

**Parenthood, Childhood and Organized Youth  
Sport in Rural and Small-Town British Columbia:  
An Ethnographic Study**

**by**

**Dominique Alexandra Payette Falls**

M.A., University of British Columbia, 2009  
B.Sc., Creighton University, 2007

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# Approval

**Name:** **Dominique Alexandra Payette Falls**

**Degree:** **Doctor of Philosophy**

**Title:** **Parenthood, Childhood and Organized Youth Sport in Rural and Small-Town British Columbia: An Ethnographic Study**

**Examining Committee:**

**Chair: Cindy Patton**  
Professor

**Barbara Mitchell**  
Senior Supervisor  
Professor

**Noel Dyck**  
Supervisor  
Professor

**Rick Gruneau**  
Internal Examiner  
Professor  
School of Communication

**Kevin Young**  
External Examiner  
Professor  
Department of Sociology  
University of Calgary

**Date Defended/Approved:** October 27, 2017

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how parenthood and childhood are enacted within the context of organized youth sport in one rural and small-town British Columbian region. Studies of organized youth sport, childhood, and parenthood have primarily emphasized the experiences of (sub)urban dwellers. This has resulted in a dearth of knowledge on the spatialized processes which inform experiences of organized youth sport in rural and small towns. This ethnographic exploratory study was conducted between 2012 and 2015 in the British Columbian rural and small-town region of the West Kootenays. It draws on fieldnotes, open-ended interviews, and participant observation to capture the lived experiences of over a hundred young people, parents, and sport administrators. By utilizing a place-based, life course perspective, this study reveals the historical, structural, and spatial fluidity of concepts such as parenthood, childhood, and organized sport. A central finding in this study is that while principles of modern parenting and childhood are now part of the dominant cultural narrative, children and parents enact this narrative in conflicting and nuanced ways. Four spatialized patterns of child-rearing vis-à-vis sport emerged: (1) pursuing the dream of sporting success, (2) making organized youth sport work, (3) opting out of organized youth sport, and (4) being pushed out of organized youth sport. Parents' and children's relationship to place, access to resources, and commitment to varying narratives and discourses on childhood and parenthood were found to drive child-rearing practices. Overall, this study showcases the agency of rural residents and draws attention to the futility of representing rural people as solely "passive recipients" of hegemonic culture. It also draws attention to the importance of including young people alongside adults in research about their lives. Finally, this study encourages government policy-makers and community-level stakeholders in organized youth sport to take a place-based approach to the delivery of programs.

**Keywords:** Organized Youth Sport; Rural and Small Towns; British Columbia; West Kootenays; Ethnography

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to the First Peoples of the West Kootenays, the Sinixt, on whose land these soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and ice rinks were built.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the young people and parents of the West Kootenays—may you recognize how fortunate you are to have grown up and raised children surrounded by such beauty.

Last, this dissertation is dedicated to everybody who works tirelessly to “make it work”—whatever “it” might be—in their own rural or small town. May your future, and the future of your village, town, or city be meaningful.

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I am so fortunate to be at the end of this journey with a smile on my face, not only because the work is done (!), but also because I enjoyed (almost) every moment. But I do recognize there is no way I would have completed this project without the help of the following people:

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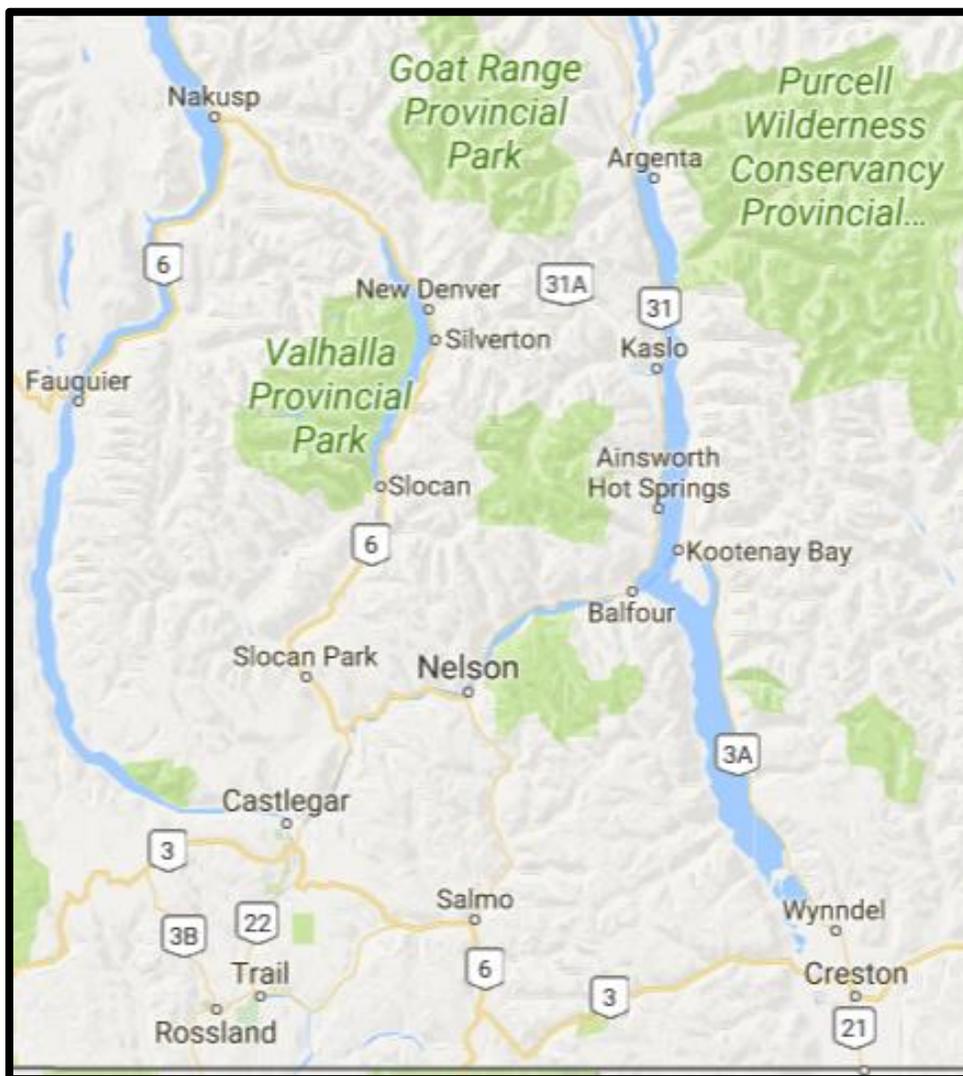
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## Glossary

Aboriginal Identity	Aboriginal identity includes persons who reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or those who reported Registered or Treaty Indian status, that is registered under the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011a).
Census Metropolitan Area	A CMA is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a large urban area (known as the urban core). The Census population count of the urban core must be at least 100,000 to form a Census Metropolitan Area. To be included in the CMA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the central urban area, as measured by commuting flows derived from Census place of work data (Government of British Columbia, 2016).
Major Midget Hockey	Major Midget Hockey describes the level of hockey generally played by athletes 15–17. These are the top players in their age group.
Rural Areas	All territory lying outside of population centres (areas with at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre) (Statistics Canada, 2017).
Rural and Small-Town Regions	Regions consisting primarily of those living in rural communities (as defined by the OECD as having fewer than 150 persons per square kilometre) and those living in small towns (population 1,000–9,000) (Beshiri, Bollman, Rothwell, Mendelson, & Halseth, 2004).
Treaty or Registered Indian	Registered Indians are persons who are registered under the Indian Act of Canada. Treaty Indians are persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes also called Status Indians (Statistics Canada, 2011b).
Visible Minorities	The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour (Statistics Canada, 2011c).



**The West Kootenays**  
**Photo Credit: Map Data © 2017 Google Canada**

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

*Residents of any given community experience a life that varies a bit from those living in another community; however, those who live in rural areas have experiences that often vary significantly from those who live in urban areas. Yet, the differences between the two only become apparent when [an] individual leaves one area and experiences the other. (Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, & Smith, 2011, p. xiii)*

The West Kootenay region in southeast British Columbia is eight to nine hours by car travel away from the closest Census Metropolitan Areas, Calgary and Vancouver. In this region, unincorporated areas and towns border the Columbia and Kootenay rivers, the Slocan, Arrow, and Kootenay lakes, and the Selkirk, Valhalla, Purcell and Monashee mountain ranges—all of which skirt the drainage basin of the Lower Kootenay River. Villages, towns, and cities dot the steep mountainsides and lake-fronts, their history, growth and settlement shaped by the terrain. As much as 250 kilometres and a ferry or as little as 20 kilometres separates the residents. Despite the short distance between some towns, the narrow, windy highways, lakes, rivers, and mountain passes create distinct boundaries, and as such, a distinct local culture.

Like many regions populated by rural and small towns, the West Kootenays bear the scars of economies reliant on over a hundred years of resource extraction. No town has been spared the consequences of abandoned mills, clear-cut mountainsides, contaminated waterways, or open pit mining. As one young resident affectionately says about her hometown of Trail, “some people refer to Trail as ‘Mordor,’<sup>1</sup> with its smelter right in the middle of town, and its smokestacks firing up 365 days a year.” Owing to the boom-

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the desolate area of the same name in J. R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* book series.

and-bust cycle of these economies, one can also see abandoned schools, overgrown baseball diamonds, and derelict tennis courts—signs of prosperity long gone. Yet at the same time, streets in the West Kootenays are lined with cafés at which baristas are serving organic Fair-Trade coffee to smelter and mill workers, customers are shopping at franchised stores and co-ops, and workers on their lunch break are logging onto public Wi-Fi to check commodities markets or scores of the most recent Nelson Leafs' game. In my fieldnotes in the first few days in the area, I describe a particularly illustrative scene unfolding outside of the coffee shop window on the main drag in Nelson: "There are two young boys in their Nelson Leafs' jerseys standing at the corner waiting to cross the street. They must have a game tonight. Over their heads hangs a giant banner stretching from one street corner to another. It announces a meeting for the public breastfeeding group" (June 6, 2012).

This dissertation is about the lives of young people, parents, and sport administrators who take part in organized youth sport in the rural and small towns that dot the West Kootenays of British Columbia. It draws on four years of ethnographic fieldwork, including ninety interviews and thousands of pages of fieldnotes (including observations, jottings, summaries of conversations in the field, notes on methodology, and analytic memos) (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). It reveals how young people, parents, and sport administrators experience organized youth sport in their villages, towns, and cities and in doing so, contribute to what it looks and feels like to live in, grow up, and raise children in rural and small-town British Columbia.

## **1.1. Why an Ethnography on Organized Youth Sport in the West Kootenays?**

*"[We] may only have a remote knowledge of places beyond the metropolis and this mainly through the fictions and fantasies . . . of texts, or through geography, history and literature classes of [our] schooling. [We] may have a general sense of such places, [we] may, for instance, know the regions of [our] country, but not their towns; [we] may be able to imagine out-of-the-way places, but not know the names of any actual places. (Kenway, Kraack, & Hickey-Moody, 2006, p.10)*

This project was born out of my curiosity about the relationship between where somebody lives and their experiences of organized youth sport. My personal and professional experiences over the years have told me that organized youth sport in “out-of-the-way places” might look and feel different from my own suburban, upper-class experiences; where one grows up may produce distinctive experiences of organized youth sport. To borrow from Wuthnow (2013), it is not that I believe people who live in small places (e.g., the towns of the West Kootenays) have entirely different habits and values than people who live in larger places (e.g., Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal). I also do not believe that organized youth sport systems in small places are entirely different than those in larger places. But, as Cohen (1978) remarks, “even when forms of social organization and behaviour in one social context appear phenomenally similar to those in another, they do not always mean the same thing to the people in those two situations” (p. 8). I have long suspected that for people living in rural and small towns, experiences of organized youth sport may be “perceived through the lens of living in [a] small plac[e]” (p. 15). In my decades as a sport participant, I have met and worked alongside individuals who grew up in rural and small towns across the country and the meanings they attached to, and their experiences of, organized youth sport have often differed slightly from mine. Returning to Cohen (1978), since it is these different meanings and experiences that guide behaviour, “it is to them that the ethnographer’s attention must be addressed” (p. 8).

