is acknowledged that these manuscripts will require adapting, as the form in which they are presented within this dissertation may not be within the specifications of the journals (e.g., too lengthy). I deliberately did not conform to publication expectations as I did not want to compromise the lived experience of the participants when developing this dissertation.

In conclusion, this dissertation challenges researchers and practitioners to widen their scope of studying and understanding sport participation and development research by listening to the voices and experiences of a wider range of individuals and groups, acknowledging and exploring the complexities of identity (e.g., intersectionality), utilizing interdisciplinary and social-ecological approaches, and

perhaps most importantly, reconceptualising our notions of sport. Finally, given the widely published benefits of sport participation, it is imperative that inclusive practices are better understood and enacted on with the purpose of ensuring that all children and adolescents have equal access, and gain the benefits of sport participation and development.

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for Interviews

**Date:** June 2016

**Study Name:** Perceptions, intentions and realities: Exploring the lived experience of sport participation amongst young athletes within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto.

**Researchers:** Lauren Wolman, PhD Candidate, Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas, Assistant Professor, and Dr. Yuka Nakamura, Assistant Professor, York University, School of Kinesiology and Health Science

**Purpose of the Research:** This research will explore the lived experiences of sport participation amongst young athletes within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Participate in a one-to-one interview. It is estimated that the study will require a maximum of 2 hours of your time.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** It is expected that findings will provide insight into sport entrance and sport participation, which will support the development of culturally appropriate and more inclusive sport programming and policy.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:** The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed, but that the name of study participants will not be recorded. Any material used in publications resulting from this study will have identifying characteristics omitted, will use pseudonyms and/or be paraphrased to maintain my **anonymity**. **Confidentiality** will be provided to the fullest extent. All interview materials and data will be kept under lock-and-key accessible only to the researcher. Participants can review their transcripts at any point in time during the study, and within three years of the conclusion of this project, unless the participant requests otherwise, all interview materials will be destroyed.

**Conservation of Data:** The data collected in notes, digitally recorded interviews, or on computers will be kept in a locked drawer or on a password-protected computer in the researcher's office until 2021.

**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 Lauren Wolman telephone at (647) 705-1531 or by e-mail ([lwolman@yorku.ca](mailto:lwolman@yorku.ca)). This research has been reviewed and approved 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 Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the study: *Perceptions, intentions and realities: Exploring the lived experience of sport participation amongst young athletes within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto* conducted by Lauren Wolman. 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

## **Appendix B: Consent to Participate in Focus Group Research**

### **How Sports Spaces are Experienced Among Youth and Young Adults Within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto.**

**Date:** July/August 2017

**Study Name:** How Sports Spaces are Experienced Among Youth and Young Adults Within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto.

**Researchers:** Lauren Wolman, PhD Candidate, Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas, Assistant Professor, and Dr. Yuka Nakamura, Assistant Professor, York University, School of Kinesiology and Health Science

**Purpose of the Research:** This research will explore how sports spaces are experienced amongst youth and young adults within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:** Participate in a focus group. It is estimated that the study will require a maximum of 2 hours of your time.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:** It is expected that findings will support the development of culturally appropriate and more inclusive sport programming and policy.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**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 data will be collected using a digital recording device and handwritten notes. Data will be safely stored in a locked facility and /or on a password protected computer and only the primary researcher will have access to this information. Data will be filed until 2021 and will subsequently be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**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 Lauren Wolman telephone at (647) 705-1531 or by e-mail ([laurenyve@hotmail.com](mailto:laurenyve@hotmail.com)). This research has been reviewed and approved 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 Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the

Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).

**Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the study, *How Sports Spaces are Experienced Among Youth and Young Adults Within a Neighbourhood Improvement Area in Toronto* conducted by Lauren Wolman. 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

## **Appendix C: Participant Interview Guide**

### **Introduction**

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today

As mentioned, I am a student at York University and for my PhD research I am interested in understanding the lived experience of sport participation young athletes in Thorncliffe Park.

