

An Exploration of How Ontario Children's Soccer Coaches of Mixed-Sex Programs Understand
Sex and Gender

Julia Hamer, BA(H), M.Ed.
School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences,
University of Ottawa

Supervisor: Dr. Audrey Giles
Committee Member: Dr. Travers
Committee Member: Dr. Martin Camiré

THESIS

Submitted to the School of Human Kinetics in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Human Kinetics

School of Human Kinetics
University of Ottawa
December 15, 2021

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: An Exploration of How Ontario Children’s Soccer Coaches of Mixed-Sex Programs Understand Sex and Gender	52
Chapter Three: Conclusion	87
Appendix A: Ethics Certificate	103
Appendix B: Sociodemographic Self-Identification Survey	105
Appendix C: Interview Guide	106
Appendix D: Contributions	109

Abstract

Sport is an arena in which natural differences between women and men are considered so obvious and profound that they necessitate completely separate teams and leagues for women and men. The normalized division of women's and men's sport and assumptions of natural sex difference also informs the organization of children's sport, including in children's soccer spaces. Sex segregation in children's sport spaces not only has negative impacts on both boys and girls, but it also actively restricts the participation of trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive children, often requiring them to choose between honouring their gender or participating in sport. Little research has explored specifically how coaches of mixed-sex children's sport programs understand sex and gender; therefore, for my Master of Arts research, I explored how children's soccer coaches of mixed-sex programs in Ontario understand sex and gender. I used a feminist science studies theoretical framework and feminist methodologies to conduct 11 semi-structured interviews with coaches who had experience working with mixed-sex programs for children aged four to eight. I used critical discourse analysis to analyze these interviews and examine the discourses (re)produced by the coaches. Through this analysis, I found that the coaches (re)produced three pervasive discourses: 1) gender is constructed but categorical; 2) inevitable and hierarchal sex differences necessitate sex-segregation; and 3) girls' sport is vulnerable and girls in sport require support. The results of this research suggest that coaches' understanding of sex and gender is heavily informed by the sex/gender binary of sport, even in mixed-sex children's soccer spaces. The findings from this research can be used to inform coach education and sport policy that resists binary and naturalized notions of sex and gender.

Dedication

For Diana and Jim, for forever cheering me on and knowing about the scams.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Audrey Giles for your hard work on this project. Thank you for taking me on as a student and giving me space to develop this project, for helping me build my craft as a writer, and for keeping me motivated to make it to the finish line. Thank you to the team members who shared ideas and articles, read drafts, and offered support.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Travers and Dr. Martin Camiré for taking the time and consideration to be a part of this project. Thank you, Dr. Travers for your own work, which has been an inspiration for my own.

Thank you to the coaches I have worked with who have made me a better and more intentional coach and to the coaches who advised on this project. Thanks to the kids I've had the privilege of working with and who have made me want to imagine more for all of us.

Thank you to the friends who saw me and held me throughout this program, Joti, Ryan, Amina, Liz, Dean, Bethany, Liz. Thanks for keeping me sharp, soft and silly.

The deepest, most profound thanks to Britt for all your care, love, and rage.

Chapter One: Introduction

Millions of children participate in organized sport in Canada and the United States every year (Messner & Musto, 2016). Sport is an important and meaningful aspect of many children's lives, and positive sport experiences can result in their lifelong interest and involvement in physical activity (Messner & Musto, 2016). Sport is also commonly a space where cultural ideas and assumptions about sex and gender are introduced and perpetuated (Travers, 2016). In Canada, soccer is the most popular team sport for children aged three to 17, with over 750,000 children participating in organized soccer in 2014 (Solutions Research Group, 2014). At the grassroots level in soccer, children are commonly separated into groups of boys or girls, which leaves little room for any child who does not fit that binary and also reinforces essentialist ideas of both sex and gender (Travers, 2016, Messner, 2011). In mixed-sex groups (in which all players play together), the social environment and the attitudes and beliefs of both players and coaches play a direct role in perpetuating ideas of gender and the relationship of gender to sport (Landers & Fine, 1996; Messner, 2009).

I have been a children's soccer coach for 14 years. Shortly before proposing this project, I was assisting a coach in running a practice with four- and five-year-olds. There were a dozen players and the group appeared to have equal numbers of boys and girls - an exciting and rare occurrence. In my experience, there have usually been more boys/only a few girls in these settings. My excitement for this was short lived, however, as the coach in charge immediately split the group into girls and boys and sent the girls, including his own daughter, to their own field for an entirely separate session from the boys. This interaction has stayed with me since it happened as one of the most overt displays of a coach's ingrained ideas of binary gender and sex difference informing their choices. This coach had the opportunity to split the group and have two smaller groups that did not emphasize gender. Instead, he made a choice to separate the

players into separate groups, assuming that the differences between boys and girls were greater than any differences among either group, while also denying any opportunity to be proven otherwise.

Inspired by this moment and many others like it, the research that I conducted addressed the question, “how do children’s soccer coaches of mixed-sex programs understand sex and gender?” Exploring this question provided insight into how coaches rely on discourses of sex and gender in a youth soccer context. Through this research, my objective was to better understand how to create children’s soccer environments that are inclusive and accessible to children of all genders.

In this chapter, I will review relevant literature to this project, highlighting the historical context of the sex/gender binary in sport, the role of gender in children’s sport, and the role that children’s coaches play in enabling or resisting binary notions of sex and gender. I will discuss my chosen epistemology of interpretivism and my use of feminist science studies, feminist methodologies, semi-structured interviews, and critical discourse analysis. Chapter 2 of this thesis is intended to be a stand-alone publishable paper that describes and discusses my research with 11 children’s soccer coaches of mixed-sex programs in Ontario, Canada.

Review of Literature

In this review of literature, I provide an overview of research that is pertinent to this project. First, I provide a description of the constructs of gender and sex as they are understood in the literature and also employed throughout this project. I then highlight the ways in which the sex binary in sport has been used as a tool of control and subordination as well as the historical contexts for sex-segregation practices in organized sport. I then review research on children’s

sport and gender, including children's experiences of gender in sport, and the role that coaches play in facilitating these experiences.

Gender and Sex

Gender is a social identity that interacts and is perpetually informed by social norms, laws, and culture. While gender is broadly understood to revolve around the traits associated with masculinity/maleness and femininity/femaleness, these attributions are themselves cultural, meaning that gender identities and expressions are localized in time and region (Woodstock, 2021). Butler (1990) described gender as an activity, constituted by expressions and performance, rather than simply an intrinsic identity, shaped by doing rather than being. The Western concept of gender is also deeply informed by racism, colonization, and related histories of power (Mendez, 2015; Wynter, 1990). As Mendez (2015) cautioned,

Without an understanding of how gender comes to be racialized through such colonial relationships of power we end up with a category of analysis that obscures as much as it claims to reveal. (p. 45)

While there are a myriad of gender identities with which people may identify, and that may be fluid over time, colonization has shaped Western societies to legitimize the identities of man and woman and their static, binary nature. In the context of sport, the construct of gender is often conflated with sex and situated within a binary system of organization, a process that constrains and misrepresents both gender and sex (Travers, 2008).

Despite the mutually exclusive categories of male and female in sport, there is no clear distinction between male and female bodies (Travers, 2018). An individual's sex is made up of a complex set of at least five different physical and physiological characteristics (Ainsworth, 2014), which exist on continuums and are variable throughout an individual's lifespan. Fausto-

Sterling (2020) emphasized that, “[c]hoosing which criteria to use in determining sex, and choosing to make the determinations at all, are *social decisions* [my italics] for which scientists can offer no absolute guidelines” (p. 5). In the wide range of cases in which individuals do not have aligned sex characteristics as either a male or female, they are considered intersex. Intersex people are subject to high levels of medical violence and erasure, as their very existence is considered a pathology and a form of deviance from legitimate sex (Malatino, 2016). This results in both surgeries done on healthy newborns to align their genitalia more closely to a binary (Malatino, 2016) and exclusion from medical records and cultural storytelling. The erasure of intersex people works to perpetuate a binary sex model, invisibilizing any challenges or disruptions to a binary status quo. Sport, with clear and rigid distinctions between “male” and “female” teams and competitions, is especially troubled by the presence of intersex athletes.

The labels of binary sex (female and male) and gender (girls and boys) used to describe children’s soccer teams are both constraining and misleading. Without directly asking children - or their parents - about their gender or sex, it would be unwise to assume either, as doing so reinforces the binary and static assumptions of both categories. Throughout this thesis, I refer to the sex/gender binary of sport, emphasizing how this organizational model commonly conflates sex and gender. I refer to current broader sport organization as using a sex-segregation model of sport, because while sport culture commonly conflates sex and gender, sex is often wielded as the most important and “true” measure of organization, as evidenced by sex testing measures and hormone requirements (Pieper, 2016). I use the term sex-segregation while recognizing the false naturalization of sex within sport and fallibility of sex as a categorical label as well as the ways that it is weaponized against trans people (Sharrow, 2021). For this reason, I use gender identities (i.e., girls) rather than sex labels (i.e., females) to refer to people. I use trans, Two Spirit, and

gender expansive as terms inclusive of a range of gender identities beyond cisgender girl/woman and boy/man, including those that predate colonial gender labels (Laing, 2021). Importantly, the term Two Spirit is a complex term cocreated by queer and trans Indigenous people in 1990 who “called for a need to co-create a term...that could be used to describe a wide range of nationspecific genders and sexualities” (Laing, 2021, p. 27). In my research, I refer to the term trans to mean someone whose gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth, inclusive of non-binary gender identities (Veale et al., 2015), but I am specific when referring to non-binary identities. Finally, when referring to existing research, I mirror the language used by the authors of that research to accurately represent their work.

The Sex Binary in Sport

Sport today is most commonly divided by sex (and by presumed extension, gender): Boys and men and girls and women generally play sport separately from each other, and the suggestion that they could play and compete together is often considered unthinkable (Travers, 2008). The binary organization of sport by sex/gender has an important historical context, as it has been informed by issues of sex, gender, race, and class, making the sex and gender-based organization of sport at all ages an inherently political issue (Hall, 2002).

McDonagh and Pappano (2008) described the normalized and mandatory practice of segregating sport by sex as “coercive sex-segregation.” They argued that coercive sex-segregation in sport was predicated on three assumptions: “(1) of female inferiority compared to males, (2) the need to protect females from injury in competition with males. And (3) the immorality of females competing directly with males” (p. 7). Rather than reflecting any actual sex differences, the authors argued that coercive sex-segregation policies construct sex differences and perpetuate status quo values of male superiority. In turn, these values and

expectations facilitate practices that confirm our beliefs about the capabilities of athletes of different sexes (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). This is echoed in Kane's (1995) important work in which she argued that "sport becomes a site in which essentialist beliefs about both sex and gender are naturalized and reproduced... constructing gender differences as (a) hierarchically ordered and (b) grounded in the body and thus perceived as biologically, inherently based" (Kane, 1995, p. 192). Kane argued that athletic differences are not categorical by sex (or gender) and that rather athletic ability is a continuum on which women often outperform men, but that the sex-segregated organization of sport works to make this continuum invisible by restricting opportunities to witness people of different genders competing together. With no evidence to the contrary, the binary and hierarchal understanding of sex differences and integral to the organization of sport remains both unchallenged and legitimized (Kane, 1995). The practice of sex segregation in sport has deep historical roots in systems of oppression that work to perpetuate dominant narratives that serve a colonial, white supremacist, cisheteropatriarchal agenda and to subordinate all who resist it.

Histories of Sex/Gender Binaries in Sport

Historically, sex-segregation and the application of a sex/gender binary has been a means of control, privileging some bodies (and people) over others, and subjecting others to high levels of surveillance, policing, and control (Brown, 2015; McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Sharrow, 2020). Maintaining rigid systems of binary sex and sex-segregation advances an agenda of white cisgender heterosexual male supremacy, marginalizing and endangering those who resist it (Brown, 2015). Sport has long been a tool that has been used to normalize binary and essentialist ideas of sex and gender. Below, I examine the ways in which the sex/gender binary has been enforced through sport in non-Indigenous, Indigenous, and Black communities in Canada.

The sex/gender binary division of sport has been used to enforce and construct “appropriate” gendered roles and behaviours. For middle- and upper-class Anglo white men in Canada in the late 1800s, sport was considered both a necessary extension and evidence of their masculinity, hardiness, and worthiness. These values were informed by Christian ideals of manliness, imperialism, and the social Darwinism concept of the survival of the fittest (Hall, 2002). In contrast, attitudes towards middle- and upper-class Anglo white women’s sport and physical activity stemmed from the values of maternal health and were informed by the white supremacist motivation to continue a fit and healthy white race (Hargraeves, 2002). Thus, while privileged white men’s sport was considered a natural extension of their gender and masculinity (Wamsley, 2007), privileged white women’s sport occurred in spite of their gender.

Grassroots sport in Canada thrived in cities in the first half of the 20th century, largely thanks to working class women, and women’s grassroots organized sport at this time was shaped by the separate spheres of men and women in wartime. Canada’s participation in war was an inadvertent catalyst to the growth of women’s sport, as when men departed for the war, job opportunities opened up in cities for women who also sought to participate in sport. While middle- and upper-class women participated in sport at their universities or private clubs, community organized basketball, hockey, softball, and track became common among working-class women in cities. While men’s sport was put on hold during the war, women’s sport continued and thrived, as women gained greater control over their own sporting affairs (Hall, 2002) filling coaching and managerial roles that had previously been held by men. The separate gendered spheres of both sport and war enabled grassroots, predominantly white women’s sport to grow and thrive in the early to mid-20th century (Hall, 2013).

Indigenous Communities

Within Indigenous communities, the implementation of Euro-Western sport and its associated values were used strategically by colonizers to construct and reinforce ideologies that advanced the colonial agenda, including a patriarchal and heteronormative relational system (Norman et al., 2019), while concomitantly disrupting Indigenous sex, gender and kinship practices. As Laing (2021) wrote, “Indigenous systems of gender and sexuality are the core of our nations; to destroy our ways of doing gender is to destroy our ways of being together—in effect, to destroy our nations.” (p, 28). Indeed, the patriarchal, Euro-Western values that were enforced by settler society affected Indigenous traditions, reinforcing a heteropatriarchal relational and family structure that maintained a Euro-Western gender binary and the marginalization of women, girls, Two Spirit and gender non-binary people, including in sport and games (Norman et al., 2019).

Consequently, the experiences of Indigenous women in sport have been underrepresented in research to date. Hall (2013) suggested that the patriarchal values enforced by colonization of Indigenous peoples suppressed women’s sport activities, providing far greater opportunities and recognition for Indigenous men’s sport. Despite this, there are some research accounts of Indigenous women in sport, both in mixed-sex and sex-segregated contexts. In her examination of organized sport participated in by Six Nations Indigenous women from 1968-1980, Paraschak (1990) found that women athletes participated in both the Euro-Canadian sport system and their own all-Indigenous system. Paraschak noted that within the all-Indigenous system, mixed-sex as well as sex-segregated sports were available, although some sport events were offered exclusively for men. Both the Western understanding of gender and the sex/gender binary that is built into the fabric of Western sport are tied to a history of settler colonialism and the re(production) of ideologies aligned with a colonial agenda.

Black Communities

Nzindukiyimana and Wamsley (2019) critiqued sport historiographies in Canada as failing to account for Black women's participation in sport. In contrast to the construction of white womanhood predicated on bodily fragility, Black women's histories as enslaved labourers have positioned them as "outside the normative gender sphere" (Batelaan & Abdel-Shehid, 2021, p. 148), and their bodies have been pathologized for their perceived deviance from womanhood, from the time of slavery until now (Batelaan & Abdel-Shehid, 2021). This gatekeeping from normative gender roles informs the ways that Black athletes, especially Black women, experience sport and sex/gender-segregation within sport, both historically and today (Batelaan & Abdel-Shehid, 2021; Brown, 2015). Nzindukiyimana and Wamsley (2019) argued for the need for more historiographies of Black women's sporting experiences and that "[i]nstrumentalizing Black women's sport experiences highlights how the combined racial and gender forces documented in other social histories of Black women in Canada also operated in sporting spaces." (p. 1291). Answering their own call, Nzindukiyimana and Wamsley's research explored sport experiences of Black women in southern Ontario in the 1920s-40s.

Although not absent, sex/gender segregation was less pervasive among Black athletes than middle-class white athletes in Canada during the 1920s-1940s. In their own historiography of Black women's participation in sport, Nzindukiyimana & Wamsley (2019) noted "not all [Black women's] experiences in sport were confined to joining games as children or only women's teams. Particularly, these stories offer a much-needed glimpse into Black Canadian gender relations as shaped by/ around sport." They retold a story of a men's All-Star baseball team inviting women to play with them, and of a well-known women's coach, Hilda Watkins, acting as an umpire at a men's baseball game. Black athletes were also faced with racial

segregation at this time; while Black and white teams would play each other, there was little-to-no integration of Black and white players on the same team (Howell, 2018), and sport was a venue of political resistance for many Black athletes (Ndukiyimana & Wamsley, 2019).

Contemporary Policing of the Sex/Gender Binary

All of the above accounts highlight some of the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect to shape sporting experiences. The inextricability of gender and race in sport is clear in the present day, including prolifically at elite levels of play, as evidenced most profoundly by the targeting of Black and brown women from the global south by female eligibility policies.

Sport continues to be characterized by a sex/gender binary. While this organization affects all levels and kinds of sport, it is most salient at the elite sport level. Segregation by sex has long-defined sport at the highest levels of play, including the Olympic Games. Pieper (2016) chronicled the history of sex testing at the Olympic Games, a practice that is used to enforce and maintain a rigid sex and gender binary. Sex testing/gender verification in sport became common place in the 1950s and 60s, and thin white American women athletes were positioned as the natural and appropriate icons of femininity and womanhood. The femininity of these American athletes was constructed in opposition to Black American and Eastern European women athletes, who had their womanhood gatekept and denied for being too “mannish.” Pieper stated, “Western norms of femininity and race underlied sex/gender anxieties throughout the Olympic movement” (p. 7). These anxieties have manifested in policies that have responded to the moral panic around fair play in women’s sports and “male intruders” who continue to disproportionately impact trans athletes as well as Black cis women athletes

One notable recent target of sex testing and gender verification is that of South African runner Caster Semenya, a Black intersex cisgender woman who is well known for being

subjected to high levels of public scrutiny, official sex testing, and gender verification. This surveillance, brought on by her success as an international track star, has resulted in her disqualification from certain track events due to World Athletics and the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) policies on testosterone; policies that have been critiqued for being based in unscientific and unreliable data (Pieper, 2016). Indeed, shortly after the 2021 Tokyo Olympics (in which Semenya was barred from competing in her most competitive race) the *British Journal of Sport Medicine* printed a correction to the research they published in 2017, which was used to ban Semenya based on her testosterone levels, clarifying that it was “exploratory, and our intent was not to prove a causal inference” (Bermon & Garnier, 2021). In November, 2021 the IOC released new guidelines for “Fairness, Inclusion, And Non-Discrimination On The Basis of Gender Identity And Sex Variations” (International Olympic Committee, 2021), which committed to creating safe and inclusive environments for all athletes but still relied heavily on language of fairness and maintaining a “level playing field.” As is seen throughout history, the policing of sex and gender in sport is conducted in the elusive name of fairness but often in practice results in the bodily surveillance, speculation, and control of athletes' bodies.