Why the West Kootenays? I first experienced the region when I was a young undergraduate student accompanying my older sister to her boyfriend’s hometown. He lived in a place I had never heard of (Rossland) in a part of the province I did not know existed (the West Kootenays). I remember my sister and I rushing the 800-kilometre drive to ensure we did not miss “the big event”: an afternoon at the local hockey rink, watching my sister’s boyfriend and his brothers play in the Annual Boxing Day Hockey Alumni Tournament. This event brought former Rossland Warriors<sup>2</sup> together for a day of hockey. I remember the ice rink was old, freezing, and barebones but the drinks were flowing and people seemed to be having a good time. The place was packed. Over the course of the few days, I learned that Rossland’s neighbour, Trail, was the “Home of the Champions” (it

<sup>2</sup> The hockey association for Rossland residents—both young and old. It was amalgamated into the nearby Trail Minor Hockey Association in the 1990s.

had not yet been named BC's Number #1 Sports Town) and that a "Smokie" was not a hot dog but rather a hockey player from the famous Trail Smoke Eaters. I learned that the boyfriend's parents were born and raised in Rossland, both had long careers working at the Cominco<sup>3</sup> smelter, spent their summers in their camper on the banks of "the lake," and had three boys, all of whom played hockey. I remember travelling back home through a blizzard and thinking, "Well if that wasn't small-town, I don't know what is!" Of course, since doing my research, I have come to learn that there is much more to a small town than the hockey rink, working at the smelter, and "going to the lake." This experience sparked my interest in wanting to know more, and it is for that reason that I ventured back into the West Kootenays nearly eight years later.

I came to this project as a student working through literature that explained the role of organized youth sport in contemporary North American practices of childhood and parenthood. This work outlines the intimate connection between organized youth sport, "good" parenting, and ideal childhoods whereby childhood and parenthood are practised and enacted through extracurricular activities like participation in organized youth sport (Coakley, 2006; Dyck, 2003, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Levey Friedman, 2013; Messner, 2009; Shaw, 2008; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). While this literature is engaging and illustrative of my own suburban, upper-class upbringing, I found it could not entirely explain what my rural and small-town friends (and their families) had experienced and what I had witnessed that winter in Rossland, British Columbia.

It is not that (geographic) context is entirely dismissed in research on organized youth sport. There are a number of in-depth journalistic accounts of organized youth sport in rural and small towns across the United States and Canada. Perhaps one of the best known of these is Bissinger's (1990) critical examination of high school football in the small economically depressed town of Odessa, Texas. More recently, D'Orso (2006) follows fourteen boys, their families, and their coach from Fort Yukon, Alaska, as they work their way towards the Alaska State Championship. Within the Canadian context, Robinson's

<sup>3</sup> Cominco stands for the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada. In 1966, the mining company changed its name to Cominco, and in 2008, to Teck Cominco. It is now known as Teck, owing to its 1913 roots as Teck-Hughes Gold Mines Ltd. (Teck Resources, 2015).

(1998) research on Junior A hockey in Canada provides examples of the intersection between masculinity and violence among teenage boys who primarily live in prairie towns across rural and small-town Canada.

Indeed, ethnographies of organized youth sport are also generally situated within specific—if sometimes anonymized—settings, most of which are urban and suburban. With the exception of Foley's (1990) ethnography on how youth learn traditional American values through participation in activities such as sports in the small economically depressed, predominately Mexican American south Texas town of North Town, very little scholarly research on organized youth sport in the United States or Canada is explicitly framed within the context of rural and small towns. Fine's (1987) rich ethnographic examination of pre-adolescent culture in boys' American Little League baseball is decidedly (sub)urban. Grasmuck's (2005) ethnography on boy's baseball demonstrates intersections of class, race, and masculinity in Philadelphia. More recently, Dyck (2012) provides a look into the world of organized youth soccer through ethnographic material collected in a Lower Mainland suburb of British Columbia. I have largely been unable to locate studies of organized youth sport that deliberately take the context (i.e., geographic, demographic, historical, cultural, and economic) of rural and small towns as the starting point for exploring how sport is organized and experienced by young people, parents, and sport administrators. There are a few exceptions in the Canadian (Mair, 2009; Oncescu, 2015; Oncescu & Giles, 2014), Australian (Atherley, 2006; Spaaij, 2009b; Tonts & Atherley, 2005, 2010), and American contexts (Oriard, 2013; Sharp, Jenkins Tucker, Baril, Van Gundy, & Rebellon, 2015) which explore leisure in rural and small towns more generally. In the words of Gieryn (2000), however, I have been unable to locate research which employs (rural) place as an interpretive frame rather than merely as a backdrop.

The absence of a rural focus in sociological literature on organized youth sport is not entirely unusual given we can no longer expect most Canadians to have had direct experience with small-town life (McGregor, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; Woods, 2011; Wuthnow, 2013). It is also not surprising given what Ching and Creed (1997) and Gieryn (2000) see as a general reluctance on the part of sociologists to consider place-based identity and processes as structuring features of everyday life and as intersecting with the

other dimensions of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and age. Lichter (2015) attributes this reluctance to the historical disciplinary separation of rural sociology and mainstream sociology, and the resultant general “antipathy between rural sociologists and mainstream sociology that sometimes pivots on questions of the continuing relevance of rural issues, especially as urbanization continues apace” (p. 814).

What this has meant is that sociological research might be drawn from a specific geographic location (e.g., suburban Lower Mainland of British Columbia), but there is a tendency to treat place as merely a stage (Gieryn, 2000) for the playing out of processes and practices of organized youth sport. As argued by Aitken (2001), such a “homogeneous, non-spatial” understanding of organized youth sport “risks perpetuating narratives which construct some lives as deviant or deficit in relation to a norm that universalizes the experiences of young people and parents in certain spaces and places” (as cited in Farrugia, 2015a, p. 616). In their book *Critical Rural Theory*, Thomas, Lowe, Fulkerson, and Smith (2011) note that putting place on the margins of sociological concerns often leads to rural places and rural identity being overwhelmingly ignored—resulting in what Wyn (2015) calls “urban ubiquity” in research on young people.

Canadian and American research on youth, childhood, and parenthood has a tendency to characterize rural young people and their parents as the “ubiquitous other” (Farrugia, 2014, 2015a; Farrugia, Smyth, & Harrison, 2014; Hopkins & Pain, 2007). Farrugia (2015a) suggests this is because sociological studies demonstrating how childhood and youth are socially constructed “can be traced back to sociology’s foundational theories (such as those of Durkheim, Töennies, and Marx) which positioned non-urban and non-European societies as non-modern and therefore not of sociological significance (Cloke, 2005)” (p. 611). Consequently, “studies of childhood and youth have been [historically] dominated by narratives based on the lives and experiences of children and young people in the urban metropolitan centres of the ‘global north,’ particularly Western Europe and the United States” (p. 611). Nilan (2011) extends this argument by suggesting that “dominant interpretive paradigms [in youth studies] describe most accurately young people in the nations and cultures where these paradigms are produced”—urban and suburban cities in the “global north.”

Despite these omissions, there is a steadily growing body of research on “rural childhoods” (Corbett, 2007, 2009, 2014; Glendinning, Nuttall, Hendry, Kloep, & Wood, 2003; Jamieson, 2000; Leyshon, 2008, 2011; 2015; Matthews, Taylor, Sherwood, Tucker, & Melanie Limb, 2000; Nairn & Higgins, 2015; Valentine, 1997, 2001), and, to a much lesser extent, “rural parenting” (Bonner, 1997; Valentine, 2001) which recognizes that childhood and parenthood are fluid categories, and that experiences of being a child or parent differ across time and place (Holt, 2011; Panelli, Punch, & Robson, 2007; Wyn, 2015). What this literature tells us is that agricultural, manufacturing, and resource extraction industries that once sustained rural areas have declined in viability, and rural areas are increasingly associated with disadvantage in relation to urban environments; hence why some authors have described young people growing up in rural areas as being “at risk of being rural” (Looker & Naylor, 2009). Research on young people in rural and small towns also focuses on the importance of out-migration for young people’s contemporary biographies and how this has a critical influence on the sustainability of these towns (Farrugia, 2015b; Haartsen & Thissen, 2014; Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 2001; Reichert, 2014). This research highlights that even if rural places are not as distinct from urban places as they once were (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 2006; Lichter, 2015; Woods, 2011), their importance as places in which childhood and parenthood play out remains.

Research based in urban and suburban settings can also help illustrate the complex ways in which where one grows up and lives continues to shape our lives in very real ways. Reynolds (2015) explores the notion of the “black neighborhood,” “bringing into sharp focus the way in which such urban neighborhoods provide black youths with different trajectories of transition into adulthood” (p. 651). She reveals how the particular types of cultural and social resources young people are able to access inform the meanings and knowledge of their local neighbourhood. Similarly, Warr (2015) focuses on the transforming significance of place belonging for young people growing up in poor (urban) neighbourhoods. She argues that “poverty increasingly fixes individuals in place and that tendency runs counter to generalized trends in which individuals are detaching from place” (p. 666).

Attention to the local contexts in which practices of childhood and parenting take place (i.e., organized youth sport in rural and small-town British Columbia) creates a more “heterogeneous understanding” of childhood and parenthood (Farrugia, 2015a, p. 614). If we do not engage with rural people and places in scholarly ways, most of what we come to know about rural and small towns and the people who live in them risks becoming overwhelmingly “idealized, even nostalgic” (McGregor, 2010, p. 7). As Thomas et al. (2011) remark, this allows “popular culture to evolve independently of the material reality of rural places, and thereby creat[es] a context in which myths and stereotypes can flourish” (p. 24). In the words of Bunce (1994), we need to stop imagining “armchair countrysides” and instead understand them in their own terms. That is why a project like this one is so important.

Given this scholarly context, the purpose of this study is decidedly exploratory: to search out new forms of practices in organized youth sport, reassess known ones, and expand our understanding of organized youth sport in a different place (i.e., in rural and small towns, and in the West Kootenays in particular). It is also to understand how dominant narratives and discourses on childhood, parenthood, and rurality, as well as macro-level elements (history, social structure) play out in the lives of individuals and the places in which they live (McGregor, 2010). It is to link macro (history, social structure) elements and the micro (individual level) (Mitchell, 2006, p. 15). For this reason, I pursue a community-study approach using ethnographic methodology, grounded in a place-based, life course perspective. While I explain this methodology and theoretical perspective in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3, I provide a brief overview below.

## **1.2. Methodological and Theoretical Introductions**

In her book *Habits of the Heartland: Small-town Life in Modern America*, McGregor (2010) suggests sociologists use community studies to “look at the ways in which broad social processes manifest themselves in day-to-day lives and interactions” (p. 238). For the present research, community studies provide a good vantage point from which to explore how and why discourses on good parents, childhood, and rurality, as well

expectations in the organized youth sport “system” (Beamish, 2015) manifest themselves in the day-to-day lives of young people, parents, and sport administrators in the West Kootenays. Within this methodological framework, the “community” is more than just a geographic location (i.e., the West Kootenays); it is also a “shared set of ideas about how the social world works, a “model” of the world on which we base our interactions with others” (McGregor, 2010, p. 240). The idea is that community studies can help us understand how people involved in the *community of organized youth sport* in the West Kootenays experience childhood, parenthood, and rurality. While the West Kootenays may, to some extent, be bounded by village, town, or city limits, communities of organized youth sport are not. They are necessarily spread out across the West Kootenay region as members rely on, and interact with, each other to maintain infrastructure, form teams, and find opponents. It is for this reason that I pursue a regional community study—one which examines organized youth sport across a region of rural and small towns in British Columbia rather than in one single rural and small town.