This interview should take approximately 2 hours and will be digitally recorded because I don't want to miss any of your comments. I will also be taking some notes during the session.

Before we start, I kindly ask that you sign the following consent form, which details the confidentiality around this interview. Any information I include in my report will not identify you as a respondent.

You don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

### **Part 1 – Perceptions of Sport**

The word sport can mean different things to different people.

1. I am interested to know how you define sport.
  - What type of activities are included in sport
  - How is sport played/provided?

- Where is sport played?
2. Tell me what an athlete looks like to you?
- Do you see consider yourself an athlete? Why or why not?

## **Part 2 – Exploring Sport Participation**

Imagine that your life is like a book and it is broken up in to various chapters. I would like to hear your story of your involvement in sport.

- 1. The first chapter is about your childhood, which covers up until you are 12 years old. Tell me about your sport participation.**

### *Did not play sports in childhood*

- Why did you not play sports?
- Were there any sports you were interested that you did not play?

### *Sport take-up*

- How did you get involved in the sport?
- Individuals influence (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, coach, extended family)
- What was their involvement in sport?
- How old were you?
- How was the sport offered (e.g., informally, community, school, etc)?
- Where did you play?

- What did you like about the sport?
- What did you dislike about the program?
- How long did you participate?

*Sports programs dropped*

- Why did you stop playing?
- Tell me about how you told the coach/teammates/friends/parents

**2. The next chapter covers 13-18 years old. How has your sport participation changed from childhood to adolescence?**

*Did not play sports in adolescence*

- Why did you not play sports?
- Were there any sports you were interested that you did not play?

*New sport/program take-up*

- How did you get involved in the sport/program?
- Individuals influence (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, coach, extended family)
  - What was their involvement in sport?
- How old were you?
- Tell me about the sport program?
  - How was the sport offered (e.g., informally, community, school, etc)?
  - How long did you participate?
  - Where did you play?

- Why did you travel outside of the neighbourhood to play the sport? (*If sport was not played within the neighbourhood*)
- What did you like about the sport?
- What did you dislike about the program?

#### *Sports programs dropped*

- Why did you stop playing?
  - Was school becoming more challenging?
  - Did you have other commitments (e.g. part-time jobs, relationships)?
  - Did you take up other interests? (e.g. specializing in certain activities)
  - Did the level of competition/skill become prohibitive?
- Tell me about how you told the coach/teammates/friends/parents

### **3. The last chapter I wanted to discuss is adulthood, which covers 19 years old and beyond. Tell me about your sport participation.**

*\*Note: This third question is relevant only for participants 19 years or older*

What has changed with regards to your sport participation from then to now? Why?

#### *New sport/program take-up*

- How did you get involved in the sport/program?
  - Individuals influence (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, coach, extended family)
    - What was their involvement in sport?

- How old were you?
- Tell me about the sport program?
  - How was the sport offered (e.g., informally, community, school, etc)?
  - Where did you play?
    - Why did you travel outside of the neighbourhood to play the sport? (*If sport was not played within the neighbourhood*)
  - What did you like about the sport?
  - What did you dislike about the program?
  - How long did you participate?

### *Sports programs dropped*

- Why did you stop playing?
  - Did you have other commitments (e.g. part-time jobs, relationships)?
  - Did you take up other interests? (e.g. specializing in certain activities)
  - Did the level of competition/skill become prohibitive?
- Tell me about how you told the coach/teammates/friends/parents

### **Part 2 - Additional Questions**

1. Think about the time you played in \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me about a memory that really stands out for you.
  - How did this 'event' make you feel?
  - Why is this event important to you? Why does it stand out in your memories?
2. Tell me about what motivates you to participate in sports?

- How important is sport participation in your life?
  - What does it mean for you to participate in sport?
3. How does the availability of sport programming facilitate/impede sport participation within your neighbourhood?
  4. What are other contributing factors, which may have influenced your sport participation, which we have not discussed?

### **Closing Remarks**

I want to thank you for your time today. Before we end, is there anything else you would like to add, that we might have not covered?

Do you have any other questions for me?