Today, at the professional and international level, there are several visible trans soccer players including Argentina's Mara Gomez, Japan's Kumi Yokoyama, and Canada's Quinn, all who have faced control and restriction within a soccer system defined by a sex/gender binary. Gomez was signed to her professional club in January 2020 but was not permitted to play her first game for almost a year, as she faced scrutiny by the Argentine Football Association over whether or not, as a trans woman, she had an “unfair advantage” over cisgender women athletes (Factora, 2020). Yokoyama and Quinn both play for the United States-based National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), a league with a limited inclusion policy that allows trans and nonbinary

players to participate as long as they are assigned female at birth and are not taking masculinizing hormones (de la Cretaz, 2021b). This is a relatively narrow window of inclusion that remains predicated on assumptions of natural sex difference. As noted by Travers (2016), policies like this create an ultimatum where players must choose between their careers and their desired gender expression, particularly their use of hormones; Yokoyama has publicly stated that once they retire from soccer they will live as a man (de la Cretaz, 2021b). The presence of trans and nonbinary players like Yokoyama and Quinn also highlights the limitations of gendered language used in women's sports, not only as they are not women, despite the moniker of the league, but as both are consistently misgendered by announcers and in the media (Yoestring, 2021). These athletes are disrupting the sex/gender binary in elite soccer spaces, and their presence makes clear the ways that the binary model of sport works to restrict and constrain athletes and their choices. While the policing of sex and gender is most salient at the highest levels of play, the ideologies of gender and sex essentialism which define the sex/gender binary structure of sport are pervasive throughout sport, including all the way down to the grassroots level of play where the athletes in question are young children (Travers, 2018).

Histories of Children's Sport and Gender

Historically, the organized sport that children have participated in has been commonly sex-segregated and designed to enforce gender expectations rooted in European values and norms. Sport was a tool used by Canadian 'Indian' residential schools in an attempt to assimilate and subordinate Indigenous youth into Canadian Christian culture (Habkirk, 2017), including Western gender norms (Norman et al., 2019). Binary, sex-segregated sport was used as a tool to enforce these gender norms as well as other Euro-Canadian values amongst children in residential schools. According to Forsyth (2007),

It was thought that participation in Euro-Canadian activities would contribute to the breakdown of communal values by fostering a competitive spirit among the pupils, and hopefully, through regulated instruction, the skills they learned would translate into a desire for individual achievement and wealth. (p. 101)

The masculinized, Euro-Western model of sport enforced at Canadian residential schools “came at a huge expense for girls, women, and gender non-binarized youth, not to mention diverse Indigenous social formations that were not necessarily premised on heteropatriarchal relations” (Norman et al., 2019. p. 118). Canada’s residential schools represent an example of sport being employed violently, as a weapon of genocide, and to enforce ideological and state-sanctioned cultural values (Habkirk, 2017); however, even in less overtly violent contexts, sport is regularly used as a vehicle to imprint ideological and cultural values on children.

In the late 19th century, organized sport and cadet training was designed and implemented to imprint young white boys with the values of “muscular Christianity” to help them achieve the state-sanctioned health, discipline, and socialization deemed necessary for them to achieve as adults in Canadian society (Wiggins, 2013). There is limited research on the histories of youth sport in Canada, specifically, but Trussell and McTeer (2007) discussed the rise of children’s organized sport in the United States through national youth organizations like the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club in the late 19th and early 20th century. YWCAs provided separate sport programs for girls, although as noted by White (2021), in America these programs were racially segregated until 1946. In her discussion of Black girl swimmers in the 1930s and 1940s, White (2021) highlighted how “[e]mbodied respectability shaped the experiences of African American girls in the YWCA since they were directed to display a polished appearance that could dispel racist claims of the unhygienic Black body” (p. 70), including maintaining extensive beauty and

haircare practices. White's (2021) work illustrated how prolific sport organizations, like the YWCA, helped to construct and maintain expectations of both race and gender through their policies and practices. The 1950s ushered in a swell of adult-organized and agency-sponsored sports for children (Trussell & McTeer, 2007) that were "intentionally designed to inculcate children with a particular set of values necessary to function properly in a democratic society" (Wiggins, 1996, p. 15), including dictating appropriate gendered and raced behaviours (Trussell & McTeer, 2007; White, 2021).

[In Canada, by the second half of the 20th century, organized youth sport, which had been overwhelmingly centred on sport exclusive to boys, was marked with challenges to the gender status quo (Wiggins, 2013). In the 1960s, boys began playing organized soccer in high numbers, and within the decade there were several successful and popular girls' programs and teams as well (Hall, 2003). However, not all girls had access to their own teams, and as late as 1992, in Ontario, sport governing bodies were attempting to disqualify and invalidate youth soccer teams that had any integration of boys and girls (Hall, 2003).

Contemporary Children's Sport and Gender

Research on children's experiences of sport, gender, and sex reveals a complex landscape of experiences and factors at play. In her sociological work on children at school, Thorne (1994) found that children are active agents in the "doing" of gender and that their engagement of "doing gender" is situational and varies in salience, in part informed by social environments in which gender is "formally or informally built into the division of labor, power structure, rules, and values" (Messner, 2000, p. 766). Thorne's work took place in a school, but Messner (2000, 2016, 2018) drew on and expanded it to include investigations of how gender is "done" in children's sport. In both sex/gender-integrated and sex/gender-segregated spaces, the practice of

gender operates at the interactional (children's individual beliefs and understandings of gender), structural (specific organizational policy that addresses or affects gender), and cultural (wider cultural messages and symbols of gender) levels, all of which are constantly interacting and mutually influencing (Messner, 2018a). Importantly, as noted above, conceptions of gender are inextricably connected with race, and the gendered experiences of young athletes, as well as their own understanding of gender, will be deeply informed by their racialized experiences (Morris, 2007).

Many researchers have examined the ways in which children bring their own understandings of gender to organized sport spaces (Eliasson, 2011; Gubby & Wellard, 2016; Larneby, 2016; Messner, 2018a; Musto, 2014; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). For example, young swimmers observed by Musto (2016) practiced swimming in what the author described as mixed-gender groups, but in social interactions, the swimmers tended to separate based on gender. In an examination of korfbal, a Swedish sport specifically designed to facilitate gender equality - Gubby and Wellard (2016) found that players held essentialist ideas of sex and gender, even when faced with evidence to the contrary. In interviews, Korfbal players were more likely to describe boys in general terms (e.g., that all boys are strong, aggressive, and throw the ball hard), while describing girls with those qualities as individuals (e.g., specifying that Jess was the only girl who could throw with a lot of power) (Gubby & Wellard, 2016).

Gender also influences children's relationship to their athletic identity and development. Girl athletes often perceive that their sport participation is considered less legitimate than that of boys; moreover, they may change their behaviour or style of play as a strategy to navigate those perceptions and expectations (Eliasson, 2011; Larneby, 2016). Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006) found that "children as young as eight are affected by gender stereotypes in sports and physical

activities” (p. 551) and that awareness of these stereotypes influences their participation in certain sports. They found boys to be more sensitive to gender stereotypes than girls: Boys were less likely to participate in sports that were perceived as “girls’ sports” than girls who were in “boys’ sports” (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). These studies demonstrate that the ways in which sex and gender are understood and the ways in which they operate in sport spaces have implications for children of all genders.

Emphasizing how boys are also constrained by gender ideologies within sport, Messner (2018b) conceptualized youth sport as embodying a “soft essentialist” gender ideology wherein (white, middle-class) girls are positioned as having autonomy and a range of available personal choices (such as choosing to participate in sport), while boys are often pigeonholed as being naturally inclined toward sport simply because they are boys. This ideology is often implicit and works to constrain the socially acceptable behaviour and attitudes of boys by relying on sex and gender stereotypes (competitiveness, toughness, aggression). Messner (2018b) argued that sport is a primary site of soft essentialist ideology, and that the socialization of boys to embody traditional masculinity ultimately and paradoxically works to constrain the actual choices of girls and women by failing to embrace boys (and men) who are nurturing, supportive, or emotionally sensitive. In this, Messner (2018b) highlighted how the sex/gender binary implicit to sport harms boys as well as girls and works to shape children’s experience and expectation of gender roles at an early age. Often, when players are segregated by sex/gender, gender becomes a less salient factor than when they are integrated (Messner, 2018a). In some cases, identity specific spaces can allow athletes who have been historically and systemically marginalized in sport the opportunity to engage in sports in an environment that is less oppressive or marginalizing. Allowing separate and self-governed sport opportunities for girls can provide space to engage

with sport in ways that allow them greater autonomy and increased safety (Hall, 2002; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Travers, 2008). In addition, voluntarily segregated sport spaces may be better positioned to address the cultural values and needs of its participants (Haggart, 2021; Thul et al., 2016; Travers, 2008). Haggart (2021) highlighted this in her interviews with coaches of hijab-wearing youth basketball program users who reported that single-gender programs allowed the opportunity for participants to remove their hijabs, if desired. However, while single sex/gender sport spaces may create opportunities for girls and women, they are still at risk of marginalizing non-binary, gender nonconforming, and intersex players, whose existence refutes the taken for granted binaries of sex and gender (Travers, 2016).

The binary, sex/gender-segregation model of participation has been shown to be a catalyst for gender-nonconforming athletes to either stop their participation or to conform more closely to “acceptable” sex and gender identities than they might otherwise (Travers, 2016). Travers (2016) argued that children and youth should not be required to compromise their gender identity to participate in sport. For gender non-conforming athletes who do continue in sex/gender-segregated sport, their participation is often enabled by socioeconomic privilege and strategies requiring relative wealth, support, and power, including both parent advocacy and medicalized gender transition (Travers, 2016). The ability to medically transition in Canada and the United States is also an issue of class, race, and disability, and not nearly equally accessible to all who might want or need it (Travers, 2018). This transition requirement is based on the assumption that biological sex differences are both categorical and hierarchal, and that people who have been assigned male at birth are inherently bigger, stronger, faster, and better athletes. This assumption positions trans girls as a threat to cis girls but also impacts the experiences of trans boys in sport:

[T]rans boys and trans men are not perceived as a threat when it comes to sports, which allows them to be able to slide through the system without as much controversy. At the same time, they can become an afterthought when it comes to advocacy or inclusion. (de la Cretaz, 2021, para. 19)

Conditioning sport participation on medical transition also means that athletes who do choose to medically transition are forced to leave teams, coaches, and teammates that they have built relationships with, and while for some trans athletes moving teams may be an important part of their social transition (de la Cretaz, 2021), it may create additional barriers for athletes with non-binary genders (Travers, 2016).

To meaningfully include trans and gender nonconforming children in sport, Travers (2016) argued that the onus of responsibility to participate should not fall on the individual athletes and families, but rather on the sport organizations to create spaces that are accessible to all athletes who wish to be there. Meyer and Keenan (2018) echoed this in their critique of trans inclusion policy in schools, often framed by the language of individual rights rather than institutional responsibility. Meyer and Keenan (2016) cautioned that, “[w]hen institutions develop policy in the name of trans inclusion, they run the risk of simultaneously codifying what it means to be trans and limiting whose gender expression may be protected by such policies” (p. 750), emphasizing in particular that codifying transness risks “constructing a trans subject that is ostensibly white and middle class” (Meyer & Keenan, 2016, p. 739). Meyer and Keenan (2016) insisted that policy makers should consider gender restrictive environments as detrimental to all participants, rather than approaching gender diversity as a problem to be fixed. Creating sport spaces that are accessible and inclusive to all genders requires structural policy changes that address the limitations of the sex-binary model and binary presumptions of both sex and gender

(Travers, 2018) while also resisting the urge to overcategorize or define children's bodies or gender (Meyer & Keenan, 2016).

In a sport system predicated on assumptions of binary and essentialist notions of sex and gender, children who are not cisgender are outsiders. While many trans kids and young people experience their gender identities as empowering and joyful, there are significant risks associated with experiencing oneself as an outsider. In Canada, a 2015 survey of trans youth 14-18 years old found them to be at five times the risk of suicidal thoughts when compared to their cisgender peers, and almost two-thirds had considered death by suicide in the last year. Almost three-quarters of 14–18-year-old transgender boys and non-binary youth reported that they had self-harmed at least once in the past year (Veale et al., 2016). In Canada, although it is neither as virulent nor as reflected in law as in the United States, anti-trans rhetoric is gaining traction and becoming more visible, increasing danger to trans people and particularly trans youth (Bellemare, 2021). Understanding the ways in which sport at all levels upholds binary and essentialist ideas of sex and gender is critical in resisting anti-trans rhetoric, policy initiatives and challenges to the safety and wellbeing of trans people, especially trans youth. Coaches have a considerable impact on shaping children's sport spaces; understanding how coaches (re)produce discourses of gender and sex is therefore critical in enabling athletes of all genders to thrive in sport environments.

Children's Coaches and Gender

Children's sport experiences are significantly informed by the actions and inactions of their coaches. While children are constantly performing, reacting to, and resisting gender in sport spaces, so too are coaches (Anderson, 2008; Eliasson, 2011; Landers & Fine, 2001; Messner, 2018a; Messner, 2018b). Messner (2009) found that coaches had difficulty articulating their

beliefs about children, coaches, and gender. Noting a great deal of contradiction and hesitancy in their responses to questions that he posed with regard to the role of gender in kids' sport, Messner identified common themes in coaches' responses (equality, natural difference, and equity within difference). He argued that in combination, these themes worked to "illustrate how the tensions within and between coaches' narratives about kids and gender reveal emergent contradictions and tensions in contemporary gender relations, both inside and outside of sports" (p. 142). Examining the role that coaches play in how children experience sex and gender can offer important insights into how and why sex and gender operate in certain ways, and whether it constrains or enables children's success and enjoyment in sport.

Musto (2014) observed a mixed-gender swim team for 8, 9, and 10-year-olds in which the coach's expectations and practice structure de-emphasized differences between genders when the swimmers were in the pool (and gender became more salient during free, social time). As a result, boys and girls interacted in supportive and amicable ways and for swimmers in the most competitive group, girls out-swimming boys was not considered to be an issue. Implementing structured and goal-oriented activities that normalized mixing all swimmers created an environment where gender was not considered a salient factor for the children while swimming (Musto, 2014).

In contrast to the swim coach in Musto's (2014) study, there are numerous examples in the literature of coaches reinforcing the perceived differences between boys and girls. For example, Messner (2018a) observed a coach of four-year-old boys use the threat of playing the girls' team as a tool to encourage his boys' team to listen. Landers and Fine (2001) found that for the coaches of a kindergarten-aged tee-ball team, "their views about girls in baseball prevented them from taking an active interest in the girls' athletic development and instead caused them to

focus on the attention and behavior deficits that they perceived were displayed by the girls” (p. 90). Similarly, Eliasson (2011) found that Swedish football (soccer) coaches of single-sex teams believed that the differences between boys and girls could be found in their style of play and social habits, and that sex/gender-segregated teams were important in facilitating the 10 and 11-year-old children’s friendships. Eliasson (2011) also found that coaches’ support of sex-segregation was reinforced by their implicit beliefs and indications that boy soccer players were superior to girls; this was revealed in the ways that coaches would encourage the girls’ team to play more like the boys’ teams. Anderson (2008) theorized that part of the process of socializing young boys to orthodox masculine sport culture (defined by an emphasis on transitional masculinity, sexism, and misogyny) is to recruit coaches who are former players within the sport organization. Former players who have thrived and internalized the expectations and values of masculine sport culture are prepared to actively reproduce it with young players (Anderson, 2008). Even when coaches are not recruited from within, they each bring their own understanding of gender, sex, and sport to their coaching practice, and these understandings are informed by structural, social, and cultural contexts (Messner, 2018a).

Constructions of gender are inextricably tied to those of race (Morris, 2007); race and gender both affect how children are perceived and treated, including in sport environments. For example, Epstein et al. (2017) identified that there exists a racist belief whereby Black girls aged 5-14 are widely perceived by adults to require less nurturing, protecting, supporting, and comforting than their white peers. While there is limited research on Black girls in sport, in classrooms, Morris (2007) found that “race shaped adult perceptions of the femininity of Black girls” (p. 491), as educators were more likely to perceive them as more socially mature, sexualized, and combative than their white peers. Black boys experience similar adultification,

resulting in the perception that they are aggressively masculine, justifying harsher punishments and discipline (Morris, 2007). In sport, Black boys are often presumed by others to have natural athletic competence but low discipline or intellect (James, 2011). Indigenous girls who participated in a sport, gender, and development program in Vancouver described wanting to play aggressively to resist the stereotype that Indigenous women were weak (Hayhurst et al., 2015). In a study of South Asian girls in sport programs in Vancouver, Douglas (2015) found that girl participants were perceived by the coaches as weak and timid because of their South Asian culture, and they were therefore assumed to be athletically uninclined. These are just some examples of how gender and race intersect to shape sport experiences. To date, there is little research on coaches' perceptions of whiteness in children's sport, which is both the result of and perpetuates the invisibility of whiteness as an identity and the construction of whiteness as normative (Long & Hylton, 2002). Understanding the ways that gender and race are mutually constructed and the discourses that result from that process allows for coaches to recognize the ways in which their assumptions and practices reproduce broader societal inequalities (Morris, 2007) and harmful discourses that have detrimental effects on young athletes.

Coaches play a significant role in creating sport environments that either support or challenge understandings of gender, especially in a mixed-sex/gender environment. Exploring how coaches understand gender and sex is an important step in challenging the naturalized sex/gender binary that shapes sport in moving towards creating sport spaces in which athletes of all genders can thrive.