Identifying salient issues within a community is a central task for the researcher (Cohen, 1978). For this, I turn to ethnography. Ethnographers go into the field armed with lines of inquiry that are best pursued by experiencing the community from the ground up. This involves

interacting, observing, and talking with people to gain detailed accounts of their personal experiences of social life, their shared and individual ways of relating these, and their understandings of the manner in which their lives are shaped by various agencies and factors. (Dyck, 2012, p. 9)

The key to ethnographic methodology, notes Cohen (1978), is not to prove the existence of a phenomenon; rather, it is for deep observation to lead to the identification of a research problem. While Cohen urges ethnographers to “take one’s cues from the field in identifying salient issues, and in turn appropriate methods for this investigation” (p. 3), he nonetheless recognizes that “one must start with a vague conception” of what might be noteworthy (p. 8).

Three central problems drove me into the field: a dearth of research on organized youth sport in rural and small towns, the placelessness of sociological research on

organized youth sport, and finally, limited research which encourages young people to speak for themselves (Messner & Musto, 2014). Having tended to the first two concerns already, I turn to the third. For a variety of reasons—both practical and epistemological— young people do not figure prominently in empirical research about their own leisure practices (Laurendeau & Konecny, 2015; Messner & Musto, 2014). Instead, parental or adult perspectives dominate research on young people’s leisure activities because it is assumed that young people cannot fully comprehend the complexity of their experiences. The resultant research focuses on how organized youth sport is arranged to meet the needs of parents and children, rather than on children’s subjective experiences of organized youth sport. As a result, notes Jeanes (2010), children and young people are often “seen” but not “heard” in leisure and family research. Research which does rely on young people’s perspectives such as Dyck’s (2012) ethnographic work *Fields of Play: An Ethnography of Children’s Sports*, demonstrates that young people “comprehend the nuanced and varied nature of their involvements in and experiences of playing sport” (p. 21). It is for this reason that this project is firmly grounded in the views of young people themselves.

I acknowledge that focusing exclusively on the experiences of young people would obscure how their “engagement in [organized youth] sport serves to connect them closely to adults,” especially their parents (Dyck, 2012, p. 103). Guided by Jeanes (2010), this project examines young people’s experiences *alongside* those of (their) parents. Doing so allows me to examine “how parental views may differ and conflict with those of young people in ways that would not be evident” were these people not participating in the same research project (p. 251). I also include adult sport administrators because, as Dyck (2012) notes, young people and adults (like sport administrators) come to organized youth sport with “decidedly different entry and vantage points” and thus often express “disparate personal experiences, related to particular points of view” (p. 5). Because many of the sport administrators (and parents) have grown up, raised their children, and now work with young people in the region, they provide the access to a lived historical context that young people cannot provide.

As I will outline in Chapter 2, the life course perspective as developed by Elder (1998) and applied to the study of young people and families by Mitchell (2006) is instrumental in bringing together the experiences of young people, parents, and adults. By linking the experiences of individuals to macro historical, geographic, and cultural contexts, this perspective helps explain how young people and adults may be taking part in the same activities (i.e., organized youth sport) in the same places (i.e., the West Kootenays) at the same time, but may develop different experiences in the process. One key principle of this perspective is that the historical context in which one is born is invaluable to unlocking the complexity of contemporary experiences (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015; Elder Jr., 1998; Mitchell, 2006). As Mitchell (2006) notes,

the past . . . has the potential to shape the present and the future, which can be envisioned as a “ripple” or “domino effect.” . . . For example, one generation can transmit to the next the “reverberations” of the historical circumstances that shaped its life history. (p. 24)

Earlier circumstances in a parent’s or an adult’s life can continue to influence their life experiences, actions, and decisions (e.g., whether to register their children for organized youth sport). In addition, individual experiences are always “linked” (Elder Jr., 1998, p. 3)—the experiences of parents and children are necessarily intertwined. It is therefore important to consider how young people, (their) parents, and adult sport administrators simultaneously—although not necessarily congruently—experience organized youth sport in the West Kootenays.

In the next section, I provide a brief historical and demographic overview of the West Kootenays. I focus on key historical events and contemporary demographic patterns which come to bear on the lives of my participants as they negotiate their way through organized youth sport in their towns. Guided by a place-based, life course perspective, this overview frames individuals’ experiences, actions, and behaviours within geographical and historical contexts and events and an evolving social structure (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015).

### **1.3. Introduction to the West Kootenays**

*At one point, there was a lot more of a boom time for logging, there wasn't as many restrictions, there was a lot more easy timber to get at. And now there has been a diminishing global need for things like paper products. There used to be more mines than there are now. But I guess, if you look historically at our area, the mining was one of the first things that really brought these towns on the map in the first place, and then you have people here that start doing other things and looking for other ways to make money. But it's a resource-based economy, so that's ultimately what it is, it's just not the jobs here as much. And for this area in particular, when the lake was flooded, when the Columbia River was dammed up. That was the late '60s, I think '68 or something like that, the property prices around here just completely plummeted, and so there's a big inflow of people that just came in wanting to get back to the land and actually come out with very little money and pick up big pieces of property and alternative life-styles, there's communes and, like, draft dodgers. So there's a lot of people—so that was a big influx of those people coming up, and then in the '80s there was another boom of people, like in the early '80s, another boom of people came up and moved here, cheap property prices again, and so around here, around our area, it seems like there was a big—there's a lot more students come through until about 10 years ago or something when that big bulge, demographic bulge worked its way through the system. Now, there are a lot of older people, and people that are retired here from Kelowna and Alberta. (Jeff, Edgewood)*

It is particularly important, as Jeff remarks above, to understand the history of the region because it impacts who can and does lives here. It is also important to recognize current demographics because it is these people—the resources they possess, the views they hold, and the values they cherish—who decide whether they can or want to make organized youth sport work in their towns and for their families, and under what conditions.

#### **1.3.1. Indigenous Peoples**

The West Kootenays is the ancestral land of the Sinixt Peoples and the Ktunaxa, the Arrow Lakes First Peoples who occupied the lands for thousands of years before the first Europeans came to the area. Given the pace of colonial expansion, by the early 1900s “the voices of the first occupants of the area appeared to have been silenced,” says Gordon (2004). By 1956 the government declared the Arrow Lakes First Peoples extinct

because the last known resident died.<sup>4</sup> Then, in 1964, entire communities and individual residents in the Arrow Lakes area were uprooted to make way for the Columbia River Treaty reservoir behind the Hugh Keenleyside Dam. What government officials did not consider was the cultural use of the land by the First Peoples (Pearkes, 2002). Regrettably, properties and ancestral grounds were submerged, leaving behind no clues of a thriving aboriginal culture. As European people and their laws, culture, and attitudes about property, land, and wealth came to dominate the region, the Native peoples became increasingly marginalized (Mouat, 1995, pp.4-5). Today, there is a stark absence of Indigenous peoples, history, and culture in the West Kootenays. Very little is known about how many Aboriginal people live in or access the region's services.<sup>5</sup>

### **1.3.2. Resource Migrants: Miners, Loggers, and Farmers**

What brought the initial wave of European settlers to the West Kootenays? As with many parts of the British Columbia interior, it was primarily resource extraction (Murton, 2007). While many parts of Canada's unpopulated and unsettled areas were deliberately transformed by a dream of the rural agricultural idyll, British Columbia's interior—especially the West Kootenays—told a different story. It was mining, logging, and fishing which dominated this “countryside,” notes Sandwell (1999). While mining in British Columbia began in 1858 on the shores of the Fraser River, the inaccessibility of the West Kootenay region meant that mining did not take off in the region until well into the latter half of the nineteenth century, explains Mouat (1995). Nevertheless, the sense of the region's richness was certainly growing fast by the 1880s (Gordon, 2004) and mining

<sup>4</sup> On March 27, 2017, the Sinixt people—declared extinct by the federal government over 60 years ago—won a historical court battle to have their existence recognized. According to the CBC, “Judge Lisa Mrozinsky also ruled that the Sinixt First Nation has not lost its connection to a huge swath of southern B.C., from Revelstoke to the U.S. border, and still has Aboriginal rights to the territory” (Nieoczym, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> I suggest there are two reasons for this. The first is the absence of any First Nation communities and reserves in the region (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). In this respect, the region is unique compared to other regions in the province. The second reason is the size of villages, towns, and cities in the region. Statistics Canada suppresses data for quality or confidentiality when towns are deemed too small. For example, only Nelson, Castlegar, and Trail meet the 250-person threshold with respect to individuals who identify as Aboriginal. Despite this limited data, what we do know is this: less than 0.3 percent (130) of the residents in the area are Registered or Treaty Indian. Just over 4 percent report Aboriginal Identity, with most reporting being Metis.

camps became the *raison d'être* for the steady influx of entrepreneurs and settlers to the region (Gordon, 2004, p. 72).

Eventually, the construction of two transcontinental railways and steamships and the appearance of paddle wheelers helped to stimulate new and substantial development of the West Kootenays' mineral resources. Mining was also made easier by "an active move by the provincial and national authorities to construct new and permanent settlements . . . in order to facilitate further exploitation of natural resources in the future" (Young, 2008, p. 9). The growing scale of the mining industry from the 1890s to the First World War and beyond meant that energy needed to be reliable and cheap, goods shipped, and residents fed—causing a host of peripheral industries to develop. Smelters were also built locally, and the Trail smelter still survives to this day as one of the world's largest zinc and lead smelter and refining operations, not to mention the region's top employer (Teck Resources, 2015).

To temper the boom or bust cycles of mining communities, many residents turned to peripheral industries to make a living. This included logging and fruit farming, and in no time, logging started to supersede mining as the next viable resource industry in the region (Gordon, 2004, p. 93). To this day, logging (and tree-planting, milling, and pulp production) continues to rival mining as a top regional employer. While subsistence and small-scale farms continue to operate in the region, farming-for-market only lasted until the 1950s (Lang, 2003).

What we learn from this history is that the West Kootenays are not, and have never been, rooted in agriculture. This is important as many of the discourses of rural life are based on farming communities (Lichter, 2015), especially in the case of those linking hockey to rural and small towns. Dryden and MacGregor (1989) exemplify this line of thinking in their book, *Home Game*. They suggest that for many small-town residents, hockey has been "a means of off-season fitness for the rigours of farming, the driving force behind the building of community centres, the way in which widely separate communities connected with each other" (pp. 20–21). Absent is an awareness that mining communities were much more densely populated than farming communities—a fact which may have

presented their residents with less individual isolation. They could also operate in the winter (especially in southern British Columbia where winters did not entirely shut down operations). I do not mean to suggest that West Kootenay towns did not have any time for hockey (I will make a case for quite the contrary in Chapter 5); rather, what I am suggesting is that the economic history and the climate of a region necessarily impact the unfolding of a leisure culture, and eventually, a culture of organized youth sport.

### **1.3.3. Japanese Internees**

Beyond miners, other groups found themselves living in the West Kootenays. During the Second World War, some eight thousand Nikkei, Canadian citizens of Japanese ethnicity, were relocated from British Columbia's coast to the region's isolated and partly abandoned "ghost" towns such as Slocan City, New Denver, and Kaslo (Gordon, 2004; Rodgers & Ingram, 2014). Interestingly, it was the Nikkei who popularized baseball among West Kootenay residents. According to a feature film by the National Film Board of Canada (2006), *Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story*, many of the internees attribute their survival to playing baseball.

### **1.3.4. Ideological Migrants: Doukhobors, Quakers, and Draft Dodgers**

Finally, Rodgers and Ingram (2014) suggest that the region has attracted a disproportionately large number of "ideological migrants" or "values-based migrants." Few economic opportunities were a good thing for these migrants because it meant the region would not be brought into the capitalist project. First came the Doukhobors. They arrived in Canada in 1899 after centuries of persecution in Russia due to their advocacy of pacifism and communal social life (Crang, 2006; Gordon, 2004). With the promise of land and freedom from military service in Canada, more than 7000 Doukhobors settled in the Canadian prairies. Following external pressures as well as internal divisions over some Doukhobors' rejection of communal life, as many as 5000 relocated to the Kootenay and Boundary regions where they purchased 20,000 acres between 1908 and 1922 that they

intended to farm communally (Gordon, 2004; Rodgers & Ingram, 2014). A significant number of families in the West Kootenay region still identify as Doukhobors.