Again, thank you for participating in the interview. If you feel that you want to add anything after we leave today, please feel free to let me know

## Appendix D: Participant Discussion Guide

### Engagement Probes

- Who else had a similar experience
- Who had a different experience

### **Introduction**

Thank them for coming

Introduce the topic and myself

Participants introduce themselves

### Ground rules

- Take 1.5/2 hours
- Break half way through
- Only one person talks at a time
- No side conversations
- No wrong or right answers
- Encouragement of everyone to participate

### Ethics

- Make sure everyone signed the form
- Reasons for taping
- Consent

- Confidentiality
- Gift cards will be given at the end of the discussion
- Before we begin, do you have any questions?

### **Beginning the discussion**

**Q:** Let's go around the table and share our name, age, and our first sport first experience within the community (*Age, Sport, Where they live*)

### **Clarity of Definitions**

**Q:** The following is a map of the Flemington Park and Thorncliffe Park, as defined by the City of Toronto.

*Do these boundaries best represent the neighbourhood you live within?*

*How do you view Thorncliffe Park and Flemington Park?*

*Is this different to how it is perceived by non-residents?*

*How are neighbouring communities' similar/different?*

**Q:** Since we are talking about spaces you use for sport, I am interested in knowing how you define sport?

*What does sport entail? (e.g., levels, structure, ages)*

*Do you think it is different to physical activity?*

**Q:** Can you give me some examples of spaces used for sport?

*What about spaces that are used for other things - but you use for sport*

*Does the space need to be designated?*

*Does the space need to be defined? (e.g., lines, equipment)*

### **Mapping Exercise**

**Q:** I encourage you to put a pin on the spaces you have used for “sport” on the maps.

*Provide examples - designed and non-designated space*

*Sport - currently and have played in the past*

*If there are any other sport spaces you use that are not located in the neighbourhood, please write them down. (include the sport, and the location)*

**Q:** I noticed that many of you use this space for sport. Tell me about it....

*What types of sports do you play here?*

*Who plays sports in these areas? Are they local?*

*What do you like about playing sports here?*

*How can the space be improved?*

*How has this sport space changed over time?*

**Q:** I noticed that many of you do not use these spaces for sport.

*What activities are taking place in these spaces?*

*Who plays sports in these areas? Are they local?*

*Why don't you use these spaces?*

**Q:** Are there spaces that you use for sport that were not identified on the map?

*Undesignated spaces?*

*Apartment Buildings?*

**Q:** How does the weather/seasons affect your use of sport spaces in the neighbourhood?

**Q:** How has sport spaces changed over time in the Neighbourhood? How has this impacted sport participation in the neighbourhood?

**Q:** How can we make spaces more accessible in the neighbourhood?

*Physical space*

- *What equipment or facilities would you need to participate?*
- *What would you need to make the space safe?*
- *Time?*
- *Sports played*
- *Format*

- *Conditions (female only)*

*Social space*

- *What would make it welcoming?*

### **Sport Spaces outside of the neighbourhood**

**Q:** For those who participate in sports outside of the neighbourhood, how is the space different to spaces you use within the neighbourhood?

*Where is this space?*

*Who plays sports in these areas? Are they local?*

*How did you hear about this space?*

*What was your impression of the space before you went the first time?*

*Did this change once you went?*

*What is it about this sport space that you like?*

*How is this space different to what is provided in the neighbourhood?*

### **For those who do not participate in sports outside of the neighbourhood**

**Q:** What was your impression of sport spaces and opportunities outside of the neighbourhood

### **Ending the Discussion**

We've had an interesting conversation, now I would like to wrap things up

Ask each for a final comment - Favorite sport space and why?