Epistemology

I employed an interpretivist epistemology in conducting this research. An interpretivist approach to research is “founded on the premise that the social world is complex and that people,

including researchers and their participants, define their own meanings within respective social, political, and cultural settings” (Potrac et al., 2014, p. 32). Interpretivist researchers believe that the ways that people collectively think and believe creates meaning and shapes our social worlds. These meanings are inherently subjective and only take on expectations of objectivity through means of power, rather than natural truths. They look for “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Interpretivism is a useful epistemology to pair with Feminist Science Studies, outlined below, when exploring discourses of gender and sex, as interpretivism emphasizes that our “perception of reality may be influenced by a number of political, cultural, and social factors” (Potrac et al., 2014, p. 33) while FSS is used to critique the naturalization of sex and gender. Interpretivist researchers recognize that participants’ experiences are central to the research process, researchers themselves cannot separate themselves from that process and that any research is inherently shaped by the experiences and attitudes of the researcher (Potrac et al., 2014). This aligns with the tenets of feminist methodologies, which centre participant’s experiences and knowledge and ask for reflexivity from the researcher. Interpretivism is also complimentary to the method of semi-structured interviews, which enable participants to expand on or go beyond the specific questions in the interview guide.

Theoretical Framework

For this research, I applied a Feminist Science Studies (FSS) framework to explore how children’s soccer coaches understand sex and gender, and how those understandings uphold or resist the sex/gender binary in sport. FSS is a theoretical framework that represents scholars’ multi-disciplinary attempts to interrogate dominant worldviews in science and how those worldviews have shaped our understandings of the world (Archer & Kohler, 2021). FSS theorists

propose that distinctions between biology and culture are not as clear as they are widely understood to be. They ask us to reimagine the relationship between knowing and being (Haraway, 1988) and the ways in which our bodies experience, interact, and are imbued with culture, knowledge, and the world (Cipolla et al., 2017).

FSS emerged in response to the rise in profile of the natural sciences after World War II (Archer & Kohler, 2021). Scientific milestones such as the creation of the atomic bomb, identification of DNA's structure, and human organ transplants created a public belief that science, objectivity, and progress were one and the same (Archer & Kohler, 2021). Activists in the social justice movements of the 1960s and 70s, including second-wave feminism, racial justice, disability rights, and anti-colonial movements, worked to question the knowledge production of the natural sciences, highlighting and interrogating the ways in which patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy operate in scientific knowledge production (Archer & Kohler, 2021).

Two tenets of traditional FSS are 'situated knowledge' and 'strong objectivity,' developed by foundational researchers, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, respectively. Haraway (1988) grappled with the tension between feminists' strong constructionist approaches, which focus, perhaps too narrowly, on the constructions and historically power-based contingencies of meaning, and the "objectivity doctrines" (Haraway, 1988) of traditional scientific disciplines. Rather than seeing objects- including bodies- or the world as passive, "[s]ituated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource" (p. 592). Haraway suggested that both our experiences and interactions with the world are embodied: "The codes of the world are not still, waiting only to be read" (p. 592). She advocated that producing meaning and knowledge related to both

bodies and the world should not be considered a discovery or a reading, but rather a conversation between multiple active agents.

Strong objectivity, as proposed by Harding (1992), was also used to critique the traditional scientific understanding of “objective” as well as the constructionist belief in non-objectivity. Rather, strong objectivity is used to recognize the historical, political, and social context of knowledge production, suggesting that the strongest forms of objectivity come from those who are the most marginalized and benefit least from those contexts. Harding proposed, “Starting thought from these disadvantaged lives enables one to detect the social mechanisms through which power relations are made to appear obviously natural and necessary” (p. 584)

While early FSS scholars highlighted and problematized widely held assumptions about science, objectivity, and knowledge, including how and why women were both involved in and represented through those subjects, later applications of FSS have both expanded their reach and narrowed their scope. FSS approaches cover a wide range of subjects, particularly those that involve the study of bodies in society, including disability studies (Kafer, 2017), somatechnics (Parisi, 2017), Black feminist studies (which introduced nuanced critiques of the idea of humans [and bodies] as objects) (Moten, 2003; Wynter, 2014), queer and trans theory (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Malitino, 2017; Rubin, 2017), and critical public health (Race, 2017). FSS is also an effective compliment to critical sport studies, especially those that interrogate gender and sex within the context of sport (Travers, 2018, 2022).

FSS is continuously being reimagined and integrated into different fields of study, sometimes involving retrospectively placing old scholarship under a new name. As Cipolla et al. (2017) noted of queer feminist science studies (QFSS),

[QFSS] is both new and old. It is new because of the new lens, a new basket for collecting together scholarship that has not necessarily been grouped together before, and is old in that the basket is not only shaped by long histories but also capable of holding scholarship from throughout the history of queer feminist thought. (p. 14)

In their discussion of QFSS, Cipolla et al. (2017) encouraged the unsettling of the presumed distinctions between biology/culture and sex/gender. In her book, *Sexing the body*, Fausto-Sterling (2000) provided a detailed and cross-disciplinary account of how biological knowledge about the body is produced as social fact, and vice versa, particularly the social understanding of sex as binary and dichotomous. Malatino (2017) highlighted the absence of trans and intersex subjects in medical archives and the legacy that medical gatekeeping has left behind on our understanding of sex and gender, while Rubin (2017) discussed how gender is prescribed to intersex people. Referencing Lee (2017), Cipolla et al. (2017) suggested that “sex and gender are neither opposed nor simply mutually constitutive, but are rather multiply interrogational, overdetermined, and entangled with other categories” (p. 10), including race, class, disability, and nation. Intersectional scholars of (queer) FSS have also cautioned that “when we invoke an unmarked gender binary as a core problem of feminist theory, we risk recentring whiteness, because gender was never ‘just two’ but an always racialized and pluralized scientific concept” (p. 12).

Sport is inherently embodied; therefore, it is a rich landscape upon which to apply FSS and ask, How do our understandings of sex and gender inform our understanding of athletes, their bodies, their experiences? How are those understandings entangled with other notions, such as race, class, or ability? Sport is also a location where our understanding of sex and gender result in explicit policy and policing of athletes who are deemed threats to those policies.

Working within a FSS framework, Wells (2020) examined the role of sex testing in elite athletics, and Pape (2020) and Moyer (2021) critiqued the role of testosterone as a means of sex testing and eligibility in women's sport. Although there is limited work in sport studies that explicitly situates itself within an FSS framework, there are several examples of FSS applied to sport studies. One example of this is in the history of sex testing, which is typically conducted at elite levels of competition. Pieper (2016) illustrated how both the desire to and practice of policing the sex (and gender) of Olympic athletes has been shaped heavily by a huge array of factors beyond relevant scientific knowledge. She chronicled the influence of social and cultural understandings of gender (including gender roles and expression), geopolitics- including cold war tensions between the West and East, racist and white supremacist ideologies, anti-doping campaigns, and internal politics within the IOC and affiliated sport and governing bodies. Pieper demonstrated clearly how our understanding of sex in relation to sport is far more complex than a simple sex-binary model implies.

Sport is marked by a sex-binary system in which males are separated from females, most often in the name of biological difference and fairness (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Pieper, 2016). In their book, *Playing with the boys*, McDonagh and Pappano (2008) challenged these assumptions, arguing that they are both based on scientific inaccuracies and deeply informed by cultural messages about gender, deserving, and belonging. They made the case that coercive sex segregation is not a true reflection of sex differences and reinforces a sexed (and gendered) hierarchy, where cisgender men and boys are always on top. Although neither Pieper (2016) nor McDonagh and Pappano (2008) explicitly claim to use a FSS framework, their work calls upon questions and research presented by FSS scholars to ask critical questions about sex, gender, and bodies in sport. A FSS framework can be used to recognize that the sex/gender binary of sport

and the culturally presumed biological fact that men and women- specifically males and females- are categorically distinct is situated within a scientific landscape that has been shaped and informed by white supremacist, colonial, and cisheteropatriarchal values and practices (Brown, 2015; Cipolla, 2017; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Pieper, 2016; Sharrow, 2021). Using a FSS framework enables scholars to interrogate how assumptions of (particularly) white cisheteropatriarchy have informed our collective understandings of bodies (and by extension people), what they can do, and who they are for. We can ask how our collective understandings of sex and gender help to craft our relationship to sport at all levels and what it means for those who engage in sport spaces. A theoretical framework of FSS is complemented by semi-structured interviews and critical discourse analysis, as it provides a framework to give participants space to talk about their understandings of sex and gender and situate those understandings within a broader sociohistorical context. It is also a compliment to feminist methodologies, highlighting and resisting ways that patriarchal systems shape our construction of knowledge.

Methodology

I used feminist methodologies to guide the research process. Feminist methodologies emerged from critical epistemological questions about the relationship between knowledge, gender, and power (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007) and a recognition that the patriarchal realms of social science and academia were failing to represent the knowledge and experience of women (Golombisky, 2018). Taylor (1998) argued, “[u]ltimately feminist methodology aims to outline an approach to research consistent with feminist aims of challenging gender inequality and empowering women” (p. 358). Feminist methodologies have grown and changed over time, reflecting changes in broader feminist movements and centring the role and impact of gender

broadly, rather than a focus on women alone (Landman, 2006). Feminist methodologies provide critical and action-oriented ways to conduct research for the benefit of people who research has historically excluded and that both interrogates and disrupts the role of gender in society. These methodologies are used to explore how gendered ideology, such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, and gender essentialism, affect people of all genders and how these ideologies may be disrupted in the name of a more inclusive and equitable society (Gardiner, 2004).

Although feminist methodologies consist of a range of practices and applications, there are widely agreed upon features: attention to gender and inequality; emphasis on the value of experiences, especially experiences of those who have been traditionally marginalized in research; reflexivity and awareness of the researcher's position, influence, and interpretation on their research; participatory methods, which connect the community being researched with the researcher rather than the researcher existing solely as a higher power; and a commitment to social action (Taylor, 1998). Researchers who use feminist methodologies are concerned with the ways that institutionalized research and practice reproduce structural inequalities and marginalization; such researchers engage in "studying up" (Harding & Norberg, 2011, p. 2005) to understand how structural practices of power shape every day social relations (Harding & Norberg, 2011).

Feminist methodologies allow researchers to reflect on their own assumptions of research. Reflexivity is the process of self-reflection and accountability for one's role in the research process (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). Reflexivity in feminist methodologies has been critiqued, however, for centring the researcher's social identities rather than the role those identities play in the research process (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). Over time, the concept of researcher reflexivity has become more nuanced and purposeful, moving beyond simply

acknowledging the social location of the researcher towards a more accountable practice of interrogating how one's social location may affect knowledge construction and the research process itself (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007).

To effectively and responsibly employ feminist methodologies in my research, I had a thorough reflexive practice related to my own role in co-constructing this research. This included critical reflection on my own experiences, beliefs, and values, my relationship to power structures, and my past experiences as both a player and a coach. One of the ways that I practiced reflexivity was with the help of my therapist, who provided me with a professional space to better understand the interactions between my experiences and beliefs and my role as a researcher.

My role as a children's soccer coach positioned me close to the participants of this research and the subject of this research. In many cases, it also allowed for complex and nuanced interviews based on my shared experiences and knowledge with the participants. It also required reflexivity and curiosity about how my own experiences and knowledge informed and influenced the research process. Notably, my experiences in the world, including as a player, coach, and researcher, are also implicitly shaped by my experiences as a middle-class queer white person, and one challenge that I experienced in conducting this research was trying to ensure that the ways that I wrote and thought about gender were not assuming a default position of whiteness. One way that I tried to achieve this was by reading the work of and listening to Black, Indigenous and people of colour talk about their own understanding and relationship to gender.

My own experiences as a soccer player and a children's soccer coach were central to my decision to undertake this research. I have participated in both mixed-sex and sex-segregated soccer environments throughout my time as a player and a coach. My organized soccer

experiences as a player have primarily been on sex-segregated teams, playing on girls' and women's teams in southern Ontario, but many of my formative years as a player were spent playing with my brother and our friends in the park, where neither gender nor sex was an organizing principle. In addition to this, the majority of my formative coaching years were spent working with mixed-sex groups, experience which then informed my coaching practices when I moved to sex-segregated groups.

Both as a reflexive exercise, and method of community participation, I had two community advisors who are coaches who reviewed my interview guide and offered their thoughts and feedback on how to improve its accessibility and clarity. Both coaches offered minor changes to the order and phrasing of questions, and one coach provided a suggestion for an additional question, which was included in the final interview guide.

Through my research, I explored the understandings that soccer coaches of children's mixed-sex teams have of sex and gender and the implications that these have for their coaching practice. Employing feminist methodologies allowed me to examine the ways in which sex and gender are implicated in children's soccer programs and how coaches' understandings and practices can be situated within the broader picture of sport, gendered ideology, sex-essentialism, and cisheteropatriarchy. It also allowed me to interrogate how sport can be a space that cultivates and perpetuates gender ideologies that work to control and constrain people, their bodies, and their identities. Through the use of feminist methodologies, I was able to emphasize social action and understand how coaches' coaching practices are informed by their understanding of gender and sex. This is an important step in resisting the ways that enforced sex and gender binaries constrain and control people, with the ultimate aim being to contribute to the creation of sport spaces that are just and inclusive for children of all genders.

Methods

Recruitment and Sampling

I selected participants for this study through purposive and snowball sampling procedures (Ranjbar et al., 2012). Sampling criteria included being a soccer coach in Ontario who works with children between four and eight years of age, having at least two years of experience coaching mixed sex/gender soccer programs, and having taken at least one NCCP community soccer coaching course (such as Active Start or FUNdamentals). I identified youth soccer clubs in Ontario through web searches and used clubs' contact pages. I then created a list of potential participants who worked with the target age group. Next, I reached out to coaches via email with my recruitment text. Employing snowball sampling, I asked coaches I interviewed to pass the study information on to colleagues who may be interested. Initially, coaches were required to be at least 18 years of age, but that age was adjusted with the approval of the Research Ethics Board to 16 years of age to include one coach. In total, 11 coaches participated in the study. Prior to starting my data collection, I received Research Ethics Board Approval from the University of Ottawa.

Self-Identification Survey

After participants expressed interest in participating in the study, I emailed them a copy of the consent form to review and a short self-identification sociodemographic survey. The survey asked for their personal pronouns, gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation. It also asked if participants wanted to disclose any additional identities that they felt were relevant to their coaching practice. All questions were optional and open ended, allowing participants to answer in their own words. For example, the question on gender read, "Gender identity means a person's internal sense of whether they're a man or a woman, both, or neither. It's a person's

internal, deeply-held sense of one's gender. Possible gender identities include but are not limited to: cisgender* woman, trans woman/femme, non-binary, cisgender man, trans man/masc etc.

(*Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.) How would you best describe your gender?"

I chose to include the identity categories of gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation in the self-identification survey (see Appendix X) for two primary reasons: To make visible participants' multiply held identities and because these are all social demographics that are implicated and embedded in the history of gender and sport. Historically, in gender and sport research and advocacy, white middle-class women have advocated for their belonging in a sport mainly at the expense of racialized, lesbian, queer, trans, non-binary, and poor women and non-binary athletes (Hall, 2002; Pieper, 2016). In enabling participants to share their identities, I attempted to make visible identities, such as sexual orientation and race, which are underrepresented in sport research but that have a deep and complex historical relationship to sport and gender. However, in the process of completing this project, I have had doubts about whether asking for and highlighting these personal identities was truly valuable for the research and whether it created a precarious situation in which participants with marginalized identities might have felt uncomfortable being asked to disclose them, even with the opportunity to decline to answer. While I am unsure if I would construct and administer a similar survey in future projects, if I were to do so, there are several ways that I would amend the survey I used in this project, primarily the language of the questions.

Prior to ethics approval, I spent a great deal of time crafting the survey to make it as inclusive as possible (Hughes et al., 2016). As part of this process, I sought feedback from both academic peers and friends who hold different identities. Despite this care, there are aspects of

this survey that in hindsight and for future projects I would amend. Specifically, I would restructure the question on gender differently, excluding the qualification of cisgender or transgender and adding a question that asked if participants identified as transgender, cisgender, both, or neither. While there are still limitations to this wording, this would help to avoid any (unintentional) implication that trans women or trans men’s gender are conditional, and it would allow participants to identify their gender more freely. I would also word the question on pronouns differently, specifying that it is asking participants for the pronouns they use for themselves, not for the people around them – as that was how several participants interpreted the question. I followed up with the participants who answered this way to learn their personal pronouns.

Table 1. Participant information

Pseudonym (pronouns)	Years Coaching	Gender	Race and Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation
Chelsea (she/her)	15	Cisgender female	White	Straight
Caroline (she/her)	23	Woman	White Canadian	Heterosexual
Aaron (he/him)	19	Man	Black	Heterosexual
Matt (he/him)	8	Cis male	White Eastern European	Heterosexual
Nate (he/him)	12	Cis male	Latin-American	Heterosexual/Straight
Daniel (he/him)	14	Cis man	White/Jewish	Heterosexual
Amelia (she/her)	9	Cisgender female	Portuguese/white	Straight
Anna (she/her)	7	Female	Caucasian, European	Straight
Cal (he/his)	18	Man	Mixed – Black/White	Straight
Sasha (she/her)	4	Woman/ female	Indian and Canadian	Bisexual
Stella (she/her)	8	Cis woman	White/Caucasian	Heterosexual (straight)

Interviews

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to facilitate the construction of data on children's soccer coaches' understanding of sex and gender. Interviews are a common research practice across disciplines. Early interview-based research was conducted by Charles Booth, who used interviews to inform his study of the social living conditions of people in London (Brinkman, 2017). Throughout the 1900s, interviewing became a more popular method of collecting data. Freud and Piaget were vital figures in the growth of this method: Freud formed and implemented his psychoanalytic theory through conversations (interviews) with his clients, and Piaget questioned children while observing how they formed and conveyed their thoughts (Kvale & Birdmann, 2008). Throughout this time, the interview was, for the most part, considered to be an objective and neutral method of collecting data. The assumption during these interviews was that the skilled interviewer could effectively uncover (or diagnose) the meaning behind what the interviewee said (Brinkmann, 2017).

In more recent times, qualitative researchers have come to view the interview as a process between the interviewer and the interviewee. The conversation that occurs is contingent on both parties' experiences. Brinkmann (2017) and Fontana and Frey (2005) both highlighted the role of the "interview society:" In modern, Western culture, the individual self is highly valued, as is the processes of reflecting and communicating experiences related to the self. These cultural values position the interview as a useful and effective method of collecting data and speak to the standard practice of interview-based research.