The Quakers are another group of ideological migrants who came to the Kootenays to escape the capitalism of the early twentieth century. The Quakers settled in Argenta, which was named as such by the Argenta (Silver) Mining Company in the 1800s. According to Rodgers and Ingram (2014), the Quakers arrived in the region from California as outcasts of the McCarthy-era politics of 1950s America, looking for a place in which they could build a community that better reflected their principles. Quakers bear a long history of marginalization and persecution, despite which they have continued to pursue peace and non-violent resistance, from their involvement in the anti-slavery movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to their ongoing efforts to oppose war, promote fair trade, and bear witness to atrocities. To this day, the Quakers make up a large part of the local population.

The most recent group of ideological migrants are the thousands of young, educated, urban, middle-class Americans who made their way north during the 1960s and early 1970s. As Rodgers and Ingram (2014) note, “propelled by conscription, the Vietnam War, the New Left and counterculture movements, and a general sense of disillusion,” (p. 96) these men and women sought a different life where their broader ideals regarding liberalism, egalitarianism, and democratic participation could be realized.

The fact that the Quakers and Doukhobors shared with the draft dodgers “their rejection of materialism, their commitment to communal living, their belief in pacifism” drew the Americans in (Rodgers & Ingram, 2014, p. 102). The fact that the preceding groups were self-sustaining is what kept the mostly urban, middle- and upper-class draft dodgers there. Over the decades, the region has developed a reputation as “counterculture haven” with war resisters as recent as the Iraq war still finding support there.

### **1.3.5. Current Population**

According to the most recent BC Stats (2016), the population of the Central Kootenay Region stands at 59,517 with over half (30,789) living in unincorporated areas. The City of Nelson is the largest community, with 10,572 residents; the settlement of Edgewood is the smallest with 236 residents. Over the course of this research, the population of this region increased by 1.8 percent, with some of the highest rates of growth in unincorporated areas and the City of Nelson (3.3 percent). The Kootenay-Boundary Region has a total population of 31,447 with just under a third living in unincorporated areas. The City of Trail is the largest community, with 7,709 residents; the Village of Fruitvale is the smallest with 1,920 residents. Over the course of this research, the population of this region increased by 1.0 percent. The highest rates of decrease were in unincorporated areas (15 percent) and Trail (4 percent).

#### **Age**

In their analysis of recent Census 2016 data, Breen & Rethoret (2017) report that two communities in the West Kootenays have a median age below that of the provincial average (41.9): the City of Rossland (39.9) and the City of Nelson (40.9). The highest median age is in the Village of New Denver (56.5), with the rest of the cities, villages, and towns between 45 and 50. Thus, while the region may be aging (as is the case with most of rural Canada) (Moazzami, n.d.), some communities are not. Nevertheless, since 2001 all towns have lost a considerable percentage of young people aged 0–19, some as high as 36 percent. New Denver and Silverton have lost 37 percent of their young people, leaving only 95 in total. Slocan lost 35 percent, leaving only 65, and Nakusp lost 33 percent, leaving only 305. Fruitvale and Kaslo have lost 26 and 23 percent of their young people respectively leaving behind only 475 and 225. Even the biggest towns in the region have been hit: Castlegar lost 11 percent of its young people, Greater Trail 15 percent, and Nelson 3 percent.

Having fewer young people also impacts the school system and all three school districts in the region have experienced significant decline in enrolment since 1995/1996 (Ministry of Education, 2016)—the year after which all my youth research participants were

born. “Every year there’s a conversation, “Is this the year the school is going to close?”” says New Denver resident Eva. Her concerns are not unfounded: over the course of the research (2012–2015) school enrolment decreased by 612 students across the three school districts; this represents changes of -4.5 percent (Kootenay Lake), -7.8 percent (Kootenay-Columbia), and -12.5 percent (Arrow Lakes Districts) (Raynolds, 2017). As a result, two elementary schools closed (Rossland and Burton), one high school (Rossland), and the school in New Denver (in Eva’s community) received the Rural Education Enhancement Fund—emergency funding from the provincial government—to keep it open for another year (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2016b). At the time of writing, five schools are threatened with closure for the 2016 or 2017 school years (elementary schools in Slocan, Winlaw, Meadow Creek, and Salmo, and a middle school in Nelson). This is on top of those fourteen schools which closed in the decade preceding the research and the countless that closed before then (BC Teachers’ Federation, 2016).

### ***Ethnicity***

This region is also noticeably white compared to urban areas of Canada. In their report on the demographic trends in the region, Breen & Rethoret (2017) found that people who identify as European make up nearly 90 percent of the total population—a full 20 to 30 percent more than in the rest of British Columbia. People who identify as “other North American” (i.e., Acadian, American, Newfoundlander, and Quebecois) make up roughly 24 percent of the population. Moreover, visible minorities make up less than 2 percent of the population, with more than half of the communities reporting *zero* visible minority residents. Visible minorities live in the three largest centres: Nelson, Castlegar, and Trail.

### ***Employment***

The West Kootenay region is paradoxically known for its *lack* of stable economic opportunities *and* its internationally recognized mining company, Teck (formerly Cominco). This means that the economy can be great, or it can be terrible. From 1951–1981 employment in BC’s mining industry—much of which was in the West Kootenays—doubled and the population of Trail continued to rise. Remarkably, Trail’s population even grew substantially during WWI and WWII, most of it owed to Cominco’s role in

manufacturing for the wars. At one point, the smelter employed 5,000 people and “disposable income, it was everywhere. There was tons of money, tons, it was fucking ridiculous,” says a former Junior A coach interviewed in Decosse (2015, p. 63). No sooner had this happened, the mining industry declined: between 1980 and 1999 mining jobs fell by 50 percent (Young, 2008) and the population declined to levels last seen in 1931. Decosse (2015) argues that “mechanization, contract work, and outsourcing have reduced the labour force to a fraction of what it once was” (pp. 63–64). Given that the smelter is right in the heart of Trail, that city has felt most the impact.

Today, Breen (2017) reports that the top sectors of employment in the region are trade, health care and social assistance,<sup>6</sup> and forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas. From 2014 to 2015, construction saw an 82.6 percent growth (to 8.4 percent), and professional, scientific, and technical services saw a 31.6 percent growth (to 2.5 percent). The region’s proximity to over a dozen active mines (Arnold, 2016) means that many residents commute outside of the region to work in the resource extraction sector; yet, they are not captured in these figures. As has been the case historically, Trail remains home to the region’s two largest employers and economic drivers: Teck Trail Operations and the Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital (KBRH). Together, Teck and KBRH directly employ over 2,100 individuals (Trail, 2014). Other major employers include: Zellstoff Celgar Limited Partnership (pulp/sawmill, Castlegar), School Districts 8 and 20, Pacific Insight Electronics Corp (electronics manufacturing, Nelson), Selkirk College (post-secondary, Castlegar), Red Mountain Ski Resort (Rossland) and Whitewater Ski Resort (Nelson), grocery stores (Trail, Nelson, Castlegar), and a variety of other forestry and mining companies (Kootenaybiz, 2015).

## ***Education***

Raynolds (2017) reports that the region has varied levels of educational attainment. Of Rossland residents, 71 percent have some form of post-secondary education. In Kaslo, the figures are lower at 67.4 percent of residents, and in Warfield, 66.1 percent. Only 37.8 percent of Nakusp residents and 48.2 percent of Trail residents

<sup>6</sup> They do not provide a breakdown of what jobs constitute this sector.

can say the same. Only 17 percent of West Kootenay residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, a level lower than the provincial average of 22 percent. In Trail, only 10 percent of residents have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher; however, in Rossland, the figure is the highest at 27 percent, with 8.4 percent of residents with education above a bachelor's degree.

### ***Income***

Powell and Raynolds (2017) report that the highest average income for families across the region is in Rossland at \$94,045 and the lowest is in Winlaw (\$43,342), Slocan (\$44,671), and Silverton (\$46,324). In 2014, six towns in the region had a percentage of low-income persons above the provincial average of 15.9 percent. This includes Slocan (34 percent), the unincorporated community of Winlaw (22.1 percent), Silverton (23.3 percent), New Denver (20.4 percent), Kaslo (20.4 percent), and Salmo (18.6 percent). Nelson is nearly equal to the provincial level at 15.2 percent. The earnings gap between men and women in the region is larger than the national and provincial average. The average male earns \$50,208, while the average female earns \$29,975—an earnings gap of \$20,233 (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2016a). This pattern is comparable to typical resource based economies, where the male tends to be the person who earns money to support a family (Little, 2006). The percentage of children living with low income is 26 percent in the Central Kootenay, well above the provincial rate of 19 percent.

### **1.3.6. A West Kootenay Culture**

As diverse as the region may be, and as connected to the wider world as its residents might be, it is recognized by scholars and residents that there is a West Kootenay Way or Culture. The West Kootenay Culture is drawn from a region noted for enduring patterns of dissent and alternative values (as I have outlined above); a region which has “always attracted proud isolationists” (Pearkes, 2002, p. 7), those “looking to withdraw from mainstream society” (Rodgers, 2014, p. 49), both “people looking for something and people escaping from something” (Gordon, 2004, p. 236).

While the West Kootenays certainly have a history of dissent, Rodgers and Ingram (2014) caution not to lump everyone into the same category. While this area is full of “resisters” to the urban, middle and upper-class status quo, there are (at least) two groups of resisters: one is a “working-class, economics-based challenge” and the other an “urban, middle-class” ideological-based challenge (Rodgers & Ingram, 2014, p. 100). There are residents who come from a long regional history of organized labour and working-class dynamics which made the area, particularly Trail and Castlegar, “one of the most radical strongholds for the burgeoning socialist movement in British Columbia at the turn of the century” (p. 99). There are others who are the “urban, middle-class baby boom generation [and their children who] embrace feminism . . . pacifism, war resistance, communal, and back-to-the-land ideals, alternative views regarding individualism and self[-]realization, not to mention sexuality, nudity, and drugs” (p. 111). For the most part, these people have settled in the Slocan Valley, the more remote and unincorporated areas on Kootenay Lake, and more recently, Nelson. Thus, while the groups described above share a long-held “rugged sense of independence, an understanding of the good life as it relate[s] to living off the land, and an appreciation of rural and small-town community” (p. 100), they are certainly not a homogeneous group.

## **1.4. Research Questions**

As there is little research on the experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators who participate in organized sport in rural areas and small towns across Canada, this project was exploratory. I started with “vague ideas about topics or scholarly theories of interest” (Tracy, 2013, p. 268). I knew that, at the very least, meanings and experiences of growing up, parenting, and sport participation had to be considered within the historical and geographical contexts in which they manifested themselves. Initial trips into the field were meant to gather historical and geographical information about the West Kootenays. Yet this did not present the full picture. A review of the literature on organized youth sport, parenting, and childhood in North America also pointed to the need to

consider the ideological context<sup>7</sup> - that is, the ways in which organized youth sport is tied to important ideas and beliefs about childhood and parenthood. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) argue that “different groups of people in society often develop their own ideas and beliefs for giving meaning to the world and making sense of their experiences” (p.17). Sport, they add, can be a site for questioning and changing dominant ideologies. For this reason, it is important to consider the ideological context in which sport is being experienced.

Tending to the geographic, historical, and ideological contexts, my initial inquiries were focused on why parents put their children in organized youth sport and what young people enjoy/do not enjoy about sport participation. I also focused on past experiences/memories in organized youth sport, perspectives on the role of organized youth sport in social circles, reasons for which people might withdraw from organized youth sport, and community tensions/identity around organized youth sport. While I was immersed in literature which helped me think about this topic, I did not enter ethnographic research knowing precisely what literatures or theories would eventually be helpful in grounding my research until many of the interviews, observations, and fieldnotes were recorded (Cohen, 1978).

Following the lead set by Tracy (2013), after time in the field and an initial review of data, I reconsidered the best direction of the analysis, reworked my research questions, and educated myself on literature that would help me frame my new insights. In my case, it was not until I started analyzing initial data collected that I figured out what was truly interesting, noteworthy, and theoretically significant. It was at this point that I played “the qualitative version of the game-show Jeopardy” (Tracy, 2013, p. 268): I discovered the answers first (contained in fieldnotes, transcripts, codes, and memos), and then came to realize what questions the data were answering. A brief look at the evolution of my research questions helps illuminate this process.