Ask if anything was missed

Thanks for participating

## Appendix E: Tables

**Table 1** Neighbourhoods of Study Demographics

Demographics	Greendale	Riverside	City Average
Born in Canada	30%	32%	49%
Ethnic origins	East Indian Pakistani Filipino Afghan	East Indian Filipino Chinese Afghan	
Home language not English or French	58%	51%	30%
Post secondary education attainment	67%	62%	69%
Percent of population in low- income	39%	30%	19%
Housing that does not meet national occupancy standard	38%	29%	14%

Source: (City of Toronto, 2019, February; Statistics Canada, 2013)

Note: Riverside and Greendale are fictional names representing the two NIAs of study used

**Table 2** Interview Participants Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Neighbourhood	Country of Birth	Parents Country of Birth
Ali	Male	19	Riverside	Pakistan	Not Available
Amanda	Female	19	Riverside	Canada	Ghana
Anjali	Female	19	Riverside	Saudi Arabia	Not Available
Arsa	Female	19	Riverside	Canada	Vietnam
Bill	Male	17	Greendale	USA	Bangladesh

Dahlia	Female	17	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available
Gold	Female	16	Riverside	Canada	Malaysia
Halimah	Female	19	Riverside	Canada	Sri Lanka
Jin	Male	20	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available
Mustafa	Male	21	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available
Priyanka	Female	18	Riverside	Canada	Philippines/Ghana
Rahu	Male	16	Greendale	Afghanistan	Not Available
Sivasan	Male	18	Greendale	Eritrea	Not Available
Sophia	Female	17	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available
Tommy	Male	19	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available
Zack	Male	19	Greendale	Pakistan	Not Available

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Notes:

- Pseudonyms are used for participant names
- This data is based on meaningful moments that participants shared, based on recall. They are meant to provide insight that contributes to common points of discussion, rather than providing a definitive reflection of their journeys to date.

Participant	Gender	Overall Sport Take-up	Age Organized Sport Take-Up	Organized Sport Take-up Setting	Leadership	Organized Sport Participation (Time of Study)
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**Table 3** Interview Participants Sport Journeys

Ali	Male	Unstructured	Youth	School	Coach	Participating
Amanda	Female	Unstructured	Childhood	School	Official	Participating
Anjali	Female	Organized	Childhood	School	Coach	Dropped out
Arsa	Female	Unstructured	Childhood	School	Coach	Dropped out
Bill	Male	Unstructured	Childhood	Community program	Administrator	Participating
Dahlia	Female	Organized	Childhood	School	Coach	Participating
Gold	Female	Organized	Early childhood	Community program	Not available	Dropped out
Halimah	Female	Organized	Early childhood	Community program	Coach	Participating
Jin	Male	Unstructured	Youth	School	Not available	Dropped out
Mustafa	Male	Unstructured	Youth	School	Coach	Dropped out
Priyanka	Female	Organized	Childhood	School	Coach	Dropped out
Rahu	Male	Unstructured	Childhood	School	Not available	Participating
Sivasan	Male	Unstructured	Youth	School	Not available	Dropped out
Sophia	Female	Unstructured	Childhood	School	Coach	Participating
Tommy	Male	Unstructured	Childhood	School	Official/Coach	Participating
Zack	Male	Unstructured	Youth	School	Coach	Dropped out

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Early Childhood = 0-5 years, Childhood = 6-12 years, Youth = 13 -17 years, Adult = 18+ years

Notes:

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#### **Table 4** Perceived Parental Support for Sport

Name	Perceived Parental Support for Sport
Ali	Supportive - Uninvolved
Amanda	Supportive - Involved
Anjali	Supportive - Involved
Arsa	Supportive - Uninvolved
Bill	Supportive - Involved
Dahlia	Supportive - Uninvolved
Gold	Supportive - Involved
Halimah	Supportive - Involved
Jin	Supportive - Uninvolved
Mustafa	Supportive - Uninvolved
Priyanka	Supportive - Involved
Rahu	Supportive - Uninvolved
Sivasan	Supportive - Uninvolved
Sophia	Supportive - Involved
Tommy	Supportive - Uninvolved
Zack	Disapproving

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Notes:

- Pseudonyms are used for participant names
- This data is based on meaningful moments that participants shared, based on recall. They are meant to provide insight that contributes to common points of discussion, rather than providing a definitive reflection of their journeys to date.