Interviews can be divided into three main categories based on their format and structure: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured (Brinkman, 2017). Quantitative researchers typically utilize a structured interview approach in which participants are asked specific and

direct questions to generate answers that can be quantified and compared among participants. This approach has inherently positivist assumptions, in that asking the “right questions” will lead to a set of predictable answers (which then can be directly compared to the answers of other participants), and that the researcher is able to act as an unbiased, independent actor. In contrast to structured interviews, unstructured interviews typically consist of a single question or prompt that allows the participant to engage in a story-telling process while the interviewer remains an active listener (Brinkmann, 2017). While this approach may allow for unexpected data to emerge, it may result in a great deal of energy spent on discussion that is not pertinent to the research question at hand. Finally, the most commonly used interview in qualitative research is the semi-structured interview. The semi-structured format allows the researcher and participant to engage in a conversation that is more likely to recognize the researcher as an active participant in the construction of knowledge (Brinkmann, 2017). A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to inquire further about topics brought up by the participant and focus on information that is directly relevant to the research question. Researchers are able to use “probes” to elicit further discussion and clarification of participants’ responses (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The semi-structured interview also allows more space for the participant to expand on their answers and mention more contextually relevant information than a structured interview would (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This flexibility makes semi-structured interviews a strong method of data collection within an interpretivist epistemology because, as Smith and Sparkes (2016) described, interpretivist researchers are travelers, journeying together with participants to construct knowledge together.

Due to the physical limitations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted interviews using the teleconferencing platform, Zoom, an approach that provided many benefits.

Virtual interviews did not require participants and me to be in the same geographical location, which meant that I was not limited in recruiting local coaches, and I was instead able to recruit participants from anywhere in Ontario. Virtual interviews also allowed for more flexibility in scheduling (Nehls et al., 2015) and greater accessibility, although this was conditioned on participants having access to the appropriate technology and internet access. Eliminating the need for travel to the interview location meant that the time commitment for participants was considerably less, and reduced barriers such as childcare and scheduling. Participants were also able to engage in the research in a setting in which they were comfortable, such as in their home, and offered participants greater anonymity by not meeting with me directly (Nehls et al., 2015). Video interviews can elicit richer data than in-person interviews, as participants may feel less vulnerable than when faced with a researcher in person (Nehls et al., 2015). Indeed, I found that participants appeared to be at ease with the virtual format.

I conducted interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The guide was loosely divided into two sections: the first focused on coaches' experiences working with mixed-sex teams and their reflections on gender in their coaching practice, and the second on their coach education experiences and how they felt gender was approached in those education spaces. As noted in my methodology section, two coaches with whom I had a pre-existing relationship reviewed the initial draft of the interview guide and offered minor suggestions to make it more accessible and comprehensive. Once I began conducting interviews, I continued to revise the guide based on what was working, what was missing, and what needed adjusting. In most cases, questions that I added were the result of insights from coaches, who often brought up valuable points or questions not specifically prompted by the interview guide. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if there

was anything else they wanted to talk about that we had not covered in the interview and if they had any feedback for me. One coach suggested that I speak more to my own experiences and reason for doing this research, and several coaches said that they considered this to be important research and were glad to see it being done. After transcribing each participant's interview, I emailed it back to them in a password-protected email and asked them to make any revisions that they felt were necessary. Only one coach made changes to their transcript, making several revisions for the sake of clarity. Then, as I describe below, I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Discourses are ways of thinking and speaking, which enable and constrain the production of knowledge and shape our social worlds (Cheek, 2004). There are many conceptions of what constitutes a discourse, and they are applied variably across different disciplines, resulting in different forms of discourse analysis (Cheek, 2004). Analysts who use CDA are concerned with connecting texts, discourses, and historical contexts to understand how knowledge and power inform our experiences, beliefs, and interactions (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). CDA is a valuable research tool for researchers who wish to “uncover the ideological assumptions hidden in the worlds of our written text or oral speech in order to resist” (Mogashoa, 2014. p. 106).

For this research, I analysed my data using a CDA approach, examining interview transcripts of the participating coaches for discourses related to gender, sex, and sport. After conducting and transcribing semi-structured interviews I employed Parker's (2014) approach to CDA, which involves identifying and interrogating discourses. Parker (2014) defined a discourse by 10 (seven primary and three auxiliary) criteria, pairing each characteristic with two prompts of analysis. The seven primary criteria Parker (2014) identified include the following: 1)

discourses are realized in text, 2) are about objects, 3) contain subjects, 4) are coherent sets of meanings, 5) refer to other discourses, 6) reflect on its own way of speaking, and 7) are historically located (Parker, 2014).

While Parker (2014) noted that these criteria are sufficient in and of themselves, he urged researchers to consider three auxiliary criteria in their analysis of discourses: they support institutions, reproduce power relations, and have ideological effects. The analysis processes that Parker (2014) tied to each of these additional criteria respectively included asking a series of questions: Which institutions are reinforced or subverted by a discourse?; which people are motivated to promote or dissolve it and why?; and how is the discourse in question related to other discourses which sanction oppression or shape historical narratives? For my research, this meant identifying and interrogating discourses related to gender and sport and the historical and institutional stakeholders connected to those discourses. These questions guided my analysis and thus results and discussion, as I highlighted discourses with significant social and political implications related to gender.

Having provided the scaffolding (Crotty, 2020) that structured my research, in the next chapter I present my “publishable paper” in which I explore the question, “how do children’s soccer coaches of mixed-sex programs understand sex and gender?” Following that paper, I present my conclusion chapter.

References

- Anderson, E. (2008). "I used to think women were weak": Orthodox masculinity, gender segregation, and sport. *Sociological Forum*, 23(2), 257-280.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00058.x>
- Ainsworth, C. (2015). Sex redefined. *Nature News*, 518(7539), 288-291.
<https://www.nature.com/articles/518288a>
- Archer, S. M., & Kohler, A. E. (2020). Feminist science studies. In N.A. Naples (Ed.), *Companion to feminist studies* (pp. 247-263). John Wiley & Sons.
- Batelaan, K., & Abdel-Shehid, G. (2021). On the Eurocentric nature of sex testing: The case of Caster Semenya. *Social Identities*, 27(2), 146-165.
- Bellemare, A., Kolbegger, K., Vermes, J. (2021, November 7). Anti-trans views are worryingly prevalent and disproportionately harmful, community and experts warn. *CBC*.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/anti-transgender-narratives-canada-1.6232947>
- Bermon, S., & Garnier, P. Y. (2021). Correction: Serum androgen levels and their relation to performance in track and field: Mass spectrometry results from 2127 observations in male and female elite athletes. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 55(17), 1309.
- Brinkmann, S. (2017). The interview. In N.K. Denzin & L.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 997-1038). SAGE.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2001.0472a.x>
- Brown, L. E. C. (2015). Sporting space invaders: Elite bodies in track and field, a South African context. *South African Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 7-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2014.989666>
- Butler, J. (2011). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

- Cipolla, C., Gupta, K., Rubin, D.A., & Willey, A (2017), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader*. University of Washington Press.
- Cheek, J. (2004). At the margins?: Discourse analysis and qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(8), 1140-1150. doi:10.1177/1049732304266820
- Crotty, M. (2020). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Routledge.
- de la Cretaz (2021). *What about the trans athletes who compete — and win — in men’s sports?* InsideHook. <https://www.insidehook.com/article/sports/trans-athletes-win-boys-sports>
- de la Cretaz, B. (2021b, June 24). *Japanese soccer player Kumi Yokoyama comes out as transgender*. Them. <https://www.them.us/story/japanese-soccer-player-kumi-yokoyama-comes-out-as-transgender>
- Doucet, A. & Mauthner, N. (2007). Feminist methodologies and epistemology. In C. D. Bryant & D. L. Peck (Eds.), *21st century sociology* (Vol. 2, pp. 36- 42). SAGE.
- Douglas, D. D. (2015). Race, gender and sport: Female athletes’ experiences of gendered racism. *Education and Society*, 18(4), 453-474.
- Eliasson, I. (2011). Gendered socialization among girls and boys in children’s football teams in Sweden. *Soccer & Society*, 12(6), 820-833.
- Epstein, R., Blake, J., & González, T. (2017). *Girlhood interrupted: The erasure of Black girls’ childhood*. Centre on Poverty and Equality. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3000695>
- Factora, J. (2020, December 8). *Argentina’s first trans pro soccer player takes the field in historic match*. Them. <https://www.them.us/story/argentina-first-trans-pro-soccer-player-mara-gomez>
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*.

Basic Books.

- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2005). *The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., p. 695–727). SAGE.
- Forsyth, J. (2007). The Indian Act and the (re) shaping of Canadian Aboriginal sport practices. *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études canadiennes*, (35), 95-111. <https://doi.org/10.7202/040765ar>
- Gardiner, J. K. (2004). Men, masculinities, and feminist theory. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 35-50). SAGE. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452233833>
- Golombisky, K. (2017). Feminist methodology. In L. Leslie (Eds.), *Communication research methods in postmodern culture* (pp. 172-195). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231730>
- Gubby, L., & Wellard, I. (2016). Sporting equality and gender neutrality in korfbal. *Sport in Society*, 19(8-9), 1171-1185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1096261>
- Habkirk, E. J. (2017). From Indian boys to Canadian men? The use of cadet drill in the Canadian Indian residential school system. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30(2), 227-247. <https://doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.13>
- Haggar, A. A. (2021). *An intersectional analysis of the recruitment and participation of second-generation African Canadian adolescent girls in a community basketball program in Ottawa, Canada* [Masters Thesis]. Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa.
- Hall, M. A. (2002). *The girl and the game: A history of women's sport in Canada*. Broadview Press. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.20.1.78>

- Hall, M.A. (2003). The game of choice: Girls' and women's soccer in Canada. *Soccer & Society*, 4(2-3), 30-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970512331390815>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist studies*, 14(3), 575-599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Harding, S. (1992). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity?". *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 437-470.
- Harding, S., & Norberg, K. (2005). New feminist approaches to social science methodologies: an introduction. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(4), 2009–2015. <https://doi.org/10.1086/428420>
- Hargreaves, J. (2002) The Victorian cult of the family and the early years of female sport. In S. Scraton & A. Flintoff. (Eds), *Gender and sport: A reader* (pp. 53-66). Psychology Press.
- Hayhurst, L. M., Giles, A. R., & Radforth, W. M. (2015). 'I want to come here to prove them wrong': Using a post-colonial feminist participatory action research (PFPAR) approach to studying sport, gender and development programmes for urban Indigenous young women. *Sport in Society*, 18(8), 952-967.
- Howell, C. (2018, September 28). *Black bases/Black ice: The multi-sport careers of Canadian Black athletes and the struggle for social justice* [Paper Presentation]. Telling the Stories of Race and Sports in Canada. Windsor. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/215511370>
- Hughes, J. L., Camden, A. A., & Yangchen, T. (2016). Rethinking and updating demographic questions: Guidance to improve descriptions of research samples. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 21(3), 138-151.
- International Olympic Committee. (2021). *IOC framework on fairness, inclusion*

and non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sex variations.

https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/News/2021/11/IOC-Framework-Fairness-Inclusion-Non-discrimination-2021.pdf?_ga=2.89933663.512106908.1639443070-884741604.1639001098

James, C. E. (2012). Students “at risk” stereotypes and the schooling of Black boys. *Urban Education, 47*(2), 464-494.

Kafer, A. (2017). At the same time, out of time: Ashley X. In C. Cipolla, K. Gupta, D.A. Rubin, & A. Willey (Eds.), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader* (pp. 114-126). University of Washington Press.

Kane, M. J. (1995). Resistance/transformation of the oppositional binary: Exposing sport as a continuum. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 19*(2), 191-218.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20251>

Landers, M. A., & Fine, G. A. (2001). Learning life's lessons in tee ball: The reinforcement of gender and status in kindergarten sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 13*(1), 87-93.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.13.1.87>

Landman, M. (2006). Getting quality in qualitative research: A short introduction to feminist methodology and methods. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, 65*(4), 429-433.
<https://doi.org/10.1079/PNS2006518>

Larneby, M. (2016). Transcending gender hierarchies? Young people and floorball in Swedish school sport. *Sport in Society, 19*(8-9), 1202-1213. DOI:
[10.1080/17430437.2016.1159194](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2016.1159194)

Malatino, H. (2017). Gone, missing: Queering and racializing absence in trans and intersex

- archives. In C. Cipolla, K. Gupta, D.A. Rubin, & A. Willey. (Eds.), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader* (pp. 157-176). University of Washington Press.
- Markowitz, S. (2017). Pelvic Politics: Sexual dimorphism and racial difference. In C. Cipolla, K. Gupta, D.A. Rubin, & A. Willey (Eds.), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader* (pp. 43-55). University of Washington Press.
- McDonagh, E., & Pappano, L. (2008). *Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in sports*. Oxford University Press.
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2, 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- Mendez, Xhercis. (2015) "Notes toward a decolonial feminist methodology: revisiting the race/gender matrix." *Trans-Scripts*, 5, 41-56.
- Messner, M. (2009). *It's all for the kids: Gender, families, and youth sports*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520943452>
- Messner, M. (2011). Gender ideologies, youth sports, and the production of soft essentialism. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 28(2), 151-170.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.28.2.151>
- Messner, M. (2018). Barbie girls versus sea monsters: Children constructing gender. In C. Cooky & M.A. Messner (Eds.), *No slam dunk: Gender, sport and the unevenness of social change* (pp. 93-113). Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t6p7fx>
- Meyer, E. J., & Keenan, H. (2018). Can policies help schools affirm gender diversity? A policy archaeology of transgender-inclusive policies in California schools. *Gender and Education*, 30(6), 736-753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1483490>

- Mogashoa, T. (2014). Understanding critical discourse analysis in qualitative research. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, 1(7), 104-113.
- Morris, E. W. (2007). “Ladies” or “loudies”? Perceptions and experiences of Black girls in classrooms. *Youth & Society*, 38(4), 490-515.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X06296778>
- Moten, F. (2003). *In the break: The aesthetics of the black radical tradition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Moyer, V. (2021). Leaky bodies and the stickiness of testosterone in women's athletics. *Somatechnics*, 11(2), 211-227.
- Musto, M. (2014). Athletes in the pool, girls and boys on deck: The contextual construction of gender in coed youth swimming. *Gender & Society*, 28(3), 359-380.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213515945>
- Musto, M., & Messner, M. A. (2016). *Child's Play*. Rutgers University Press.
- Nehls, K., Smith, B. D., & Schneider, H. A. (2015). Video-conferencing interviews in qualitative research. *Enhancing qualitative and mixed methods research with technology*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-6493-7.ch006>.
- Norman, M. E., Hart, M., & Petherick, L. (2019). Indigenous gender reformations: Physical culture, settler colonialism, and the politics of containment. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 36(2), 113-123. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2018-0130>
- Nzindukiyimana, O., & Wamsley, K. B. (2019). ‘We Played Ball Just the Same’: Selected Recollections of Black Women’s Sport Experiences in Southern Ontario (1920s–1940s). *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 36(13-14), 1289-1310.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2019.1691533>

- Pape, M. (2020). Ignorance and the gender binary: Resisting complex epistemologies of sex and testosterone. In *Sports, Society, and Technology* (pp. 219-245). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parisi, L. (2017). "The Bio-Technological Impact" and "Abstract Sex". In C. Cipolla, K. Gupta, D.A. Rubin, & A. Willey (Eds.), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader* (pp. 282-295). University of Washington Press.
- Parker, I. (2014). *Discourse dynamics: Critical analysis for social and individual psychology*. Routledge.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. SAGE.
- Pieper, L. (2016). *Sex testing: gender policing in Women's sports*. University of Illinois Press.
- Potrac, P., Jones, R. L., & Nelson, L. (2014). Interpretivism. In L. Nelson, R. Groom & P. Potrac (Eds.), *Research methods in sports coaching* (pp. 31-41). Routledge.
- Ranjbar, H., Haghdoost, A. A., Salsali, M., Khoshdel, A., Soleimani, M., & Bahrami, N. (2012). Sampling in qualitative research: A guide for beginning. *Annals of Military and Health Sciences Research*, 10(3), 238-250.
- Rubin, D.A. (2017). "An unnamed blank that craved a name": A genealogy of intersex as gender. In C. Cipolla, K. Gupta, D.A. Rubin, & A. Willey (Eds.), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader* (pp. 82-101). University of Washington Press.
- Schmalz, D. L., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2006). Girlie girls and manly men: Children's stigma consciousness of gender in sports and physical activities. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 38(4), 536-557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2006.11950091>
- Sharrow, E. A. (2021). Sports, transgender rights and the bodily politics of cisgender supremacy. *Laws*, 63(10), 63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/laws10030063>

- Solutions Research Group. (2014, June 10). *Massive Competition in Pursuit of the \$5.7 Billion Canadian Youth Sports Market*. Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc.
<http://www.srgnet.com/2014/06/10/massive-competition-in-pursuit-of-the-5-7-billion-canadian-youth-sports-market/>
- Smith, B. & Sparkes, A.C. (2016). *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise*. Routledge.
- Taylor, V. 1998. Feminist methodology in social movements research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 21(4): 357–379. doi:10.1023/A:1023376225654.
 supremacy. *Laws*, 63(10), 63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/laws10030063>
- Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. Rutgers University Press.
- Thul, C. M., LaVoi, N. M., Hazelwood, T. F., & Hussein, F. (2016). “A right to the gym”: Physical activity experiences of East African immigrant girls. In M.A. Messner & M. Musto (Eds.), *Child's play: Sport in kids' worlds* (pp. 165-178). Rutgers University Press
- Travers. (2008). The sport nexus and gender injustice. *Studies in Social Justice*, 2(1), 79-101.
<https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v2i1.969>
- Travers. (2016). Transgender and gender-nonconforming kids and the binary requirements of sport participation in North America. In M.A. Messner & M. Musto (Eds.), *Child's play: Sport in kids' worlds* (pp. 179-201). Rutgers University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813571478>
- Travers. (2018). Transgender kids and sport participation. In V. Krane (Eds), *Sex, gender, and sexuality in sport: Queer inquiries* (pp. 163-177). Routledge.
- Travers (2022). Trans and Non-Binary Experience in Sport.
- Trussell, D., & McTeer, W. (2007). Children's sport participation in Canada: Is it a level playing

- field?. *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études Canadiennes*, (35), 113-132. <https://doi.org/10.7202/040766ar>
- Veale, J. F., Watson, R. J., Peter, T., & Saewyc, E. M. (2017). Mental health disparities among Canadian transgender youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 60(1), 44-49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.09.014>
- Wells, C. J. (2020). *On the resiliency of sex testing in sport* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- White, S. (2021). Black girls swim: Race, gender, and embodied aquatic histories. *Girlhood Studies*, 14(2), 63-79.
- Wamsley, K. B. (2007). The public importance of men and the importance of public men: Sport and masculinities in nineteenth-century Canada. In K. Young & P. White (Eds.), *Sport and gender in Canada* (pp. 24-39). Oxford University Press.
- Wiggins, D. K. (1996). A history of highly competitive sport for American children. *Children and youth in sport: A biopsychosocial perspective*. Brown & Benchmark.
- Wiggins, D. K. (2013). A worthwhile effort? History of organized youth sport in the United States. *Kinesiology Review*, 2(1), 65-75. <https://doi.org/10.1123/krj.2.1.65>
- Wynter, S. (2014). Towards the sociogenic principle: Fanon, the puzzle of conscious experience, “identity” and what it’s like to be “black.” In M. Duran-Cogan & A. Gomez-Moriana (Eds.), *National identity and sociopolitical change: Latin America between marginalization and integration* (pp. 30-67). University of Minnesota Press.
- Woodstock, Tuck. (Host). (2021, Oct. 25). Gender 101: Revisited (101) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Gender Reveal*.
- Wynter, S. (1990). Afterword: beyond Miranda's meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’

of Caliban's 'woman'. In C. Boyce Davies & E. Savory Fio (Eds) *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean women and literature*, (pp. 355-73) Africa World Press.