<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Mitchell (2012), I define ideology as “a system of beliefs and ideas that justifies or rationalizes action” (p.22).

My original research question developed in the proposal stage was very much exploratory. It was: How is organized youth sport in one British Columbian rural and small-town region experienced by young people, participants and non-participants alike, between the ages of 12 and 18? Answering this question, however, proved challenging as I entered the field. First, accessing non-participants was near impossible (as I explain elsewhere in this chapter) and for this reason, I was not able to collect data from them. Second, I became increasingly aware that the lives and interests of young people and their parents were closely connected. As I collected more and more data on the logistics of sport participation in these areas, I shifted from seeing sport primarily from young people's points of view to a gradual acknowledgment that these views must be recognized as being inextricably connected to those of their parents. Another question came to mind: What role does organized youth sport play in the day-to-day lives of young people, parents, *and* sport administrators in these rural and small communities? As I spent more time in the region, I also came to recognize the importance of local history, culture, and geography in shaping organized youth sport. I began asking, what is it about this place (i.e., the West Kootenays) that contributes to these people's experiences? Finally, as I started to work through the data, I realized how much the ideological conditions of childhood and parenthood seep into participants' behaviours. While this is certainly not an exhaustive audit of the evolution of my research questions (or the direction of this project), it serves to illustrate the iterative, ethnographic approach that grounded this research and resulted in the findings contained in this dissertation. The research questions of this project, then, can be formulated as follows:

- How do young people, parents, and sport administrators in the West Kootenays negotiate macro level (e.g., geographic, economic, demographic, historical, ideological) and micro level (e.g., individual, familial) influences in their involvement in organized youth sport?
- How are childhood and parenthood envisioned and constructed in the context of organized youth sport in the West Kootenays?
- How does place shape the experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators taking part in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays?

The findings and arguments presented throughout this dissertation emerge from the everyday lives of my participants to address these research questions. In Chapters 4 and

5, I draw attention to place-based conditions that influence organized youth sport. These include geographical, historical, cultural, and ideological factors. In Chapter 6, I bring attention to the heterogeneity that characterizes practices of childhood and parenting in the context of organized youth sport in the West Kootenays. I conclude with the following argument: experiences of organized youth sport are necessarily emplaced. For the young people, parents, and adults involved in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays, place is at the centre of their practices and meanings (Vodden, Baldacchino, & Gibson, 2015) of childhood, parenthood, and organized youth sport.

## **1.5. Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.5.1. Rural**

Rural is a polysemous word, with both lay and scholarly meanings (Lichter, 2015; Woods, 2011). Rural is often considered “that which is *not* urban” (Lichter, 2015; Thomas et al., 2011); this was particularly the case for early sociologists who sought to understand the consequences of modernization and industrialization (Bonner, 1997; Lichter, 2015). But, a binary understanding of rural and urban places proves difficult to uphold when, “in many cases, the lifestyles of rural residents may seem little different to those of urban residents” (Woods, 2011, p. 162). In post-industrialized countries like Canada, the “rural [may] still be recognized as being different from urban, but the difference is seen to be one of degree, not of kind” (Bonner, 1997, p. 134).

The blurring of distinctions between “rural” and “urban” does not mean that rural places are not sociologically significant. If population density and total population size are a measure of “rurality,” then we understand that rural towns face unique circumstances which have a direct bearing on residents’ lives. If we look at the economies of rural places, then we recognize development around distinctively rural industries; for example, farming, fishing, forestry, and mining. If our focus is on reconciliation and the effects of colonization, rural, remote and isolated places continue to play a significant role in treaty negotiations and the re-writing of settler-indigenous relations. Finally, if we consider “representations of the rural” (Woods, 2011)—ideas, beliefs, and discourses about “rurality”—we see that

“the rural” is still very much alive, even if it remains “messy, multiple, and contested” (Hamilton, 2015, p.5).

The key is that there is no such thing as an objective definition of rurality or rural (Bonner, 1997; Hamilton, 2015; Woods, 2011). The way we understand “rural” living, lives, experiences, and structures is informed by what questions we are attempting to answer. Given that this dissertation takes a place-based life course perspective, I am particularly interested in how individual lives are embedded in and transformed by geographic, historical, and ideological conditions and events (Mitchell, 2006, p. 18). This includes how individual lives are embedded in and transformed by macro processes which occur *in a specific place* at a *specific time*. My understanding of rural and small towns is necessarily one which acknowledges the impact of living in a small, spatially dispersed population which is far from large centres (Lauzon, Bollman, & Ashton, 2015; Lichter, 2015). People who live in regions with a density of fewer than 150 people per square kilometre, in “small towns” with a population of 1,000–9,000, and who find themselves hours away from major cities (Beshiri et al., 2004) encounter distinct opportunities and challenges, and these will determine the extent of agency individuals can enact in their own lives. People who live in rural and small towns also have ideas about what these towns should/do look and feel like. What makes a place “rural” is therefore more than its geographic location.

According to Woods (2011), rural places (like any place) are made up of the interconnection between the material, the imaginative, and the practised dimensions of place. The material dimension refers to the wider historical, social, economic, environmental, geographic, and cultural elements of a place. The imaginative dimension of rural places refers to representations, discourses, narratives, and ideas about rurality. Woods (2011) elaborates:

the “rural” is first imagined, then represented, then takes on material form as places, landscapes, and ways of life are shaped to conform to the expectations that the ideas of the “rural” embody. Experiences of these “rural” places and lifestyles are fed back into the collective imagination, refining and modifying the idea and thus contributing to a dynamic process through which the “rural” is produced and reproduced. (p. 17)

For researchers interested in organized youth sport in rural and small towns, it is important to consider how rural and small towns are imagined as “rural” and what role organized youth sport (or sport in general) might play in these discourses on rurality.

Finally, while everyday lives of rural people are certainly linked to material conditions and representations of rurality, these aspects “never completely overwhelm the experiences of everyday life” (Halfacree, 2006, pp. 51–52). “People living in rural areas make the rural through their own practices and performances . . . , through their lifestyle choices, and through their interactions with other rural residents” (Woods, 2011, p. 162). The crux of this dimension is that everyday interpretations and experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators contribute to the making of the West Kootenays as a rural place. But experiences of “rural living” vary enormously. At any given time, there are many overlapping and plural versions of rurality co-existing across the same territory, “sometimes sharing spaces of interactions and practices, and sometimes competing in their claims to place” (Woods, 2011, p. 178).

### **1.5.2. Young People**

The definition of “young person” or “youth” varies based on context. The Canadian federal government specifically defines rural youth as being age 15–29 in places with a population of less than 10,000 (R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2002). This age bracket is particularly significant for local governments, policy makers, and service providers concerned with the “aging” of rural and small towns. These groups target employment opportunities and training to young people as they make their first entry into the workforce (roughly around age 15) and through their transition into “careers” (in their late twenties). It is also at this age when many young people start to plan their families, and it is the hope of local politicians that they will stick around to do so (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2015).

For this project, anyone 19 and under is considered a “young person.” This reflects the fact that 19 is usually the age at which one is no longer allowed to participate in organized “youth” sport. As the project focuses on young people who are *currently* or were

*recently* involved in organized youth sport, this “age cap” makes sense. Youth is also considered a social status that one can float in and out of (Coté & Allahar, 2006), but this does not preclude the fact that many institutions which influence the lives of young people (like organized sports) put age limits on “youth.”

### **1.5.3. Organized Youth Sport**

For this project, “organized youth sport” is defined as any sport that takes place through an organizing body such as an association or club that meets regularly (e.g., for practice, games, trips), and that is delivered specifically, but not necessarily *exclusively*, to young people. I intentionally leave the definition of “sport” and “organized” open to capture the meaning of organized sport *in place*. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) remind us that sport is a social construction, with different meanings across cultures and contexts. What might be considered a “sport” in one setting may not be in another. For example, my participants mention snowmobiling, motocross, and hunting as “sports” young people participate in yet these do not meet the official definition of sport put forth by Sport Canada. In terms of organization and association, The West Kootenay Recreational Dirt Bike and ATV Society has been operating motocross trail networks and organizing races for all ages since 2004 (Lakeman, 2017). In this respect, it is organized in very much the same way as a local soccer club—if different only in scale and frequency of competitions.

Definitions of sport *in place* are also influenced by cultures, practices, and policies from the outside. In the West Kootenays, the SportBC definition of sport is used by regional Sport Councils to determine which activities receive operational funding. For this reason, activities that locals may understand to be sports, and which are organized and associated, may not receive any financial support. The local branch of KidSport—an organization that covers the cost of registration fees—uses the SportBC definition to determine which activities are covered by its subsidies. Unfortunately, this means that participants in dance and skateboarding are ineligible for funding, even though some research participants spoke of dance as the “sport of choice” for many girls in the region and skateboarding attracts many young people.

## 1.6. Dissertation Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical and empirical context that guides this research project. I begin with a summary of major concerns pursued within the sociology of sport. I then move to the specific focus of this dissertation. This includes an exploration of the dominant paradigms on childhood and parenthood which guide much of the research on organized youth sport in Canada. I follow this with an examination of scholarly work on child rearing in rural and small towns, as well as organized youth sport in rural and small towns. I close by outlining my theoretical approach—a place-based, life course perspective—to demonstrate its usefulness in framing spatialized practices of parenthood and childhood through organized youth sport in the West Kootenays.

In Chapter 3, I present the methodology used for this research project. I provide an in-depth discussion of the research design and the data, including the choice of ethnography, methods, access to participants, and data analysis. I also discuss the ethical considerations when researching in rural and small towns, especially when it includes young people. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how I negotiated my identities and potential bias throughout the research.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings. The findings build from the everyday lives of my participants because it is in this dimension that we can best come to understand how spatialized practices of parenthood and childhood play out in organized youth sport. Chapter 4 focuses on the material and structural conditions of the West Kootenays, that is, precarious employment, low population, and distance to population. Chapter 5 focuses on people's ideas about rurality: what they *imagine* or *represent* rural places to be and feel like and how this comes to bear on their involvement in organized youth sport. I focus on the West Kootenay Culture and the "hockey-as-small-town ethos" to illustrate this. Together, these chapters demonstrate how individuals negotiate geographic, historical, cultural, and ideological contexts in the pursuit of organized youth sport—as youth participants, parents, or administrators.

In Chapter 6, I present the discussion. I relate the ethnographic material in Chapters 4 and 5 to practices of childhood and parenthood. I discuss how the geographic, historical, cultural, and ideological contexts presented in Chapters 4 and 5 complicate the pursuit of ideal childhoods and parenthoods through organized youth sport. Drawing on a place-based, life course perspective which stresses the interaction between structure and human agency, I highlight the diversity of approaches to parenting and childhood that stem from the negotiation of the conditions presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Finally, the dissertation concludes (Chapter 7) with a summary of key findings that emerged out of this research project and how these relate to our knowledge on parenthood, childhood, and organized youth sport in rural and small towns. The implications, importance, limitations of this research, and possible avenues for future research are also discussed.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter begins with a summary of key concerns pursued in the sociology of sport. I follow this up with a discussion of dominant themes in the literature on parenthood, childhood, and organized youth sport. I note its limitations in contextualizing experiences of organized youth sport in rural and small towns. Given this gap in knowledge, I next turn to literature on growing up and parenting “in the countryside.” I draw on its major themes and identify a significant gap: a lack of consideration of the sporting practices of young people and parents in rural and small towns. It is for this reason that I next highlight the literature on organized youth sport in rural and small towns. Dominated by quantitative empirical research, this body of work does little to further our knowledge on the intersection between parenting, childhood, and organized youth sport in these small places. For this reason, I close this chapter by laying out the theoretical orientation that drives this inquiry: a place-based, life course perspective.