Yoestring, T. (2021, April 28). *NWSL announcers really need to fucking stop misgendering athletes*. The18. <https://the18.com/en/soccer-entertainment/nwsl-misgendering-announcers-quinn>

**Chapter Two: An Exploration of How Ontario Children's Soccer Coaches of Mixed-Sex
Programs Understand Sex and Gender**

Abstract

In this study, I explore how soccer coaches of children's mixed-sex programs in Ontario understand sex and gender in the context of their coaching practices. Informed by feminist science studies and feminist methodologies, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 coaches. Through critical discourse analysis, I identified the coaches (re)production of three discourses: 1) gender is constructed but categorical; 2) inevitable and hierarchal sex differences necessitate sex-segregation; and 3) girls' sport is vulnerable and girls in sport require support. The results of this study indicate that these coaches' understandings of sex and gender are heavily informed by discourses of sex essentialism and sex and gender difference, which together legitimize the need for a binary sex/gender model of sport.

Sport perpetuates both a sex and gender binary. As Kane (2015) characterized, “sport [is] an ideal setting for establishing and articulating the [a]ssumption that there are two, and only two, obviously universal, bipolar, mutually exclusive sexes that necessarily correspond to stable gender identity and gendered behaviour” (p. 342). Despite what the organization of sport and much of society imply, neither sex nor gender is binary in nature. Histories of the sex and gender binaries in sport illuminate the ways in which binary, naturalized notions of sex and gender have been used as a means to control, police, and subordinate those who resist a colonial agenda of white supremacy and cisheteropatriarchy (Batelaan & Abdel-Shahid, 2021; Pieper, 2016; Sharrow, 2021). The assumption that men and women athletes must exist and compete in separate spheres promotes a hierarchical and binary understanding of sex, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy in which there is limited evidence available to refute the notion that women cannot compete with men (Kane, 1995). Researchers have argued convincingly that coercive sex-segregation practices in sport do more to construct than reflect any actual sex differences (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008) or binary distinctions of sex (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2020). In this paper, I refer to the binary model of sport as the sex/gender binary to emphasize the conflation of sex and gender, but I refer to the organizational process of dividing athletes as sex-segregation in light of the legitimacy sport gives to sex but not gender identification.

The discourses that shape and inform the coercive sex-segregation of adult athletes also affect children’s experiences of sport. Despite the fact that there are no notable physiological or developmental athletic differences among prepubescent children of different sexes (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2009), children are often segregated by sex/gender in sport. This practice has harmful implications for children of all genders and their access and relationship to sport, but it is particularly marginalizing for trans, Two Spirit, and gender-expansive athletes

whose presence delegitimizes the binary sex/gender model itself. Even in mixed-sex sport environments, binary assumptions of sex and gender that shape sport and sport culture continue to exert pressure both on how those constructs are understood and operate in those spaces (Travers, 2018). Coaches play integral roles in both maintaining or destabilizing binary assumptions of sex/gender in sport spaces. In this paper, therefore, I explore how soccer coaches of children aged four to eight in mixed-sex soccer programs understand sex and gender.

Literature Review

In this section, I provide an overview of research on how the sex/gender binary in sport affects children of all genders, contextualizing these impacts within the sex binary's historical roots in colonization, white supremacy, and control. Further, I review research on mixed-sex sport environments and highlight research on children's sport coaches and the ways in which they have been found to both uphold and resist binary sex and gender ideologies and discourses.

Children's Sport and the Sex Binary

In Canada, organized youth soccer leagues primarily follow the model of adult professional and national teams (Hall, 2002) by dividing players by sex and age. This means that there are distinct girls' and boys' teams for most age groups, despite the fact that individual differences among children of the same gender are greater than between children of different genders (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2009). The youngest age groups in sport can be an exception to the sex segregated organizational norm, and based on a review of Ontario soccer clubs' websites, mixed-sex soccer programs are most consistently found with children ages four to six, and occasionally up to age eight.

The sex/gender binary model works to uphold heteropatriarchal norms that constrain children of all genders (Anderson, 2008; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Messner, 2009).

Anderson (2008) argued that sex segregated sport enables an ideology of orthodox masculinity, which he described as, “including risk taking, homophobia, self-sacrifice, the marginalizing of others, a willingness to inflict bodily damage, and the acceptance of pain and injury” (p. 261). Anderson argued that orthodox masculinity is expressed through sexist, misogynistic, and anti-feminine views among men athletes. Messner (2011) addressed the experiences of boys and critiqued the soft essentialist gender ideology of sport, which promotes flexibility of gender expectations for girls but not for boys, relegating the latter to traditional gender roles and expectations and reinforcing the expectation that sport is the domain of boys and men. McDonagh and Pappano (2008) highlighted the ways in which a coercive sex-segregated model undermines girls’ sport by perpetuating assumptions of girls’ difference and athletic inferiority, and justifying girls’ access to fewer resources and cultural legitimacy than boys’ and men’s sport. Taken together, this research illustrates the range of harms that stem from a sport model centred around a sex/gender binary and sex-segregation that affect both boys and girls, but the most significant harms of a sex/gender binary in sport are experienced by trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive athletes.

To date, there has been limited research on the experiences of trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive children in sport. In one exception to this, in their research with trans and gender nonconforming children, Travers (2016) identified many barriers to sport participation and belonging, including sex-segregated and sex-differentiated facilities and programs. They found that trans and gender non-conforming children are often forced to make a choice to stay “stealth” and remain their perceived (but inaccurate) gender or to make a binary transition, with medical intervention beginning in puberty, if they want to stay in sport, or drop out of sport altogether. Travers (2016) highlighted that while some children may thrive with a binary medical

transition, many are more comfortable outside of binary gender, and these children are left behind by a sex-based structure of sport. The harms caused to children by sex segregated sport do not occur by accident but reflect the historical, social, and political agenda enforced by a naturalized sex and gender binary. As Travers (2018) argued, “Issues relating to transgender participation in sport cannot be understood independently from the historical role of sport in normalizing and reinforcing Eurocentric binary gender norms, gender inequality (male superiority), heterosexuality, and related assumptions about sex difference” (p. 166). I examine these issues in the following sections.

The Sex and Gender Binary as a Means of Control

The sex/gender binary, wherein it is purported that there are two discrete sexes and corresponding genders, has long been used to perpetuate colonial, white supremacist, and patriarchal means of control (Brown, 2015). State sanctioned genocidal practices of colonization in the territories currently known as Canada enforced strict colonial binary gender policies to simultaneously assimilate Indigenous Peoples into Western Christianity while alienating them from their own cultures, land, and practices (Habkirk, 2017; Norman et al., 2019). Laing (2021) explained that “processes of colonization have led to interpellation of the Western gender binary in many Indigenous communities, which causes harm to many trans, queer, and two-spirit Indigenous community members.” (p. 29). European settlers used Indigenous Peoples’ recognition of more than two genders as evidence of their inferiority and justification for land theft and violent genocidal practices (Robinson, 2020).

Residential schools in Canada were a key site of this violence (Forsyth, 2007): Indigenous children, after being forcibly or coercively taken from their communities and lands, were forced to speak only English or French and to adhere to strict Western gender norms. In

these residential schools, sex-segregated sport and physical activity became tools for imprinting Western masculinity based in Muscular Christianity (Habkirk, 2017). The emphasis on boys' sport was part of a larger project of colonization (Forsyth, 2007; Norman et al., 2019), including replacing Indigenous traditional physical practices with sporting activities with implicit Christian and patriarchal values.

The sex-segregation of sport and physical activity was not only enacted in residential schools; it was the primary method of organization and enforcement of gender norms in many schools throughout Canada. Distinct physical education spheres in white middle-and upper-class spaces enforced and perpetuated cultural beliefs not only about gender and sex as binary and essential, but of the distinct roles and capabilities of girls and boys when it came to physicality. In Ontario in the late 1800s and early 1900s, boys' physical education classes were centred around militaristic drills, gymnastics, and rough sports. Girls' classes, on the other hand, emphasized light calisthenics to the end of refining their posture and developing grace (Francis & Lanthrop, 2011), and rigorous physical activity was deemed both inappropriate decorum and a threat to the fragility of girls' bodies and health (Hall, 2002). Stemming from a eugenic desire for white supremacy, these values were heavily classed and raced, reserved for wealthy white girls and women while those who were working class/racialized were still expected to engage in manual labour with little concern for their health (Hall, 2002). Expectations of feminine fragility shaped by whiteness still shapes sport today (Harrison, 2001; Withycombe, 2011).

Mixed-Sex Sport in a Sex-Segregated Landscape

Most organized sport is defined by a sex/gender binary, which inherently perpetuates sex- and gender-essentialist ideologies; however, when mixed-sex sport does exist, it is not isolated from those ideologies and discourses (Allison & Love, 2021; Travers, 2018). Often, sex-integrated

sports or activities still require participants to disclose their sex to register, which is often the precursor to sex-differentiated uniforms, roles, or expectations (Travers, 2018).

There are mixed results concerning whether creating integrated sport spaces effectively disrupts sex- and gender-essentialist ideology. While Anderson (2008) found that men football players who moved into sex-integrated cheerleading had their presumptions of women athletes challenged and disrupted, Gubby and Wellard (2016) found that Swedish Korfball players continued to hold essentialist ideas of sex and gender even while playing on sex/gender integrated teams. Both boy and girl Korfball players described boys as all being strong, aggressive, and athletic and girls with those qualities as individuals and exceptions to the gendered rule. Allison and Love (2021) ran a mixed gender Quidditch course for college students and found that the majority of students maintained the same level of gender and sex essentialism throughout the program. They found that students were more likely to have their existing beliefs of women's athletic inferiority and men's natural athleticism and aggression confirmed rather than disrupted. These studies suggest that simply exposing athletes to mixed sex/gender sport environments is not sufficient in challenging their pre-existing beliefs about gender, sex, and sport. These studies focused on athletes and did not explore either the role that coaches play in upholding or interrupting athletes' beliefs or how coaches themselves have their beliefs challenged or reinforced by mixed-sex/gender sport environments.

Coaches and the Sex/Gender Binary

Coaches can both uphold and disrupt binary and essentialist sex and gender ideologies, and research has demonstrated a variety of ways that this can occur. Messner (2009) found that little league baseball coaches demonstrated high degrees of contradiction and tensions in their discussions of children, sport, and gender, drawing on discourses of equality and access for all

children in addition to natural and categorical differences between girls and boys and their relationship to sport. Musto (2014) found that on a mixed-gender swim team of 8-10-year-olds, coaches' expectations de-emphasized gender and girls outswimming boys was considered an unremarkable event. In contrast, in his research, Messner (2018) observed a soccer coach of 4-year-old boys using the threat of having to play the girls' team as a way to manage the behaviour of their players. In 4- and 5-year-old tee-ball, Landers and Fine (2001) found that coaches gave different and less constructive coaching advice and guidance to girls than boys.

Coaches also help to reinforce and reproduce gender by their inaction. Larneby (2016) found that in an elite Swedish sport school, when boys and girls played floorball together, girls were often slighted, either through constrained play (receiving less time on the ball or less opportunity to practice decision making) or by explicit comments and harassment by male players (including sexual objectification). Though not discussed explicitly within the study, Larneby's work provides an opportunity to ask what actions coaches can take to create a space that is more inclusive or supportive of all genders. In my study I extend the exploration of how mixed-sex sport environments, and especially coaches, uphold and disrupt the sex/gender binary by investigating how coaches of children's mixed-sex soccer programs understood sex and gender.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist science studies (FSS) is a theoretical framework that scholars use to interrogate the relationships between culture and biology, knowing and being, and objectivity and subjectivity (Archer & Kohler, 2021). Two primary tenets of FSS are 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988) and 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1992). Situated knowledges "require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent" (Haraway, 1988, p. 592) and that

generating meaning is an interaction with, rather than a reading of, the world. Strong objectivity recognizes the historical, social and political context of knowledge production and suggests that those most marginalized in those contexts can provide the strongest objectivity. Concerned with the study of bodies and the world, FSS is uniquely suited to enable scholars to explore the implications of sex and gender in sport spaces. Fausto-Sterling (2000, 2020) reasoned that the inherent relationship between biology and culture means that our understanding of the body, and particularly of sex, is shaped and obscured by social forces. Pape (2020) and Moyer (2021) both critiqued the role of testosterone as a measure of eligibility in women's sport, and Wells (2020) critiqued the role of sex testing more broadly. Although not explicitly FSS scholars, Pieper argued that our understanding of sex in relation to sport is far more complex than a simple sex-binary model implies, while McDonagh and Pappano (2008) argued that coercive sex-segregation in sport (a prescriptive organizational model distinct from voluntary sex-segregation chosen by individuals) is intended to maintain a status quo rather than reflect any biological experience or need. In my research, I used FSS to guide the interrogation of discourses of gender and sex as understood in a sport context and to examine what coaches' understanding of those concepts mean for young soccer players.

Methodology

In conducting this research, I was guided by feminist methodologies, which represent a range of research practices and values centred around gender, marginalization, and social change (Landman, 2006). Widely agreed upon tenets of feminist methodology include: attention to gender and inequality and a commitment to social action or positive change; emphasizing and valuing participant experience; participatory methods, which connect the community who is the focus of the research with the researcher; and researcher reflexivity and awareness, which

includes developing an understanding of how the researcher's experiences, values, and positionality interact with and affect the research at hand (Taylor, 1998).

My experiences playing soccer in both mixed-sex and sex-segregated girls and women's spaces, and my experiences as a children's soccer coach were integral to the ways that I approached this research. My relationships to power are shaped by my experiences as a white queer person with a graduate degree and middle-class generational wealth, social positions that inform the ways in which I experience sport, coaching, and academia, which have implicitly shaped my research. This research was also shaped by my personal politics, which centre queer and trans liberation (Feinberg, 1992; Patton-Imani, 2020; Woodstock, 2021), disability justice (Mingus, 2011; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018), and police and prison abolition (Kabe, 2021; Love, 2020; Maynard, 2017), all which inform and inspire my desire to imagine sport beyond existing oppressive structures to transformative futures. My reflexivity practices included discussions about gender and sport with people I am in close relationship with, as well as consultations with coaches whom I knew prior to beginning this research and who provided advice on the construction of my interview guide, including the format and order of questions. This aligned with my approach of feminist methodologies in that it engaged members of the community – children's soccer coaches – that was centred in this research.

Research on sport is well suited for a feminist methodological approach, as the Western sport landscape is built upon systemic gender discrimination, bioessentialism, and sex and gender policing (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008; Pieper, 2016). Using feminist methodologies is a way to explore the ways in which gender and sex are implicated in sport and affect the relationships that coaches have to sport and gender. Building this understanding is one step in reimagining a more just and inclusive model of sport, including children's sport.

Methods

Inclusion Criteria and Recruitment

The inclusion criteria for participants were coaches 16 years and older who have coached children between the ages of four and eight in mixed-sex soccer programs in Ontario, Canada. Coaches were required to have taken at least one of the National Coaching Certification Program soccer coaching courses (Active Start, FUNdamentals, or Learn to Train), which are typically required to act as a soccer coach in Ontario. Governed by a provincial body, soccer clubs within Ontario are relatively regulated in terms of their coaching practices and policies, with coach education, curriculum, and policy primarily dictated by Ontario Soccer. I chose Ontario as the region of study because of my own proximity and familiarity to children's soccer in Ontario, as well as the provincial standardization of coaching requirements.

I recruited participants for this study through purposive and snowball sampling (Ranjbar et al., 2012), primarily through email. By searching the websites of community soccer clubs in Ontario, I created a list of contacts who appeared to meet the inclusion criteria for my research. I then sent an individual email to each contact in which I included my recruitment text and asked coaches to either reply to the email if they were interested or forward it onto coaches in their networks. Further, at the end of each interview, I asked coaches to pass along the study information to anyone in their networks they thought would be interested. The final sample for this project (n=11) consisted of five men and six women who had been coaching for between 4 and 23 years.

Self-Identification Survey

After agreeing via email to participate in this research, I sent participants a copy of the consent form to review and a brief self-identification survey. The self-identification survey

included questions on the participants' gender, pronouns, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and any other identities that they wished to disclose or felt were relevant to their coaching practice. Each question was optional and was prefaced with a brief definition and example of the identity category. All questions were open-ended to allow participants to effectively self-identify and not feel constrained or marginalized by preselected responses. The table below includes the responses given by each participant. Allowing participants to self-identify their gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation was done in an effort to make visible the identities of those involved in sport and sport research, and to contextualize participants' contributions in the results section. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Table 1. Participant responses to self-identification sociodemographic survey

Pseudonym (pronouns)	Years Coached	Gender	Race and Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation
Chelsea (she/her)	15	Cisgender female	White	Straight
Caroline (she/her)	23	Woman	White Canadian	Heterosexual
Aaron (he/him)	19	Man	Black	Heterosexual
Matt (he/him)	8	Cis male	White Eastern European	Heterosexual
Nate (he/him)	12	Cis male	Latin-American	Heterosexual/Straight
Daniel (he/him)	14	Cis man	White/Jewish	Heterosexual
Amelia (she/her)	9	Cisgender female	Portuguese/white	Straight
Anna (she/her)	7	Female	Caucasian, European	Straight
Cal (he/his)	18	Man	Mixed – Black/White	Straight
Sasha (she/her)	4	Woman/ female	Indian and Canadian	Bisexual
Stella (she/her)	8	Cis woman	White/Caucasian	Heterosexual (straight)

Semi-Structured Interviews

While I had initially hoped to conduct interviews face-to-face, due to COVID-19 restrictions, I completed 11 virtual semi-structured interviews over the video-conferencing platform, Zoom. The interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes in length. I began each interview by reading the consent form aloud and obtaining verbal consent from each participant. I divided the interviews loosely into two phases: the first focused on the coaches' background and their coaching experiences related to gender, and the second focused on their coach education experiences. The interviews followed a semi-structured format in which the discussion was guided by the interview guide, but which allowed for discussion to move in directions led by the participants themselves or through probes (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Data Analysis

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyze the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews conducted with coaches. Discourse analysis can take many different forms (Cheek, 2004), and those who employ CDA emphasize the social and political context and implications of discourses (McGannon, 2016). For this research, I followed Parker's (2014) 20-part guide to identifying and interrogating discourses within a text. Parker defined a discourse as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (p. 22), conditioned by 10 criteria and 20 prompts that researchers can use to identify discourses in their texts. I analyzed my data first by identifying the objects found in the interview transcripts and coding them appropriately, and then by using Parker's conditions and prompts to determine which discourses were operating and how. Parker's final three conditions of discourse can be used to interrogate the role of institution, power, and credibility in discourses. I returned to these conditions and their accompanying

prompts to identify which discourses held significant social and political implications, and I highlight these discourses in the following section on results.

Results

Using discourse analysis, I identified three discourses that the participants (re)produced in their interviews: 1) gender is constructed but categorical; 2) sex differences are inevitable and hierarchal, which necessitate a sex-binary model in sport; and 3) girls' sport is vulnerable and girls in sport require support.

Gender is Constructed but Categorical

The coaches' (re)production of gendered differences centred on competitiveness, confidence, and social behaviours. The coaches indicated that these distinct behaviours facilitated distinct styles of play between boys and girls, at both young ages and at older, more elite levels. At the same time, the coaches broadly resisted the idea of hard gender essentialism, identifying society and culture as significant factors in shaping gendered behaviours and expectations.

The coaches commonly described girls as having less confidence and being more hesitant than boys on the field, which the coaches often related to the girls' lack of physicality (such as taking the ball off players or using their bodies to win challenges), as well as a greater fear of making mistakes. Nate described this:

[Girls] don't want to take those risks. They don't want to take on a dribble and mess up....

And then they think it's horrible. Whereas boys, like they're just like, I'm gonna go try and score, you could tell the [boy] goalie go try and score, and he'll do it.

The coaches felt that gender differences contributed to two distinct styles of play for girls and boys. According to Nate,

[G]irls in general usually understand the game a bit better. Their intellectual side is a bit higher, but the physical side is a little behind the boys. Whereas the boys are more physically and more capable or faster, stronger at that same age. I remember distinctly seeing that with the U8s. We did the exact same session back-to-back. And I explained it the exact same way. And the boys came out flying, doing everything wrong. And the girls asked a ton of questions took 10 more minutes, did it right, but did it really slow and really, like, careful.

The coaches were aware of dominant discourses of gendered behaviours, and Chelsea described the tension between not relying on these discourses while also understanding how the past experiences of players may have been influenced by their gender:

They're all coming from a different place... You've got to kind of just like meet them as a person where they're at. But then you've also got to keep in mind, like, there are not just stereotypes and, like, proven track records, like the girls might be a little bit more hesitant to join in if there's boys playing just because of their own experience, whereas boys are typically a little bit easier to get going. But it's not, like, a proven rule. You can't just assume every boy is gonna want to run out there and start playing. You can't assume every girl's gonna be a little bit more shy. So, it's tricky.

Daniel offered his thoughts on why gender differences among players seem so pronounced:

You would maybe say, "Oh, the boys are more likely to be really competitive and trying to score lots of goals and win the games." But I think that might just be... an impression we get... Because we have a much larger sample of boys in general. [C]oaches may see in a class of 10, we've got two or three boys that are super competitive, right, but there's

only three or four girls, and one or two of them are really competitive. So, I'm not sure if that's a real difference.

When asked where they thought gender differences came from, many coaches spoke about the role of society, parents, and coaches in shaping gendered behaviours and expectations. Anna related this specifically to gender differences resulting from socialization in soccer players: “[W]hen the girl is born, they're given a pink blanket. And when the boy is born, they're given a blanket full of soccer balls.” Aaron spoke about boys being seen as more aggressive in a sport that rewards that behaviour:

[T]here's definitely the coach and the parent and who tells them that you should be more, you should behave more like that... the game in of itself, lends itself to that type of behavior, that competitiveness, aggression. Those are attributes of a player that's required to be successful.

Similarly, Nate spoke about how coaches' expectations uphold gendered discourses: “[I]t's a nurture nature kind of mix because like, you can see like physically, when you take an average of it all, the boy will be faster. But at the same time, you're telling them boys are faster.” In addition to this, several coaches also expressed not understanding where these perceived gender differences came from, especially in young children. Anna asked, “I don't know, because they're so young, they haven't even been in society for that long. So, where's the difference?”

Most of the coaches also expressed an understanding that gender identities are not necessarily static or binary. Amelia said, “[T]hey're still figuring out who they are. And you can't just be like, yeah, you are a girl. And they might not be feeling that.” Several coaches spoke about trans and nonbinary players, either who they had worked with personally (both at soccer and in other contexts) or who other coaches had coached. Anna described an experience she had

with a young player: “So a child came to me last summer. Well, the family came. And the child is born female but identified as- actually didn't identify necessarily. And they wanted to play with boys. And I didn't hesitate [to let the child do that].”

The coaches' discussions of gender reflected tensions wherein gender was constructed as a social identity (rather than a naturalized one) but where gendered behaviours were pervasive and categorical. The coaches acknowledged the role of societal expectations in shaping gendered behaviours, as well as their experiences with trans and nonbinary gender identities, while simultaneously calling upon dichotomous and static language to describe the differences between boys and girls.

Inevitable and Hierarchical Sex Differences Necessitate Sex-Segregation

A second discourse was that sex differences result in players who are assigned male at birth becoming faster and stronger athletes than those who are assigned female at birth and the need for sex-segregation in light of those differences. Several coaches noted that these differences increased over time and many coaches, including Caroline, stated that mixed-sex programs worked at younger age groups in which sex differences were not the most salient difference between players:

[B]ecause they're so young, the biggest defining factor usually is their month of birth.

Because they're young, those players, whether they be male or female, born in the first third of the year, are often 99% of times stronger than those males and females born in the last third of the year.

Many coaches indicated that as sex (as well as gender) differences became more pronounced over time, sex-segregated teams became an eventual necessity for the well-being of players: “[It] kind of becomes like, is this really fair to have them playing together? Would they get more out

of a program where everybody is just a little bit more similar physically and also, mentally?”

Anna considered these differences to impact players who were as young as five, and she cited biology as a reason for choosing to separate her sessions into boys and girls:

And the boys were biologically being a little bit rougher and more aggressive and more excited. And they [the girls] didn't want to play. So, I ended up separating the genders for the U5, and the U6 players.

Multiple coaches described their observations that boys between the ages of 6 and 9 became “naturally” faster, stronger, or more aggressive than girls. Amelia explained:

So, I've noticed like, for example, males, boys tend to around age seven and age eight, their strength really develops. And sometimes when we have a mixed group, the girls tend to be a little scared sometimes of the way the boys kick because they're very strong and, and at that age, the boys are just learning that they are really strong.

In contrast to boys apparently having greater natural speed, strength, and aggression, Chelsea illustrated how girls who embodied those same qualities were considered exceptions to the rule:

Boys will tend to be stronger as they approach eight, nine years old than the girls on like a general basis. But then you're also going to have like, girls who are absolute superstars who could beat everyone in the club, you know.

Aggressive and highly physical girls were considered more similar to boys and often better suited to playing with a boys' team than a girls'; Matt exemplified this:

Boys, there's a lot of naturally high competitive players and they really like a higher aggression... and if you happen to have a girl who's aggressive like the boys are, then

you have to decide what do you need to do to really give her a challenge physically, right?

In contrast, boys who did not display this “natural” aggression were rarely mentioned, and when they were, they were positioned as non-athletes, such as when Anna noted, “I love those soft boys who just, and they really are, they're delicate flowers, and I love them so much. Soccer will likely not be their career, but hey, they're here.”

While some coaches saw sex-based differences affecting their players and teams in children as young as five, others described programs for young children as being more flexible because of developmental similarities and a lack of sex differences. Matt described this: “I think it's easier at the younger ages, because you have a lot more flexibility. Once you get once the kids are fully developed, then it becomes a very, very contentious issue.” Anna saw these biological differences as underpinning different styles of play between sexes:

[T]he female game is really interesting, because the female game consists of a lot more long balls crossing and passing because a girl, a female, can't run to the ball as fast as a male. That's all right. So, the female game is just different. Not worse, not better, different than the male game.

Matt also described challenges that occur when older players do not fit into a sex-binary model, using an example from a U13 division (players turning 13 years old in the current year). He said,

So, if a [player] transitions to a girl and they're U13 and they're dominating, put them up [an age group], but how long can you do that? It's so, so hard to answer. answer that question. I don't I don't really know how you would deal with that.

Matt also reflected on what is considered fair in instances in which players do not fit the traditional sex binary: “There's such a big argument around all that sort of stuff with sports and, and where players belong. And it's, it's in whether it's fair, or that sort of thing.” While the coaches were open to having mixed-sex programs for children of very young ages, that openness was not as consistent as players became older. The coaches saw what they perceived were biological sex differences and presumed physical biological advantages of assigned male at birth players as a challenge that required a sex-segregated environment.

Girls’ Sport is Vulnerable and Girls in Sport Require Support

A final discourse that was (re)produced in the interviews was that girls’ sport is vulnerable and that there is need to support girls in sport. The coaches (re)produced this discourse through discussions of the challenges that they face in their mixed-sex programs and the importance of supporting girls in soccer, often through the creation of sex-segregated sport spaces.

Low participation of girls in mixed groups (including often only one girl in a mixed group) was a common challenge faced by coaches of mixed-sex programs, including Matt who said:

[S]ometimes you might have a girl who doesn't like playing, being the only girl playing with a group of boys. So, then you might have to, you'd have to be very creative with that if you don't have a lot of girls in the program. I fortunately don't have that issue this winter.

The coaches who discussed this challenge specified that it was almost always a case of low numbers of girls, but Daniel suggested that the social challenge of unbalanced ratios would theoretically exist in both directions, “When they’re [girls] that main outlier, they feel less

comfortable. And I mean, it almost never happens the other way, but I would imagine that a boy entering a [practice] of all girls would probably express similar discomfort.”

Several coaches spoke about a potential lack of feelings of belonging for lone girls in a “mixed” group. Aaron highlighted how he saw girls’ relationship to the program change over time and being one of the only girls became more a more salient factor for players as they aged:

[Girls] start to believe that they shouldn't be participating in the activities with the boys, or they tend to have an affinity to want to participate in groups with more girls or with other girls, or there must at least be another girl within the group.

Amelia also noted that boys’ reluctance to pass to girls was a challenge that she faced as a coach: “[T]hat would be I think the biggest challenge that we've had between genders specifically, is where the girls don't want to play because they're the only girl. Or the boys don't pass to the girls, because they're a girl.” Caroline expressed that girls in a boy-dominated group had to be able to excel to experience cohesion in the group.

In my experience, it has happened in certain instances where the boys will not pass to her. Or they play around her. The girl almost has to be at the top of that group and be willing to dominate and win the ball more often in order to get the ball.

Low participation numbers of girls in a mixed program were catalysts for both Anna and Cal to move to separate boys’ and girls’ soccer programs. Anna said:

I had 10 kids on a team, and I had about three girls and seven boys. And when I had three girls and seven boys, when I had two girls not show up, that meant I only had one girl and seven boys. And not to fault them...I don't think anything was wrong, [but] they didn't want to play. And then I was watching all over the field girls not playing because their friends weren't there.

Cal described how dividing teams by gender changed participation, slightly increasing the number of girls: “In splitting the boys and girls, we've noticed our girls’ numbers have gone up, like, not like 100 girls [are] now coming instead of 50...it's gone up two or three.”

Amongst coaches there was a recognition that girls’ and boys’ sport were not on even footing, and that girls’ sport (and girls in sport) was more vulnerable and needed supports to help correct this. Anna argued:

And let's talk about the importance of keeping females in sport, in [U4-U6], let's talk about the importance of keeping females in sport in [U7-U8]. Because it matters. And it is one of those things. You know, it's one of those things where like, right now, we don't actually need to talk about how to keep the boys in sport.

Several coaches spoke to the importance of supporting girls’ sport participation. While most of the coaches identified that they had experienced little formal coach education on gender, Nate and Aaron both noted that they had taken the online training Keeping Girls in Sport: “The Girls in Sport [training] is mandatory... Is it necessary? Yes. Is it sufficient? Right now? Probably not.”

Discussion

In this study, I sought to explore how coaches who worked with children in mixed-sex environments understood sex and gender, and related to discourses of gender, sex, and sport. In my interviews, these coaches (re)produced three pervasive discourses: 1) gender is categorical but constructed; 2) hierarchal sex differences are inevitable and necessitate a binary model; and 3) and gender inequalities in sport necessitate the support and protection of girls’ sport. In the following section, I discuss how the three discourses highlighted in this research work together

to reinforce and legitimize a binary sex-segregation model of sport and the implications of this for young athletes.

Gender is Constructed and Categorical

The coaches' discussions of gender demonstrated an understanding that gender is at least partially a social identity and is not necessarily static or binary. Many of the coaches were careful to specify that when talking about gender differences they did not mean *every* boy or girl, and that individual differences were an important factor in considering difference. However, these caveats were often discussed in a way that still constructed *most* boys as similar and *most* girls as similar, with any outliers positioned as exceptions to the professed norm rather than challenges to it. Similarly, although trans and nonbinary players were discussed, they were rarely integrated into conversations of gendered behaviour; instead, they were also positioned as exceptions. The coaches' observations about gender also revealed how sport re(produces) gender expectations, highlighted by the combination of Mike's comment that aggression is naturally higher in boys, Aaron's note that aggression is a valued attribute in soccer and encouraged in boy players, and Anna's comment that "soft boys" may not be destined for careers in soccer.

The many gender differences that the coaches described as existing between girls and boys were expressed in ways that both reinforced the categorical and binary nature of gender and often tacitly endorsed gender(/sex)-segregated environments. This aligns with Messner's (2011) argument that beliefs about gender can be both categorical but non-essentialist, resulting in an ideology of soft essentialism, which is especially pervasive in youth sports. With the exception of Daniel, the coaches rarely critiqued their own perceptions of gender differences, although several indicated that gender was complicated and some expressed discomfort at the tension between understanding gender as a social construct but seeing consistent gendered behaviours in

their players. Despite the noted value of considering children as individuals, and despite having an understanding of gender identity beyond cisgender girl or boy and the cultural and social forces that inform gender, the coaches often relied on an understanding of gender that was largely static and categorical.

Inevitable and Hierarchal Sex Differences Necessitate Sex-Segregation

The coaches' understanding of gender as constructed but categorical was underpinned by their much more explicit belief in sex differences and the belief that these differences made players who were assigned male at birth stronger, faster, and overall better soccer players. They commonly attributed physical differences to developmental or biological factors, such as how Chelsea, Amelia, and Anna described a "growth spurt" for boys around the age of seven or eight that made it more difficult to have sex-integrated teams. Despite the fact that prior to puberty there are no significant physical or hormonal gender differences in children (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2009), several coaches cited this perceived developmental difference as validation for dividing girls and boys. Even when the coaches acknowledged more sociocultural explanations for physical differences between boys and girls, such as when Nate described boys being faster while also being told they are faster, the explanations still hinged on the expectation that biologically boys are stronger and faster than girls. The perception of these naturalized differences both legitimizes the need for separate spaces and creates a landscape where fairness and safety become issues of sex. This is especially precarious for trans athletes, wherein their biological sex is considered "more real" than their gender and their belonging on their gender-aligned teams is seen as a threat to the ideals of fairness and safety.

For many of the coaches, working with young children in mixed-sex environments appeared to reinforce the need for inevitable sex-segregated programs, especially as players

aged. Taken together, the discourses of gender as constructed but categorical and hierarchal sex differences as inevitable suggest that even though the coaches' conceptions of gender resisted essentialism in some ways, pervasive and institutionalized discourses of sex difference constrain imaginable solutions to gender injustice in sport (Travers, 2008).

Girls' Sport is Vulnerable and Girls in Sport Require Support

The coaches identified gender inequity as an issue in sport, emphasizing the challenges faced by girls and women. Challenges to having mixed-sex environments were often related to apparently natural or inherent gender and sex differences between boys and girls, rather than to broader structural and cultural inequalities or oppression within sport or society. In response to this, when coaches spoke about gender equity, it most commonly involved a separate but equal response, which took the form of separate spaces or programs for girls that were away from the boys. This often stemmed from the idea that girls and boys are different and have different needs that are best met separately. One commonly cited challenge was the participation and comfort of girls in majority boy spaces. Anna and Cal both chose to run sex-segregated programs as a solution to these challenges, hoping that this change would support and encourage girls' participation. As Cal described, moving to segregated sessions in comparison to mixed groups increased girls' participation by two or three players. In both Cal's and Anna's anecdotes, running sex-segregated sessions to encourage girls' participation was mutually exclusive to having mixed-sex sessions, a choice that reinforced binary notions of sex and gender difference and may have created additional barriers for trans and gender expansive players.

While voluntary sex segregation may play an important role in addressing oppression and equity in sport (Travers, 2016), focusing only on gender inequity as affecting girls obscures the harm caused to children of all genders by a coercive and naturalized sex-binary sport system. It

overlooks the ways that the narrow patriarchal ideologies that shape sport also negatively affect boys, and it oppresses and erases trans and gender non-conforming children. If voluntary gender segregation is not explicitly trans inclusive, it may also privilege cisgender players often specifically at the expense of the belonging or safety of trans girls, by relying on assumptions of sex difference and transphobic discourses of safety and fairness (Sharrow, 2021). Sex segregation in sport also risks positioning gender as the most salient marker of identity, and girls as a monolithic category. Too often, this category is represented by white, middle- and upper-class girls (Hall, 2002) and results in a failure to recognize the nuances of multiply held identities, obscuring the ways in which dominant ideologies, including those of race and class, permeate both our understanding of gender and barriers to accessibility in sport.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

All research has limitations, and this study is no exception. One notable limitation in this work is the recognition that coaches discussing their coaching practices is not equivalent to coaches engaging in their coaching practices. Asking coaches to be able to reflect on their practices and experiences does not guarantee that their discussion is a fair representation of their coaching practice; having the opportunity to observe coaches would have been a valuable complement to the data I collected through the interviews. Unfortunately, this was not a possible dimension of my research because of the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This limitation also meant that conducting research with children themselves was not possible. However, centring the experiencing of children in sport is a valuable and important research goal that should be addressed in future studies of children's sport and gender. It is especially important for research to centre trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive players and coaches in sport, who can speak to their own experiences and challenges with a binary sport system.