#### **2.1. Introduction**

The sociology of sport is a sub-discipline of sociology which centres around the application of C. Wright Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination to the social world of sport. It is particularly interested in how individual experiences in and of sport are linked to the structure of society, what social patterns influence individuals,’ families,’ and groups’ experiences of sport, and the taken-for-granted assumptions about sport (its definition, purpose, meaning, shape). Coakley and Donnelly (2009) call this the “deeper game” associated with sport. This field of practice is based on three central assumptions.

First, sport is a social construction: it is an “aspec[t] of our social world that is created by people as they interact with one another under the social, political, and economic conditions that exist in their society” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 11). This means that sport is also a contested terrain; there is “no universal agreement about

meaning, purpose, and organization” of sport (p. 7). Second, sport is a major social institution: it serves as a regulatory agency that channels behaviours in culturally prescribed ways (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 10) and establishes and transmits social norms, values, statuses, and roles. Sociologists of sport are particularly interested in the connection between sport and other major social institutions (e.g., family, education, economy, politics, mass media, religion), cultural identities, and ideologies (e.g., race, gender, social class, disability). This brings me to the third assumption: that sport is a microcosm, not a reflection of society. It is a “world in its own right, with its own life and its own contradictions” (Harvey, 2000, p. 19 in Crossman & Scherer 2015, p. 5) yet is also shaped by the social world around us and actively shapes the social world (Crossman & Scherer, 2015, p. 5).

Major texts in the field include *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies* by Jay Coakley, *Sociology of North American Sport* by George H. Sage and D. Stanley Eitzen, and in the Canadian context, *Social Dimensions of Canadian Sport and Physical Activity* by Jane Crossman and Jay Scherer. Beyond these overview texts, there is considerable diversity in theoretical perspectives used by sociologists of sport (Maguire & Young, 2002). Conflict theorists are interested in how sport reflects the interests of the powerful and advantaged, with particular attention to processes of capitalism (see Collins, 2013; Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Gruneau, 1999; Kennelly, 2016). Critical theorists are interested in how sport acts as a site where culture and social organization are produced, reproduced, and changed (see Giardina & Donnelly, 2008; Sykes, 2017). Feminist theorists draw attention to how sport is a gendered activity in which (certain) males have the power (see Hargreaves, 1994; McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). This is complemented by masculinity studies and research which focuses more broadly on sport, gender, and sexuality (see Lenskyj, 2003; Moriss-Roberts & Gilbert, 2013; Pronger, 1990; Young & White, 2007). Race theorists consider how sport is racialized, racializing, and racist (see Atkinson & Young, 2014; Darnell, Nakamura, & Joseph, 2012; Hylton, 2009). Post-colonial theorists examine sport within the context of (de)colonization, with a specific focus on sport-for-development and sport for peace (see Darnell, 2012; Wilson, 2012). Interactionist theorists focus on how sport participants understand their world, with a particular interest in the characteristics of sport subcultures (see Atkinson & Young, 2008;

Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003). Many scholars in the field pursue research that crosses theoretical boundaries. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, research on deviance and violence in contemporary sport (see Atkinson & Young, 2008a; Young, 2012).

Sociologists of sport pursue varied topics of interest. The same can be said about the methodologies they employ (Young & Atkinson, 2012). Owing to the quantitative dominance in the field of sport studies more broadly, ethnographic inquiries have a relatively short history in the sociology of sport (see Molnar & Purdy, 2016; Sands, 2002). Ethnographic sport research has its origins in the study of European working-class masculinity and rituals of fandom and sport participation (particularly soccer or football) (see Murphy, Williams, & Dunning, 1990; Redhead, 1993). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, sociologists of sport have broadened their ethnographic interests. Some notable ethnographies include *The City and the Subculture Career: Professional Street Skateboarding on the Streets of L.A.* (Snyder, 2012), *Strong and Hard Women: An Ethnography of Female Bodybuilding* (Bunsell, 2013), *Transnational Mobilities in Action Sports* (Thorpe, 2014), and *Desi Hoop Dreams: Pickup Basketball and the Making of Asian American Masculinity* (Thangaraj, 2015).

Regrettably, only a few scholars have pursued ethnographic inquiries into the world of youth sport. These include Fine's (1987) *With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Pre-adolescent Culture*, Foley's (1990) *Learning Capitalist Culture Deep in the Heart of Tejas*, Grasmuck's (2005) *Protecting Home: Class, Race, and Masculinity in Boys' Baseball*, and Dyck's (2012) *Fields of Play: An Ethnography of Children's Sport*. While considerable attention is paid to youth sport in the field of sport studies more broadly, sociologists of sport have certainly not exhausted this area of study. There are, to be sure, some scholars who have dedicated nearly their entire career to the studying this topic (e.g., Jay Coakley, Michael Messner) with particular attention to the (re)production of power, privilege, and ideology. There are also some in-depth examinations, albeit not necessarily ethnographic or scholarly, into the world of youth sport more generally (see Giardina & Donnelly, 2008; Hyman, 2009, 2012; Messner & Musto, 2016) and its relationships to child rearing (see Friedman, 2013; Kay, 2009; Lareau, 2011; Thomson, 1999). Finally, some scholars have turned their attention to the impact of parents' own

athletic pursuits on parenting expectations. In her book *Iron Dads: Managing Family, Work, and Endurance Sport Identities* (2016), political scientist Diana Cohen considers the effects of endurance-sport training on family, parenting, and sense of self.

Despite this burgeoning field of sociological studies of sport and the growing (albeit limited) focus on youth sport and parenting, explicit focus on these concepts in rural and small towns remains absent from the field. Consequently, our knowledge to date of organized youth sport in Canadian rural and small towns is limited, anecdotal, and reliant on quantitative methodologies or generalized from studies on adult rural sport in other countries. Moreover, existing research “outside of the metropolis” has tended not to distinguish between “unincorporated areas” with a population density of fewer than five inhabitants per square kilometre and small towns in a rural and small-town region with a population density of 400 inhabitants per square kilometre (e.g., Trail, B.C.). This has contributed to the homogenization of “rural” experiences.

It is also regrettable that we know little about organized youth sport in rural and small towns because residents living in these places still make up a considerable part of the Canadian population: over 7 million Canadians live in rural places (Moazzami, n.d.). At the provincial level, 12.4 percent (or more than half a million) of British Columbians live in rural and small towns (Moazzami, n.d.). In light of these figures, it is disconcerting that while many of Canada’s young sport participants and their parents engage in and construct their identities and livelihoods in rural and small towns across the country, their experiences have been largely left undocumented or uncontextualized. Nonetheless, the limited knowledge we *do* have about (rural) youth sport does help us discern important areas of inquiry.

## **2.2. Organized Youth Sport and Dominant Ideologies of Parenthood and Childhood**

*Parental investment of time, energy, and material resources in . . . children does not take place in a vacuum, but in historical settings, with particular conditions of childhood [and parenthood] and with important cultural*

*conceptions about what is appropriate and desirable for children* (Bianchi et al., 2006, p. 7).

The system of organized youth sport has its roots in the urban centres of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century in North America, a time of rapid capitalist expansion, industrialization, and migration to the cities. It was also at that time when scientists started to understand that the environment in which a child grew up could influence their development. As Coakley and Donnelly (2009) remark, this led many people to “organize” the contexts of childhood (p. 111). It was believed that the conditions found in urban centres would lead to many idle hours for children, which many assumed would be filled with delinquent self-destructive activities. With mandatory schooling, laws against child labour, and overcrowded tenements, points out Levey Friedman (2013), “urban reformers were particularly preoccupied with poor immigrant boys who were often on the streets” (p. 26). Because adults “did not trust city boys to play unsupervised” (p. 27), organized activities soon became popular in urban centres.

It was not until the post-war baby boom of the mid-1940s to 1960s that organized youth sport in Canadian cities and suburbs gained momentum, particularly for boys. With an “unprecedented prosperity in Canada” (Hall, Slack, Smith, & Whitson, 1991, p.198), parents who were “optimistic about the future . . . entered the scene eager to have the characters of their sons built through organized competitive activities” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 112). These parents “were concerned about giving their children opportunities that had not been available during their own childhoods—in Europe during the War, or in Canada during the Depression” (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 113). They were very concerned with the social mobility<sup>8</sup> of their children and felt this could be best achieved if children were offered “constant protection and supervision, guidance, emotional investment, intellectual stimulation and continual monitoring” (Bianchi et al. 2006, p. 7).

<sup>8</sup> Social mobility “is the term used to describe the movement of individuals from one social location in society’s stratification system to another” (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 121).

For organized youth sport to take off, it needed to be accompanied by considerable structural changes in family life and parent-child relations. Post-war Canada marked the arrival of the welfare state, relatively full employment for men, and the large-scale withdrawal of women from wartime production and employment. This allowed for most families to be provided for by a single wage earner—the father. Equipped with a new sense of prosperity, middle- and upper-class women remained at home and were encouraged to be constantly available to take care of their children’s needs (e.g., volunteering for their activities) (Shaw, 2008).

Shaw (2010) notes that changes in the labour market along with loosening gender ideologies has meant that since the 1970s, the dominant structure of the family has shifted to that of the dual earner, with both parents increasingly working full-time (Daly, 2001; Trask, 2010). With less time to socialize the children themselves, parents are expected to find appropriate venues to take over this function/role, leading some scholars to suggest that what is “unique about the way the family is organized in modern society is the isolation of child-rearing activities from other social activities” (Bonner, 1997, p. 121). The responsibility for child rearing has been thrust away from the wider extended family or community and into the hands of one or two people (p. 120).

When we look at the growth of organized youth sport in Canada, we recognize that it is not only linked to the needs of parents (i.e., somebody must take care of our kid while we are both at work) or the needs of children (i.e., their health and safety), but also to the meaning of parenthood and childhood. Since the 1980s, there have been significant changes in parenting ideology or what it means to be “good parents.” As Coakley and Donnelly (2009) outline, “good parents, in the minds of many people today, are those who can account for the whereabouts of their children twenty-four hours a day, every day” (p. 113). In this context, good and caring parents are reluctant to permit unsupervised children’s play (Darrah, Freeman, & English-Lueck, 2007); instead, they are encouraged to plan, organize, and “construct” children’s free time so that it has a particular value or quality (Shaw, 2008, p. 694).

Under these circumstances, adult-supervised, rationally organized programs such as sport, in which skills are built and manifested progressively through regular performance and monitoring, are considered perfect avenues for ensuring the “right” type of socialization (Adler & Adler, 1994; Coakley, 2006; Donnelly & Harvey, 2007; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007; Lareau, 2011; Levey Friedman, 2013; Sage & Eitzen, 2016; Shaw, 2010). Many parents put their children in organized youth sport because they offer the perfect setting for developmental and achievement advantages (Sage & Eitzen, 2016; Shaw, 2010); they equip children “with attitudes, skills, and habits that [will] furnish them with a ‘competitive edge’ to face the challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead of them” (Dyck, 2000, p. 146; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). The message is that without organized youth sport, “the rearing of children in contemporary Canada will remain incomplete and faulty” (Dyck, 2012, p. 34).

Under such ideological conditions, organized youth sport is favoured because it provides parents with measurable indicators of their children’s accomplishments. It also acts as a venue where their performance, worth, and reputation as parents can be validated (Dyck, 2012; Goodwin, 2006). As Dyck (2012) notes, the lengths to which some parents will go to ensure their children participate in organized youth sport reveals their “deep insecurities . . . concerning not only the future class prospects of their sons and daughters but also of the relative success of their own individual lives as adults and efforts as parents” (Dyck, 2012, p. 70). Differences in styles of child rearing also reflect the fact that not all parents have the same resources to work with and, therefore, cannot all afford to have the same hopes and expectations (Dyck, 2012, p. 53). As scholars have pointed out, the facilitation of children’s participation in organized youth sport takes time, money, and effort on the part of parents (Messner, 2009; Shaw, 2010; Thomson, 1999). “When people spend much of their time and energy coping with the challenges of everyday life,” note Coakley and Donnelly (2009), “they have few resources left to develop [their children’s] sport participation as part of their lifestyles” (p. 311).