Many of the coaches I interviewed admitted to not thinking about gender in their coaching practices and suggested that they were going to be more conscious of it in the future. In some ways this is valuable, as it suggests that their answers were not rehearsed and instead reveal which sex, gender, and sport discourses are most accessible for coaches in the moment of being questioned about them. A valuable extension of this study would be to follow up with the coaches who were already interviewed to explore if and how having the opportunity to reflect upon gender in interviews for this project affected their coaching practice or informed their understanding or beliefs about gender, sex, and sport.

Conclusion

The coaches I interviewed for this research were passionate about their roles as coaches and cared about the players with whom they worked. In addition, they often called upon discourses of sex and gender that supported a sex/gender binary model of sport and re(produced) notions of naturalized and binary difference between boys and girls. The discourses drawn on by the coaches in my research align with the sociohistorical context of sport and the sex/gender binary. Entrenched in a history of subordination and control through a coercive and naturalized sex/gender binary, sport and the oppressive systems that it is founded on are emmeshed with the need for rigid, binary, and hierarchical definitions of gender and particularly of sex. Despite the coaches in this project having a conception of gender as (somewhat) expansive and constructed, they predominantly (re)produced discourses of sex difference as definitive, inevitable, and hierarchical, which constrained their ability to imagine a sport system beyond the binary.

The degree to which sport organizations, culture, and policy perpetuates narrow ideas of gender and sex means that even well-meaning attempts to address gender injustice can easily fall into reproducing harms rather than disrupting or transforming them. Often, measures to support

or protect girls' sport does little to challenge the sex-binary model of sport, especially when common solutions to gender inequality in sport revolve around a "separate but equal" response. This response continues to marginalize and erase trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive children, leaving them to navigate a binary system that does not recognize their identities and personhood. It can reinforce and reproduce notions of sex/gender difference, while erasing the potential value that mixed-sex/gender environments have to offer. Exploring how coaches understand gender and sex is an important step in challenging the naturalized sex/gender binary that shapes sport and affects young athletes and in moving towards creating sport spaces in which athletes of all genders can thrive. This research has the potential to inform both coach education content and organization policy that may help to make children's soccer spaces more accessible for children of all genders.

References

- Anderson, E. (2008). "I used to think women were weak": Orthodox masculinity, gender segregation, and sport. *Sociological Forum*, 23(2), 257-280.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00058.x>
- Allison, R., & Love, A. (2021). "We all play pretty much the same... except": Gender-integrated quidditch and the persistence of essentialist ideology. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124162111040240>
- Archer, S. M., & Kohler, A. E. (2020). Feminist science studies. In N.A. Naples (Ed.), *Companion to feminist studies* (pp. 247-263). John Wiley & Sons.
- Batelaan, K., & Abdel-Shehid, G. (2021). On the Eurocentric nature of sex testing: The case of Caster Semenya. *Social Identities*, 27(2), 146-165.
- Brown, L. E. C. (2015). Sporting space invaders: Elite bodies in track and field, a South African context. *South African Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 7-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2014.989666>
- Doucet, A. & Mauthner, N. (2007). Feminist methodologies and epistemology. In C. D. Bryant & D. L. Peck (Eds.), *21st century sociology* (Vol. 2, pp. 36- 42). SAGE.
- Eliasson, I. (2011). Gendered socialization among girls and boys in children's football teams in Sweden. *Soccer & Society*, 12(6), 820-833.
- Erikainen, S., Vincent, B., & Hopkins, A. (2020). Specific detriment: Barriers and opportunities for non-binary inclusive sports in Scotland. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 1-28.
[doi:10.1177/0193723520962937](https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723520962937)
- Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. Basic Books.

- Feinberg, L. (1998). *Trans liberation: Beyond pink or blue*. Beacon Press.
- Forsyth, J. (2007). The Indian Act and the (re) shaping of Canadian Aboriginal sport practices. *International Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue internationale d'études Canadiennes*, 35, 95-111. <https://doi.org/10.7202/040765ar>
- Francis, N. R., & Lathrop, A. H. (2011). "Children who drill, seldom are ill." Drill, movement and sport: The rise and fall of a female tradition in Ontario elementary physical education (1850s to 2000). *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*. 23(1), 61-80. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v23i1.2523>
- Gubby, L., & Wellard, I. (2016). Sporting equality and gender neutrality in korfbal. *Sport in Society*, 19(8-9), 1171-1185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2015.1096261>
- Habkirk, E. J. (2017). From Indian boys to Canadian men? The use of cadet drill in the Canadian Indian residential school system. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30(2), 227-247. <https://doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.13>
- Hall, M. A. (2002). *The girl and the game: A history of women's sport in Canada*. Broadview Press. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.20.1.78>
- Hall, M.A. (2003). The game of choice: Girls' and women's soccer in Canada. *Soccer & Society*, 4(2-3), 30-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970512331390815>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575-599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Harding, S. (1992). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is "strong objectivity?". *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 437-470.
- Harrison, Louis. (2001). Understanding the influence of stereotypes: Implications for the

- African American in sport and physical activity. *QUEST*, 53(1), 97-114.
10.1080/00336297.2001.10491732.
- Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.
- Kane, M. J. (1995). Resistance/transformation of the oppositional binary: Exposing sport as a continuum. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 19(2), 191-218.
- Landers, M. A., & Fine, G. A. (2001). Learning life's lessons in tee ball: The reinforcement of gender and status in kindergarten sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13(1), 87-93.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.13.1.87>
- Landman, M. (2006). Getting quality in qualitative research: A short introduction to feminist methodology and methods. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 65(4), 429-433.
<https://doi.org/10.1079/PNS2006518>
- Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2, 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- McDonagh, E., & Pappano, L. (2008). *Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in sports*. Oxford University Press.
- McGannon, K. (2016). Critical discourse analysis in sport: What, why, and how? In B. Smith & A. Sparkes (Eds.), *International handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 230-242). Routledge.
- Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present*.

Fernwood Publishing.

- Messner, M. (2009). *It's all for the kids: Gender, families, and youth sports*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520943452>
- Messner, M. (2011). Gender ideologies, youth sports, and the production of soft essentialism. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 28(2), 151-170.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.28.2.151>
- Messner, M. (2018). Barbie girls versus sea monsters: Children constructing gender. In C. Cooky & M.A. Messner (Eds.), *No slam dunk: Gender, sport and the unevenness of social change* (pp. 93-113). Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t6p7fx>
- Mingus, M. (2017, August 15). *Access intimacy: The missing link*. Leaving Evidence.
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>.
- Moyer, V. (2021). Leaky bodies and the stickiness of testosterone in women's athletics. *Somatechnics*, 11(2), 211-227.
- Musto, M. (2014). Athletes in the pool, girls and boys on deck: The contextual construction of gender in coed youth swimming. *Gender & Society*, 28(3), 359-380.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213515945>
- Norman, M. E., Hart, M., & Petherick, L. (2019). Indigenous gender reformations: Physical culture, settler colonialism, and the politics of containment. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 36(2), 113-123. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2018-0130>
- Pape, M. (2020). Ignorance and the gender binary: Resisting complex epistemologies of sex and testosterone. In *Sports, Society, and Technology* (pp. 219-245). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parker, I. (2014). *Discourse dynamics: Critical analysis for social and individual psychology*. Routledge.

- Patton-Imani, S. (2020). *Queering family trees: Race, reproductive justice, and lesbian motherhood*. NYU Press.
- Pieper, L. (2016). *Sex testing: gender policing in Women's sports*. University of Illinois Press.
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Ranjbar, H., Haghdoost, A. A., Salsali, M., Khoshdel, A., Soleimani, M., & Bahrami, N. (2012). Sampling in qualitative research: A Guide for beginning. *Annals of Military and Health Sciences Research*, 10(3), 238-250.
- Rauscher, L., Cooky, C. (2016). Ready for anything the world gives her?: A critical look at sports-based positive youth development for girls. *Sex Roles*, 74, 288–298.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0400-x>
- Robinson, M. (2019). Two-Spirit identity in a time of gender fluidity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 67(12), 1675-1690. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1613853>
- Sharrow, E. A. (2021). Sports, transgender rights and the bodily politics of cisgender supremacy. *Laws*, 63(10), 63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/laws10030063>
- Taylor, V. (1998). Feminist methodology in social movements research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 21(4), 357–379. doi:10.1023/A:1023376225654.
- supremacy. *Laws*, 63(10), 63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/laws10030063>
- Transgender Law and Policy Institute. (2009). *Guidelines for creating policies for transgender children in recreational sports*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/240595092/Guidelines-for-Creating-Policies-for-Transgender-Children-in-Recreational-Sports>
- Travers. (2008). The sport nexus and gender injustice. *Studies in Social Justice*, 2(1), 79-101.
<https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v2i1.969>
- Travers. (2016). Transgender and gender-nonconforming kids and the binary requirements of

sport participation in North America. In M.A. Messner & M. Musto (Eds.), *Child's play: Sport in kids' worlds* (pp. 179-201). Rutgers University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813571478>

Travers. (2018). Transgender kids and sport participation. In V. Krane (Eds), *Sex, gender, and sexuality in sport: Queer inquiries* (pp. 163-177). Routledge.

Wells, C. J. (2020). *On the resiliency of sex testing in sport* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).

Withycombe, J. L. (2011). Intersecting selves: African American female athletes' experiences of sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 28(4), 478-493. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.28.4.478>

Woodstock, Tuck. (Host). (2018-present). *Gender reveal* [Audio podcast].

www.genderpodcast.com

Chapter Three: Conclusion

Conclusion

The sex/gender binary is a pervasive part of sport culture and organization. It is often taken for granted as natural and necessary rather than being viewed as a structural choice rooted in the historical oppression, control, and policing of racialized and gender diverse people and their bodies. There is an existing body of research investigating how gender operates in sport, but significantly less that explicitly troubles the gender/sex binary in sport (Alison & Love, 2021; Anderson, 2008; Kane, 1995; Travers, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2022), and there is even less research that interrogates the gender/sex binary in children's sport (Travers, 2016). Similarly, while there is some research on how mixed-sex sport environments uphold or disrupt binary and essentialist notions of sex and gender, it has been centred largely on older youth and adults rather than children. As a result, for my Master of Arts, I chose to conduct research using feminist science studies, feminist methodologies, semi-structured interviews, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore how coaches of children's mixed-sex/gender soccer teams understand gender and sex.

My inspiration to conduct this research came from my own experiences in soccer coaching spaces and the recognition that gender was rarely discussed or named explicitly despite inherently shaping the structure, organization, and interactions that occurred in those spaces. In 2019, I completed Canada Soccer's Children's Coaching Licence, an intensive 10-day course focused on coaching children aged four to 12 and targeted at coaches with advanced coaching licenses. On the 10 eight-hour days on which this course ran, there was no formal course material on gender. While gender was occasionally discussed among coaches informally, I observed a high degree of discomfort and uncertainty amongst both the instructors and participants when talking about gender, particularly in ways that might destabilize the status quo. We discussed

using age as an organizing principle in soccer and the best ways to move players up and down age groups based on their skill and size at length, but we rarely discussed gender in the same way, save for discussing exceptional girl athletes playing with the boys. At the same time, we were a group that was heavily shaped by gender. Of 24 participants, only three, including me, were not men. On the first day, the man who was leading the course called for a round of applause to celebrate our participation. Our practical sessions were run with sex/gender-segregated teams of children, and I observed the ways that those enrolled in the course and leading the course treated girls' and boys' teams differently from each other. I left this course extremely disheartened at how a formal and high-level children's coach education program failed to address gender in its content, and in the limited ways in which coaches were able to discuss gender at all, while simultaneously bearing witness to the ways that gender influenced the course itself.

My coaching experiences have given me a wealth of examples of the ways in which essentialist discourses of gender operate in children's soccer spaces, particularly as facilitated by coaches. Building on these examples and situating this knowledge within a broader sociohistorical understanding of gender and sport provides an opportunity to recognize both the harms that may be caused by dominant discourses of gender, sex, and sport, and what measures may be taken to mitigate or transform those harms. My research findings have the potential to provoke thought, and hopefully change, concerning coach education and sport inclusion policy to enable athletes of all genders to thrive in soccer and other sport spheres. In this final chapter, I will discuss these potential changes as well as the theoretical and methodological contributions I have made, limitations of my research, and opportunities for future research.

Contributions to Coach Education

The idea for this project emerged from my own experiences as a children's soccer coach in Ontario and a desire to see a future for children's soccer that centred the needs of children of all genders. Given that this was the origin of my project, it follows that there are several potential education implications for coaches and coaching. My research provides several implications for the design of coach education programs to target restrictive and oppressive discourses of gender and sex. Rather than critiquing the individual coaches in my study, my results should highlight how discourses of sex and gender are powerful sociohistorical tools and the ways that oppressive ideas about sex and gender are reproduced at institutional and cultural levels in sport. At the same time, the results of my research provide the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of how to equip coaches to become agents of resistance of these oppressive discourses and policies within sport.

The coaches I interviewed had received very little coach education focused on gender. In general, it had included only the Keeping Girls in Sport training, a 90-minute course centred on supporting adolescent girls in sport, developed by Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, the Coaching Association of Canada and Canadian Women and Sport (Coaching Association of Canada, 2018). The coaches' understanding of gender and sex differences were based primarily on their own experiences with and observations of players, and the coaches had been given few tools to assess the implications of those observations. Without targeted coach education that provides holistic and accurate information about gender and sex, and the discriminatory foundations upon which dominant discourses about these concepts rest, coaches' observations of the ways that gender operates in sport may be more likely to confirm their existing beliefs rather than destabilize them. While a few of the coaches I interviewed questioned where their own

beliefs about gender came from, as well as the validity of their own observations, this was not common.

I suggest that soccer coach educators need to ensure that coaches are able to receive accurate and accessible education on gender and sex to increase coaches' abilities to understand the ways in which discourses of gender and sex are informing their coaching behaviours. Three specific ways that coach education programs can integrate the results of my research are to create education resources that 1) allow coaches to interrogate their own beliefs about gender, sex, and sport; 2) refute the idea that boys and girls are fundamentally different but allow coaches space and tools to question why they may appear so; and 3) centre the experiences of trans, two-spirit, and gender expansive players, rather than treating them as outliers or exceptions to an otherwise binary system of gender. My research is well positioned to inform the design of soccer coach education that specifically targets binary and restrictive discourses of gender and sex and equips coaches to recognize and resist those discourses in their own coaching practices. However, educating soccer coaches is still a largely individualized response and should be coupled with institutional level changes in policy as well.

Policy Contributions

While coach education may be able to inform the behaviours of individual coaches, they must also be supported by institutional changes, including policy. One necessary policy change highlighted by my research is the need to normalize all-gender soccer programs for children (programs that do not refer at all to sex). In my research, discourses of sex and gender differences validated two coaches' choices to separate children as young as five by sex, and they reinforced the coaches' widely held belief in the necessity of sex-segregated spaces as athletes aged. While many coaches ran mixed-sex programs for their youngest players, the structural

organization of sex-segregation for slightly older players reinforced both the expectation of gender and sex differences and restricted imagination for any alternative organization. Because of this, players who resisted gender or sex expectations were discussed as exceptions to a binary system and their presence was seen as necessitating individual and reactive inclusion efforts rather than proactive or transformative ones.

Meyer and Harper (2016) argued that transformative gender inclusion policy should intentionally deemphasize sex and gender categories. Two applications of this in sport include increasing the prevalence of all-gender spaces and, where there are gender specific spaces, allowing players to register through the uncontested self-identification of their gender (Travers, 2018; Woodstock, 2021). While policy is an integral part of the process of transforming sport, which takes the onus of responsibility of change off individuals, it is not enough on its own. As Travers (2008) identified, policy is not enough to transform deeply rooted and covert beliefs and values: “changing the sexist structure of sport is relatively easy compared to the difficulty of transforming the entrenched misogynist, homophobic and transphobic culture of sport and sporting spaces” (p. 96). This affirms the need for policy change coupled with coach (and athlete) education that is designed to dismantle the oppressive culture of sport.

While cultural change cannot come from policy alone, policies that establish codes of conduct, anti-harassment, and accountability can be a part of changing culture. Soccer clubs can send clear messages about which behaviours they value and refuse to stand for and can create space for greater accountability for actions that cause harm. Strong and intentional standards of behaviour can reduce the need for identity-based policies and practices, which although useful can also be reductive and limiting in themselves (Meyer & Harper, 2016). One challenge to enacting policies such as these at the club level is that many policies, including on sex-

segregation, are set by national and provincial soccer associations and must be challenged at this level in addition to at individual soccer clubs. My research contributes insight to the need for both education and policy efforts dedicated to challenging the restrictive and oppressive culture and structure of sport, including children's soccer. Beyond these practical implications, my research also makes methodological and theoretical contributions that I discuss below.

Methodological Insights

The primary methodological insight of my research is in the value of virtual interviews. I had initially planned for this research to centre on players rather than coaches but my research was impeded by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw the cessation of sport programs and the limiting of personal contacts. As a result, I chose instead to interview coaches of young children and did so over the teleconferencing platform Zoom rather than in person. Online interviews proved to be a strong method of conducting semi-structured interviews that provided many benefits to both me and the participants, including enabling me to recruit participants from beyond my own geographical location and offering greater accessibility for participants themselves.