This ideal of good parenting is far more achievable in the middle and upper classes than in the working and poor communities of urban areas and in many rural parts of the country (Bianchi et al. p. 7). This is why, as Lareau (2011) reveals, working-class and poor

parents may (be forced to) opt for different child-rearing ideologies and practices. Unlike middle-class parents, some working-class and poor parents view “children’s development as unfolding spontaneously, as long as they [are] provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support” (Lareau, 2011, p. 238). These parents do not consider the concerted development of children, particularly through organized leisure activities, as an essential aspect of good parenting. However, it would be naïve to suggest that these parents (or their children) do not feel pressured to conform to the norms of modern parenting. For these families, their preferred cultural logic of child rearing at home may be out of synch with the standards of social institutions around them. This is because notwithstanding the diversity of existing family contexts, the more labour-intensive type of parenting has been normalized to the extent that it has standardized the expectations, behaviours, and practices associated with parenting across family structures (Shaw, 2010). The extensive responsibilities assigned to parents by what Shaw (2010) calls the “dominant orthodoxies” of modern parenting are expected to be fulfilled no matter the conditions in parents’ and children’s lives. As Shaw (2008) captures,

The experiences of [parenthood] are diverse, and are dependent on a range of social and material factors such as [gender], class, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, employment status and custodial status. Beliefs about [parenthood] and appropriate practices also vary and are constantly being constructed, negotiated and reconstructed (Fox 2001). Nevertheless, it can be argued that there is a dominant institution of [parenthood] that is particularly evident in Western societies (such as North America, Western Europe) and is promoted and reinforced at the ideological level (Short, 2005). This institution has implications for the experiences and meanings of [parenthood], regardless of different material, social and cultural circumstances. It also influences decision-making regarding everyday [parenting] practices. (p. 689)

Although there are some variations in parenting practices, the dominant discourses appear to affect attitudes to parenting across different family contexts. As Bianchi et al. (2006) remark, “behavior is guided not only by what is, but also by what we think should be” (p. 6). While it is recognized that families may not all have access to the resources required to pursue dominant parenting practices, they are nonetheless encouraged to put their children into extracurricular activities geared towards “appropriate socialization.” They are also evaluated based on this standard, even if they do not themselves aspire to reach it (Lareau, 2011).

While these dominant interpretive paradigms of childhood, parenthood, and organized youth sport are instrumental in understanding contemporary North American parenthood and childhood, they most accurately describe young people and parents in cities and suburbs (Nilan, 2011). This is despite the fact that we know childhood and parenthood are fluid concepts which “do not exist as a priori categories outside of their location in place, space, and time” (Wyn, 2015, p. 12). Young people experience a variety of childhoods, just as parents experience a variety of parenthoods, “defined not only by macrosocial characteristics (for example, gender, class, age, race) but also by their association and affiliation to different types of everyday worlds and experiences” (Matthews et al., 2000, p. 141). In other words, childhood and parenthood are produced, enacted, and transformed in particular social contexts—organized youth sport in rural and small towns being one of these contexts.

It is important to consider how childhood and parenthood are practised and performed in the context of organized youth sport in rural and small towns. As I will establish next, there are distinct discourses and narratives about “parenting in the countryside” that do not figure into hegemonic discourses on parenting or childhood<sup>9</sup>. Many adults move to rural and small towns precisely because they want their children to grow up in what they consider a “rural way” and they want to parent in a way that makes this happen. These parents believe they are being “good parents” by raising their children in rural and small towns and under very different ideological conditions than those described in the aforementioned literature on modern parenting.

The kind of socialization that occurs through organized youth sport is not without its critics. There is a substantial body of work in the sociology of sport which points to the problematic nature of organized youth sport. Generally, this literature notes that what goes unnoticed in the conventional rhetoric on parenting and childhood is that under certain

<sup>9</sup> Drawing on Olsen (2011), I define hegemony as the process through which “‘generally accepted’ or dominant standards and values of society are socially constructed, and continually renewed and defended” to the point where they become “taken-for-granted and left unquestioned” (p.184). Brym (2014) adds that this process is accomplished by using dominant cultural institutions, like sport and the family, to “naturalize and universalize dominant ideology, and to absorb the challenge of alternative and oppositional points of view” (p.124).

conditions in Western society, “sport [acts as] an agentic institution for negotiating and normalizing hierarchy and boundaries for inclusion and exclusion” (Travers, 2011, p.2). There is a tremendous body of scholarly work demonstrating how organized sport reinforces dominant power relations and social inequalities around gender, sexuality, class, and race whereby “the athlete” is constructed as someone who is male, white, heterosexual, and middle or upper class (Travers, 2006, 2008, 2011).

With respect to social class, Donnelly and Harvey (2007) argue that sport participation means different things for those from the working, middle, and upper class—particularly boys. Sport participation is traditionally seen as meaningful in the lives of working-class boys because of its heightened status as a “school for masculinity.” Organized competitive sport is also considered by some working-class cultures as a viable option for social mobility. In a precarious labour market, working-class boys may lack many of the skills required to become “successful” and may therefore turn to sports as their way “up and out.” As Sage and Eitzen (2016) note, sport “is a social arena where [these boys] can be somebody, where they can achieve respect they otherwise do not get” (pp. 117–118). For middle-class youth, participation in sports is imbued with meanings related to success and the development of social networks, the development of career skills, and the achievement of the ideal body type. For the upper class, sport participation is often related to the display of social status and social location.

There is also considerable work on the social construction of gender and sex in sport. Travers (2006) argues that in North America (and much of the world), sport is “one of the most important institutions for naturalizing and reinforcing the assumption that fundamental differences exist between the sexes” (p. 432). This is done through “coercive sex segregation” (separate sports for women and men, separate leagues, separate or modified rules, and so on) and serves to construct and enforce a flawed premise that females are inherently athletically/physically inferior to males (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, p.7). McDonagh and Pappano (2008) maintain that sex segregation also “works to suppress evidence of a [gender] continuum” in which women can be shown to possess “masculine” characteristics and men to possess “feminine” characteristics in greater and lesser proportions, with different individuals located on different points of the spectrum (p.

9). As Travers (2016) notes, sex segregation is extremely problematic for gender non-conforming children and more often than not leads to their withdrawal from organized youth sport altogether.

It is not just female athletes who have to deal with the fall-out of violating the norms of (manly) sports (Drummond, 2016; Kehler, 2016; White & Young, 2007). Grasmuck (2005) encourages us to remember that the range of actual male *behaviour* is often far broader than our dominant *ideas* about how men should behave (p. 96). In her study on boys' baseball, she found a range of masculinities being enacted by the players and coaches. While she did find many examples of the "self-made-man" ethos of capitalist masculinity in which the qualities of individuality, dominance, and competition were emphasized, she also came across many men and boys who were nurturing, caring, and played or coached for the fun of it. As was also the case in Fine's (1987) research on boys' baseball, however, counter-hegemonic male discourses may have existed, but they were often marginalized and discouraged. As White and Young (2007) report, "despite shifting norms of what constitutes legitimate maleness in Canadian society, there remains a fundamental association between sport involvement in boyhood and socialization into dominant (and we might add heterosexual) masculinity in adulthood" (p. 271).

With respect to sexuality, Pronger (1990) suggests that because homosexuality and athletics express contradictory attitudes to masculinity (and Lenskyj 2003 would add femininity), violation and compliance respectively, their coexistence in one person is a paradox (p. 3). For this reason, a sport culture is created which solidifies heterosexual behaviour. Paraphrasing the work of Lenskyj (2003) and Dworkin and Wachs (2009), sport is what makes boys into men (and men, in this case, are straight). When men are "masculine" there are fewer discerning questions about their participation in the heterosexual order. Gay men are marginalized because they don't pursue this "goal." No matter how hard they try, sport will not make them into "real men." When women are "feminine" the same holds for their participation in the "normal" sexual order. Girls who participate in sport run the risk of becoming "too" masculine and therefore being put under "suspicion" of being homosexual.

Sport also serves to reinforce social inequalities and power relations based on race (Cooky & Rauscher, 2016; Flintoff, Dowling, & Fitzgerald, 2015; Hartmann & Manning, 2016; Paraschak, 2012; Paraschak & Tirone, 2015; Williams, 2016). However, because blatant racist policies no longer exist as they did in the early part of the twentieth century, race is often no longer taken to be an “issue.” Sports such as basketball which are predominantly made up of non-white athletes are given as examples that “race” no longer matters in sport. However, this view of sports fails to acknowledge the *meaning* that race has in the lives of many people. “Race” remains as part of the lived experience. Critical race theorists like Hylton point to the need to be aware of the ways in which the meanings and discourses around sport are “racialized” and in turn how these meanings inform the way sport is organized (Hylton, 2009, p.2). It is institutions like sport that serve to legitimate “racist” actions and embed them in what seemingly become benign practices.

Given the context of sport as a social institution which privileges some experiences at the expense of others, we should not assume that practices and performances of modern parenting and childhood through organized youth sport are available to everyone. We should also not assume that these practices and performances result in positive experiences for those children and parents who, because of their resources, are provided with access to the system of organized youth sport. Research has shown that power and privilege do not insulate young people from (and as a matter of fact, may actually expose children to) the expectations and pressures associated with organized youth sport (e.g., burnout, loss of individual identity, family bankruptcy, violent behaviour of coaches and sexual abuse, disruption of education, risk of injury, sibling rivalry) (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). In his book *Until it Hurts: America’s Obsession with Youth Sports and How it Harms Our Kids* (2009), Hyman argues that young people all too frequently become “victims” of, rather than participants in, organized youth sport culture. He worryingly notes how “sports for kids has evolved (and devolved) into a playground for those who invited themselves to the games and, like irritating dinner guests, refuse to leave the party—parents, coaches and other interested adults” (p.xii). Under such conditions, it is reasonable that many young people and parents may decide to opt out entirely from organized youth sport.

I now turn to the discourses and narratives about “parenting in the countryside.” These help us understand why some parents want their children to grow up in a “rural way,” and why they parent in a way that makes this happen. These discourses and narratives also help us understand how “good parenting” is defined under very different ideological conditions than those described in the aforementioned literature on modern parenting.

### **2.3. Growing Up and Parenting in Rural and Small Towns**

One of the most powerful and enduring ideas about rural places is that they offer a more appropriate family environment in which to bring up children than urban environments (Fredrik Rye, 2006; Valentine, 1997, 2001). Because rural and small towns are small, far away from urban centres, and often situated close to abundant natural resources, they are characterized as good places to raise children. They are first positioned as such because they afford an opportunity for innocence to be expressed and safeguarded against threats to vulnerability (Jones, 1997; Valentine, 1997; Wuthnow, 2013). The image is of children playing in the yard without supervision and wandering to a friend’s house without parents worrying. One must wonder, however, how much of this is grounded in romanticism rather than in empirical evidence. As Fredrik Rye (2006) remarks, rural youth relate to rurality in different ways. How do specific groups of young people experience safety in their rural and small towns?

Shoveller, Johnson, Prkachin, & Patrick (2007) found that because long bus rides are a common occurrence for rural youth, some students who want to participate in organized afterschool activities form sexual relationships and/or engage in sexual acts with people who own cars. In her book *Crossing the Line*, Robinson (1998) explores how heterosexuality and hypermasculinity come together in the world of Junior A hockey—a world that is firmly rooted in Canadian rural and small towns (Tremonti, 2016). She reveals how the culture of Junior A hockey puts tremendous pressure on young boys to prove their masculinity in ways that amount to sexual assault and sexual violence against women.

Rural and small towns are also considered good places to raise children because they afford young people the freedom they need to grow and develop; to “ge[t] outside, roa[m] through backyards and over fences, collec[t] toads, and lea[d] a kind of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn existence” (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 65). In many ways, this approach to child rearing is akin to what Lareau (2011) terms the Accomplishment of Natural Growth, albeit in a rural rather than (sub)urban context. Rural parents who take this approach may believe that children should be “free to spend time playing, being outside close to nature, being by themselves, and learning without close monitoring by adults” (Wuthnow, 2011, p. 65). Contrary to dominant discourses of parenthood and childhood, it is suggested that children should not be bombarded with adult-supervised structured activities.