My research was guided by feminist methodologies, and I was thus concerned with addressing issues of inequity and with engaging in participatory methods which acknowledge and attempt to mitigate the power discrepancy between researcher and participants. Online interviews aligned with these values, offering greater accessibility to the interview process. They allowed for a flexibility of scheduling and omitted the need for travel to an interview location, both factors which increased accessibility of my research and may have resulted in participants being more likely to agree to participate. This was notably significant for two women who participated, one of whom was a teacher and participated in an interview after her workday while

still at school, and one who was on parental leave and was interviewed with her two children in the background. While none of my participants raised concerns about access to teleconferencing technology or access to internet, barriers to technology and data access are limitations to online interviews and may limit the participation of socioeconomically marginalized individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the already high burden of care for women (Power, 2020), and online research methods are one way to make research participation more accessible to women who are already engaged in multiple forms of work. These methods also make research more accessible to disabled participants, an important consideration at all times but particularly at the time of COVID-19 when risks to health in public spaces are high. Liddiard et al. (2019) argued for the role of online research practices in enabling disabled young people to participate in research meaningfully. Online interviews also meant that participants were able to engage in the interview in a location of their choosing, a factor which may have contributed to their own comfort and reduced the imbalance of power that may come from participants entering a space of the researcher's choosing (Nehls et al., 2015). Finally, the distance provided by the virtual platform decreased the intimacy between me and participants and may have made it easier to discuss the potentially sensitive subjects of gender and sex (Nehls et al., 2015). Deakin and Wakefield (2014) argued that "the face-to-face interview can often feel uncontested, and online interviews are presented as a second choice or alternative when this 'gold standard' of interviewing is not possible" (p. 604). My research suggests that online interviews should be considered no less valuable than face-to-face interviews, and that normalizing the research practice of online interviewing has considerable benefits for both participants and researchers, including increased access and equity.

Theoretical Contributions

There is currently limited sport research that is explicitly situated within a FSS framework, including Moyer's (2021), Pape's (2020), and Wells's (2020) examinations of sex verification and eligibility in elite athletics. There is also existing sport research that closely aligns with many of the tenets of FSS, including Kane's (1995) advocacy for a continuum of athletic ability, Pieper's (2016) sociocultural history of the Olympic practice of sex testing, and McDonagh and Pappano's (2008) critique of coercive sex segregation. These authors have drawn heavily upon contributions from FSS scholars, most notably the interrogation of the naturalized sex and gender binaries and what they mean for our cultural understandings of both gender and sport. As Cipolla et al. (2017) noted in their discussion of queer FSS, there is opportunity for scholars to reimagine existing research within the frameworks of FSS as the field expands to incorporate a growing number of subfields, and it is possible that the aforementioned scholars see their work as part of FSS today. However, to my knowledge, my study is one of few to explicitly use FSS as a theoretical framework for sport and gender research.

Pairing FSS with CDA provided me with an extremely strong platform to specifically explore discourses of sex and gender in relation to children's soccer. Sport researchers often conflate gender and sex, fail to define either construct, or use binary and/or essentialist language in ways that uphold normative assumptions of sex and gender. Grounding my work in an FSS framework provided an opportunity to deeply interrogate the language and assumptions reproduced in dominant discourses of gender and sex. The primary theoretical contributions of this research include exemplifying the strength of using CDA grounded in a FSS framework to conduct research related to sport, sex, and gender.

Limitations

There were several limitations to my research, including sample homogeneity, the construction and implementation of my interview guide, and the potential discontinuity between discussions of coaching practices and actual practices. Given that sport research has historically centred white, straight, and cisgender voices, I had hoped that my sample would be able to represent more diverse perspectives in terms of race, sexual orientation, and gender. While the sample of individuals in my research was racially and ethnically diverse, and it consisted of more women coaches than men coaches, it was relatively homogenous in other ways: most of the coaches identified as cisgender, no coach identified as transgender (though some coaches did not specify either way), and all but one coach identified as straight/heterosexual.

While identity is not a necessary or guaranteed precursor to insight, queer, trans, Two Spirit, and gender expansive coaches may be uniquely suited to provide insight on ways that gender and sex are (re)produced and enforced in children's soccer spaces given their own experiences with confronting gender norms and expectations. In addition, while more than 50% of my sample were women coaches, all but one woman was white. As discussed throughout this thesis, gender is deeply informed by racial ideologies, and girl/womanhood in particular is defined implicitly by standards of and by whiteness (Markowitz, 2017; White, 2021). The combination of my own middle-class whiteness and a sample of primarily white women makes this study vulnerable to adopting a conception of gender that is quietly informed by whiteness and obscures racialized experiences and conceptions of gender. However, the demographics of participants in this study roughly aligned with the demographics that I am familiar with in youth soccer environments in southern and southeastern Ontario and likely reflects a systemic need for greater diversity amongst coaches. I collected the coaches' sociodemographic information primarily to make visible identities that are often unaccounted for in research and to avoid

having a sample that was over-represented by coaches with identities with strong relationships to power, such as white men. While I achieved this in my sample of coaches in some regards (e.g., having a greater number of women coaches than men), I was not successful in others (e.g., having no trans, Two Spirit, or gender expansive coaches and few women of colour coaches). In grappling with how the identities of participants may inform my research and collecting sociodemographic data from participants, I often felt like I was at risk of tokenizing people based on their identities. I also feel unsure if the benefit of collecting this sociodemographic data outweighed the potential risk of having someone with a systemically marginalized identity feel discomfort at feeling as though they had to disclose their identity in the name of my research. Having completed my research, I have a greater appreciation of how difficult it is to use research practices that account for identity in a safe, inclusive, and meaningful way, and as a developing researcher, this is an ability that I hope to be able to cultivate over time.

My research was also limited in its analysis of how coaches' understanding of sex and gender was informed by race. In my interviews with coaches, discussions of gender rarely incorporated other aspects of identity, including race, and my data analysis and discussion reflected that. It is also one way that this project may have been informed by my own whiteness. Future research should specifically explore the role that constructions of race play in coaches' understandings of sex and gender.

A further limitation of my research can be found in my interview guide. Although I was intentional about its creation, I have realized that it carries its own binary bias. One question in particular positioned boys and girls as oppositional: "What are some similarities/differences you notice between boys and girls that you coach?" Phrasing the question in this way may have resulted in answers being more firmly rooted in binary ideas of gender/sex than if it had been

phrased in a more open-ended way, such as, “What are some gender differences that you notice between the players that you coach?” The recognition of this bias in my interview guide illustrates the salience of binary thinking and language, and it suggests that my language may reflect a binary bias in other aspects of this study, in spite of my ongoing reflexive practices. A final limitation of this research is in the potential incongruency between verbal reports of coaching practices and actual practices. Many of the coaches in this study expressed that they had never thought very intentionally about gender in their coaching practice. Although I identified which discourses coaches called upon in their discussions, I did not have the capacity to distinguish if they were reflections of their actual coaching practices. Having the chance to interview coaches and observe their coaching practice would have strengthened this research and likely would have provided interesting complexities between coaches’ spoken beliefs and how those beliefs are put into practice.

Opportunities for Future Research

There are a number of different opportunities for my research to be expanded upon in future projects. A further extension of my study would be to follow up with coaches who participated in my research and observe if and how their responses changed over time. Many coaches indicated that they had not thought intentionally about gender in their coaching practice, and some offered feedback that participating in this research had inspired them to be more thoughtful about gender. Re-interviewing coaches at a future time could provide valuable data on how simply being prompted to consider gender in their coaching practice may have influenced their understanding of and behaviours concerning gender. As discussed above, my research would have been strengthened by complementing the data collected with observations of participants’ coaching practices. As such, this also offers an avenue for future research.

Considering the need for greater coach education surrounding gender and sex, future research also should be conducted to examine the content and efficacy of coach education materials in equipping coaches to acknowledge and navigate issues of gender and sex in their coaching practices. Research that both analyzes existing coach education content and consults with coaches about their satisfaction and knowledge from that education can provide valuable data on how to address and mitigate harmful discourses of gender and sex that permeate and shape children's sport spaces and coaching practices.

The experiences of children in sport should also be taken seriously by researchers, especially those of children who do not fit neatly into a sex/gender binary model of sport. While Travers' (2016, 2018) work highlighted the experiences of parents of trans and gender non-conforming children in sport and trans kids themselves, very little research exists that centres the voices of trans and gender non-conforming children navigating a sport system that was not designed for them. Similarly, queer and especially trans coaches may be uniquely positioned to discuss how sex and gender operate in children's soccer spaces and future research should seek to centre the voices of these coaches in discussions of coaching practices and coach education.

Alluded to but not deeply explored in my research was the assumption that "real sport" is sex/gender-segregated is both tied to understandings of sex/gender, but also to a sporting culture of competition and meritocracy. One way that this was alluded to in my research was through discourses of "fairness", an elusive value which itself carries implications of competition and meritocracy and informed some coaches' beliefs about sex/gender segregation. A final suggestion for future research is a deeper exploration of the relationship between the value of competition and gender in sport. In my experience, organized mixed-gender soccer spaces have been reserved for the youngest players and the least competitive players. Further research should

explore coaches' beliefs about competition, success, and reasons for sport participation and the ways in which these beliefs interact with their beliefs and understanding of sex/gender.

Critiquing the role of competition and meaning of success in sport is also an opportunity to interrogate neoliberal values imbued in sport that centre competition, meritocracy, and hierarchy, and what affect those values have on both coaches and young athletes.

Final Thoughts

In conducting this research, I have highlighted ways in which eleven children's soccer coaches in Ontario understand gender and sex. My research demonstrates the ways that children's sport is shaped by discourses of gender and sex that are informed by the institutional histories of sport and the sex/gender binary. This research provides opportunities for coaches, educators, and managers of children's sport to re-examine the ways in which their behaviours, practices, and policies reinforce or resist oppressive and restrictive attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about gender and sex, and their implications on young athletes of all genders.

References

- Allison, R., & Love, A. (2021). "We all play pretty much the same... except": Gender-integrated quidditch and the persistence of essentialist ideology. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124162111040240>
- Anderson, E. (2008). "I used to think women were weak": Orthodox masculinity, gender segregation, and sport. *Sociological Forum*, 23(2), 257-280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00058.x>
- Cipolla, C., Gupta, K., Rubin, D.A., & Willey, A (2017), *Queer feminist science studies: A reader*. University of Washington Press.
- Coaching Association of Canada. (2018, October 15). *Keeping girls in sport: A new resource for coaches, mentors and leaders*. Coaching Association of Canada. <https://coach.ca/keeping-girls-sport-new-resource-coaches-mentors-and-leaders>.
- Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative research*, 14(5), 603-616.
- Kane, M. J. (1995). Resistance/transformation of the oppositional binary: Exposing sport as a continuum. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 19(2), 191-218.
- McDonagh, E., & Pappano, L. (2007). *Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in sports*. Oxford University Press.
- Meyer, E. J., & Keenan, H. (2018). Can policies help schools affirm gender diversity? A policy archaeology of transgender-inclusive policies in California schools. *Gender and Education*, 30(6), 736-753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1483490>
- Moyer, V. (2021). Leaky bodies and the stickiness of testosterone in women's athletics. *Somatechnics*, 11(2), 211-227.

- Nehls, K., Smith, B. D., & Schneider, H. A. (2015). Video-conferencing interviews in qualitative research. *Enhancing qualitative and mixed methods research with technology*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-6493-7.ch006>.
- Pape, M. (2020). Ignorance and the gender binary: Resisting complex epistemologies of sex and testosterone. In *Sports, Society, and Technology* (pp. 219-245). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pieper, L. (2016). *Sex testing: gender policing in Women's sports*. University of Illinois Press.
- Travers. (2008). The sport nexus and gender injustice. *Studies in Social Justice*, 2(1), 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v2i1.969>
- Travers, A. (2013). Thinking the unthinkable: Imagining an “un-American,” girl-friendly, women-and trans-inclusive alternative for baseball. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 37(1), 78-96.
- Travers. (2016). Transgender and gender-nonconforming kids and the binary requirements of sport participation in North America. In M.A. Messner & M. Musto (Eds.), *Child's play: Sport in kids' worlds* (pp. 179-201). Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813571478>
- Travers. (2018). *The Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and their parents) are creating a gender revolution*. New York: NYU Press.
- Wells, C. J. (2020). *On the resiliency of sex testing in sport* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).
- White, S. (2021). Black girls swim: Race, gender, and embodied aquatic histories. *Girlhood Studies*, 14(2), 63-79.
- Woodstock, Tuck. (Host). (2021, Nov 8). Episode 103: Britni de la Cretaz (103) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Gender reveal*.

Appendix A: Ethics Certificate

06/12/2020

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-10-20-6197
Titre du projet / Project Title	Examining Children's Soccer Coaches' Understanding of Gender and Sex in Their Coaching Practices
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	06/12/2020
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	05/12/2021

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Julia HAMER	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Audrey GILES	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

06/12/2020

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CER) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'Énoncé de politique des *Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CER avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CER dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Kim THOMPSON

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For Daniel LAGAREC Président(e) du/ Chair of the Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada

550 Cumberland Street, Room 154
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • ethique@uOttawa.ca / ethics@uOttawa.ca
www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie | www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics

Appendix B: Sociodemographic Self-Identification Survey

Self-Identification Survey

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in this research on children's soccer coaches' understanding and navigation of sex and gender in their coaching practice!

Historically, research in sport and coaching has centred some voices and people over others. One of the goals of this project is to include the perspectives of coaches whose identities may be underrepresented in coaching research, particularly women, trans and non-binary coaches; Black, Indigenous, and coaches of colour; and 2SLGBIAQ+ coaches.

As mentioned, we ask that you fill out the following short survey to help us to ensure that the participants of this project represent a range of identities and demographics. The answers to this survey will remain confidential and will not be included in the research unless permission is explicitly granted by the participant. All questions are optional- if you do not wish to answer any question, you may state that or leave it blank.

1. Gender identity means a person's internal sense of whether they're a man or a woman, both, or neither. It's a person's internal, deeply-held sense of one's gender. Possible gender identities include but are not limited to: cisgender woman, trans woman/femme, non-binary, cisgender man, trans man/masc etc. (*Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth.) **How would you best describe your gender?***

*2. Gender pronouns are a way for people to refer to you when not using your name. Examples are: she/hers; they/them; he/his (eg. Julia left her soccer ball at the field, she can get it tomorrow; Jay forgot their water bottle). **Which pronouns do you use?***

*4. Broadly speaking, race is a social concept understood by most people as a mixture of physical, behavioral and cultural attributes. Ethnicity recognizes differences between people mostly on the basis of language and shared culture. **How would you best describe your racial and/or ethnic heritage or identity?***

*3. 2SLGBTIAQ+ perspectives have been historically excluded from sport research and narratives. Sexual orientation describes a person's emotional and/or sexual attraction to others. Possible sexual orientations include but are not limited to: asexual, bisexual, gay, heterosexual/straight, lesbian, queer etc. **How would you best describe your sexual orientation?***

*5. **Are there other identities that are significant to you, your coaching practice, or the themes of this project, and that you wish to highlight?***

Appendix C: Interview Guide

- 1. Can you tell me about yourself?**
- 2. Could you tell me about your coaching experience?**
 - a. How long have you been coaching for?
 - b. Have you coached outside of Ontario/Canada?
 - c. What kinds of programs have you coached (age/gender/level)?
 - d. What are your favourite programs to coach?
- 3. What do you think are some strengths of a mixed gender group?**
- 4. What do you think are some challenges of a mixed groups?**
- 5. Do you notice similarities between the girls and boys who you coach?**
- 6. Do you notice differences between the girls and boys who you coach?**
 - a. Why do you think those differences exist?
- 7. Are there differences in the ways that you approach coaching girls or boys? What are they?**
- 8. What are some ideas or myths that you think coaches believe about girls and boys?**
 - a. How do you think that informs the ways that they coach those players?
- 9. Can you tell me about an experience you've had with a mixed group where there were challenges specifically related to gender?**
 - a. What did you do? Looking back, would you do anything differently?
- 10. What are things that you think are important for coaches to consider when working with mixed groups?**
- 11. Can you tell me about a moment where you felt unsure about how to approach an issue related to gender in your coaching practice?**
 - a. How did the issue resolve?
 - b. Were you able to find support to help you manage it? From where?
- 12. Have you ever coached a player who you knew was non-binary, genderqueer, or another gender diverse identity?**
 - a. If so, what was that experience like for you as a coach?
 - i. Were there things that were challenging for you?
 - ii. Did you feel equipped to support that player?
 - iii. Did you consult anyone for advice or help in supporting that player? What happened?

- iv. What did you take away from the experience?
 - b. If not, how do you think it might affect your coaching practice?
 - i. What are things you think could be challenging for you?
 - ii. Would you feel equipped to support that player?
 - iii. Would you feel comfortable asking for help or advice from your club or other coaches if you felt challenged?
 - iv.
- 13. How do you approach pronouns in your practice? How do you know how to refer to players?**
- a. Do you ask/use forms/assume?
 - b. Have there been times where you have guessed wrong?
- 14. Do you think it is important for coaches to have an understanding of how gender might influence their teams and coaching practice? Why or why not?**
- 15. What are some of your primary coaching influences? Can you think of ways that they influenced your understanding of gender?**
- 16. Are there any aspects of your identity that you feel have informed your perception or understanding of gender in your coaching practice? Are there things that you notice, or think about differently compared to peers who do not have one of those identities?**
- 17. What kind of coach education/coaching courses have you done?**
- a. Have any of those courses specifically focused on children or youth?
- 18. How did you feel about the ways those courses approached the topic of gender?**
- a. Was it discussed formally (in course material) or informally (group discussion)?
 - b. What were the main items discussed as they related to gender(s)?
 - c. Was gender discussed as a binary (only boys and girls) or was there discussion of other genders as well?
 - d. Was it discussed in regard to coaching practice? How so?
 - e. If it was not discussed, why do you think that was?
- 19. Did you takeaway information about gender from coaching courses that informed your coaching practice?**
- a. Was it valuable for your coaching practice?
- 20. Are there any specific issues/scenarios/topics related to gender that you wish had been covered in your coaching courses?**
- 21. Has the way you coach mixed groups been informed from other sources than coaching courses?**
- a. Where do your ideas of how to coach a mixed group come from?

- b. If you faced a challenge related to gender, what supports or resources would you turn to?
- 22. Based on your experience what do you think would be a more effective method/strategy in educating coaches on the topic of gender? -**
- 23. Are there any ways that you wish your club/organization approached gender differently?**
- 24. If you imagine a future of really gender supportive soccer spaces, what does it look like?**
- 25. Is there is anything that I haven't brought up or that has come to mind during this conversation that you would like to discuss?**
 - a. Do you have any final thoughts you'd like to share about gender, coaching, or coach education?
 - b. Is there any feedback you'd like to give me about this interview?
- 26. Do you consent to us using the information from your self-identification survey in our analysis and write up? It would be strictly anonymous and not include your name but would just outline all participants' gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation.**

Appendix D: Contributions

Julia Hamer completed the conceptualisation, data collection, analysis, and write-up of this thesis project. Dr. Audrey Giles supported the development and conceptualisation of the thesis research as well as the editing, proofreading, and strengthening of the final thesis product. Two coaches provided advisement on the construction of the interview guide prior to the beginning of interviews. Chapter two of this thesis will be published with Julia Hamer as the first author and Dr. Audrey Giles as the second author.