According to Valentine (2001), it is not only that parents prefer this environment for child rearing: young people are also said to prefer it because it allows them to enact an ideal childhood. As he says,

[This view] suggests that young people prefer to play in “natural” space, where they are free to create their own activities and adapt their surroundings to their games, rather than in adult-defined play spaces where their activities are constrained. The countryside is seen to offer more possibilities for this sort of imaginative play than the city because rural environments are not as ordered and regimented by adults as rural environments. There are claimed to be more open or abandoned and derelict spaces in the country than the city, which children can adapt to their own ends, away from the surveillant gaze of grown-ups. (p. 262)

However, just like the idea of rural place as safe, one must wonder how much of this is grounded in romanticism rather than in empirical evidence. Ward (1990) writes that though we imagine rural children to have unlimited access to open space, in practice “today’s rural landscape has fewer children and fewer places for them” (pp. 262-263). In their research with rural children, Matthews et al. (2000) “found little evidence of young people running freely across fields and through woods and exploring distant forests and hills” (p. 144). They attribute this to many rural places now being fenced in by adults for private land. They also found that young people wanted to connect more with the social than the natural environment. Like many scholars have pointed out, the main criticism waged against rural and small towns by young people is not that lack of nature or open

space but rather the lack of formal, built, spaces to hang out like movie theatres, shopping malls, leisure centres and so on (Fredrik Rye, 2006; Martz & Gourley, 2008).

Finally, rural and small towns are said to be good places to raise children because they are built on a “sense of community” whereby neighbours, teachers, and shopkeepers watch out for the young people. The most common way this characteristic is expressed is through phrases like “everybody knows each other” and “everybody watches out for each other” (Fredrik Rye, 2006). Relationships in rural and small towns are said to be personable and meaningful, ensuring that children will always be cared for and nurtured. This does not necessarily lead to small towns as friendlier places; rather this leads to what Bonner (1997) calls an ethic of helping. This idea goes back to the classical work of Ferdinand Töennies who considered the main difference between rural and urban places as one of social interaction. In urban places, people are more likely to relate to each other in impersonal and transactional ways, whereas in rural communities, social interaction involves long conversations, familiarity, and personal sharing (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 25). The conditions found in rural places are therefore considered more amenable to raising children in a supportive, caring environment without constant, deliberate adult supervision. In this context, there is very little need for organized youth activities. The conditions found in urban centres, on the other hand, require constant adult supervision.

One of the problems with this kind of thinking is that it treats rural places as fixed and unchanging and perpetuates stereotypes about rural and small towns. As Thomas et al. (2011) astutely point out:

Does a woman living in a remote rural village who spends hours communicating through email and chat rooms and rarely leaves her house, experience close intimate relationships with other people in her immediate physical space? . . . . Conversely, does a man living in a city of ten million people, who visits the same stores and has regular conversations with the same people, experience the impersonality of urban life? (p. 26)

In reality, rural and remote towns are often geographically isolated or have far distances to travel to services and neighbours and thus people are actually more socially isolated in rural areas than the perceived close-knit community that myths perpetuate (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005). Another problem with this kind of thinking is that

it is dominated by parents' or adults' perspectives. Research has shown, however, that “the peacefulness and tranquility that adults value so much in the rural idyll may just be boring to teenagers” (Fredrik Rye, 2006, p. 411).

Scholarly work on ideologies of parenting and growing up in the countryside is not necessarily proof of significant differences between what is understood and performed as parenting and childhood in rural and small towns versus in urban and suburban towns. As Matthews et al. (2000) argue, “the onset of mass media and mass communication render such imaginings as highly implausible. [Rural children and parents are] not ‘sealed-off’ from a range of influences from elsewhere” and do not live in an “isolated rural state” (p. 145). Nor are rural and small towns static. This “rural” type of approach to child rearing is based on the assumption that opportunities for cultural enrichment (ballet, art lessons, sports leagues) do not exist or, at the very least, are much greater in larger places (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 65). However, evidence shows that rural and small towns now offer many organized activities (Atherley, 2006; Eime, Payne, Casey, & Harvey, 2010; Oncescu & Robertson, 2010; Sharp et al., 2015). Given these circumstances, Bonner (1997) argues that the notion of modern parenting (as opposed to the actual practices) transcends the urban-rural difference (Bonner, 1997, p. 124). He does not dismiss the claims made by parents that rural and small towns are great places to raise children. Rather, he argues that parents continue to describe them as such because the conditions found in rural and small towns make them feel less overwhelmed with the requirements of modern parenting. Rural and small town parents are said to subscribe to expectations of modern parenting just as (sub)urban parents do; they just choose the conditions found in rural and small towns to pursue them. Many rural parents may indeed register their children in organized youth sport. In the next section, I outline the limited knowledge we have on organized youth sport in rural and small towns.

## **2.4. Organized Sport in Rural and Small-town Canada**

Contemporary research on sport in rural places suggests that (adult) leisure organizations and sports clubs can play an important role in community life in many rural

towns (Barrett, 1994; Trussell, 2009; White, Wyn, & Albanese, 2011), providing opportunities and spaces for engaging in collective activities that are essential for healthy individuals and towns. The potential for sport to create a sense of belonging, community, and place in rural settings has been expressed by many authors doing research in Australia (Atherley, 2006; Spaaij, 2009b; Tonts & Atherley, 2010) and a limited number in Canada (Mair, 2009; Trussell, 2009; Trussell & Shaw, 2007).

The role that sports clubs can play in community building is ever more pressing in an era when many rural and small towns continue to experience a loss of public services (e.g., hospitals and schools) (Oncescu & Giles, 2014, p.295).<sup>10</sup> This is important because school closures tend to be the result of changing demographics (e.g., fewer school-aged children)—demographic trends to which sport organizations are certainly not immune. Oncescu and Giles (2014) point out that school closures have meant that parents and youth who wish to participate in activities must travel an increasing distance, meaning they are less physically present, and therefore less engaged, in their home community. Changing demographics and rural restructuring have also impacted the volunteer and staff available to make organized activities run (Glyptis, 1989; Lasley, 1987; Oncescu, 2015; Oncescu & Robertson, 2010; Oncescu & Giles, 2012; Riley & Arnold, 1995; Tefler & Wall, 1994). Rural communities struggle to recruit volunteers to organized recreation activities because it is the same few individuals who do all the work, resulting in burnout (Riley & Arnold 1995).

It is important not to “naturalize” the dominance of sport (clubs) in rural and small towns. Some researchers argue that the presumed dominance may have more to do with the fact that there is a lack of alternative leisure activities (Shoveller et al., 2007) or that

<sup>10</sup> There is an interesting case study in the small town of Warner, Alberta (pop. approx. 350). In 2000, the school was near to shutting down and community members thought it would mean the end of community growth—if not the community’s existence. The solution the community members came up with was to build an elite women’s hockey school in the existing public school. This school would draw from girls across Canada and Europe who were interested in furthering their hockey game. Since the school started, Warner’s population has grown by 19% (Stanley, 2015). In the case of Warner, Alberta, the population growth is owed to the temporary residents attending the hockey school. Yet, evidence suggests that after these girls are done their program, none intend to stay in Warner (Adams & Cantelon, 2016).

young people are not aware of other opportunities besides sports (Shaw-Raudoy, 2011) and less to do with the “sense of belonging” and “community” they create. Research that asks young people what they want in their towns reveals that sport may not be it (BC Rural Network, 2014; Shaw-Raudoy, 2011). The case of hockey is particularly illustrative of the tendency to naturalize the role of organized sport as the centre of rural towns and culture.

While hockey continues to be played in rinks across the country, and people continue to make their lives in rural and small towns, the “hockey-as-small-town ethos” (Buma, 2012), however engrained in Canadian identity, is certainly not representative of the lives of young people living in rural and small towns of today (Whitson, 2001). For Gruneau and Whitson (1993) it has *never* been representative of life for all small-town residents. At the outset, this ethos is based on the experiences of and opportunities offered exclusively to boys and men—embodying specific forms of masculinity in rural landscapes. This “unfailingly positive” (Oncescu & Giles, 2014, p. 310) acceptance of hockey-as-community silences others who do not fit in, or who may experience their community differently based on what they draw upon for their “identity, feelings of belonging, and general wellbeing” (p. 311).

In the contemporary British Columbian context, Epp and Whitson (2001) note that many small towns are undergoing a shift from blue-collar miners and loggers to ski instructors and baristas and the cultural practices associated with those original ways of life are struggling to live on. Within the sport context, the indoor arenas that many small communities built in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and which represented “the friendliness and togetherness of small-town Canada” (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993, p. 205) may no longer be the focal point of the community as young people spend their time engaging in a variety of activities. Wilson (2006) urges us to consider that with Canada being more urban and multicultural than ever, and with young people having access to a larger range of sport and non-sport interests, hockey may have been relegated to “just one recreational or consumer choice among many, as opposed to the ritual of winter life that many middle-aged Canadian men recall” (p. 14). In many small towns, hockey may have become a habit rather than a passion (p. 15).

It is not only what people think about hockey that changed; it is also the conditions under which hockey is played that have changed. In his research, Decosse (2015) found significant evidence for what he calls “shifting geographies of elite hockey production.” Whereas elite hockey player production used to come almost exclusively from rural and small towns across Canada, it is no longer the case. His analysis suggests that the privatization of organized hockey in Canada has shifted the standards for participation far out of reach for most rural and small town players. The limited infrastructure in the form of all-year ice time, private academies, and elite hockey schools means that rural and small-town players are simply no longer able to compete with their urban and suburban peers. The bar has been raised too high for these players—no matter the effort they and their parents put in. For most, the only option is to move away from their rural and small towns or to give up dreams of elite hockey success altogether. For these reasons, it is questionable whether hockey remains the centre of (any) rural and small towns.

Beyond the focus on sport and community building, there does exist a limited body of research on the participation rates of young people living in rural and small towns. This research reveals that participation in organized activities (not necessarily just sport) is significantly lower here than in cities and suburbs (Clark, 2008) and that young people growing up in geographically isolated communities face more limited options for how they use their out-of-school time compared to their urban and suburban peers (Pettigrew, Miller-Day, Kriefer, & Hecht, 2012). Generally, this scholarship focuses on the lack of quality physical activity programs in rural communities (not necessarily sports), the barriers that prevent people from accessing these opportunities, and why this is problematic for rural people’s health. It does not, however, link participation rates to the social construction of childhood, parenthood, or rurality.

Bilinski et al. (2005) found that for elementary school children in grades 4 to 6 living in rural Saskatchewan, distance to activities was a major barrier to participation. Kowalski et al. (2012) report that for residents of the Northwest Territories, work and school commitments, the price of recreation and sports equipment, days and times of programs, the cost of recreation programs, and not having a program close to home were significant constraints upon recreation and leisure. Walia and Liepert’s (2012) research in rural

Ontario illuminates how some youth find it difficult to engage in an activity they enjoy because of limited opportunities in their rural area. For many participants, this means engaging in an activity in their backyard or another area near their home or having to travel to larger urban areas to access their preferred activity. Most notably, the authors acknowledge a difference in participation rates between young people living in town compared to those living in more remote or rural areas. Finally, Sharp et al.'s (2015) research with rural American youths in grades 7, 8 and 10 reveals that in the absence of structured activities, some youth take advantage of unstructured outdoor leisure activities at much higher rates than national averages. They also report that male students, those from lower socioeconomic status, and those with parents with low levels of educational attainment were significantly more likely to report low involvement in organized and unstructured leisure activities.

While this body of research certainly helps illuminate some of the conditions that might prevent young people in rural and small towns from participating in organized youth sport, it does not tell us how organized youth sport is *experienced* by young people, parents, and sport administrators living in these areas. This may be due to the primarily quantitative nature of this research. It also does not touch on how and why, given these conditions, some young people, parents, and sport administrators try tirelessly to “make it work.” Finally, it pays very little attention to the impact that local history, culture, and social structure might have on the delivery and resultant experiences of participants in organized youth sport in rural and small towns.

The literature presented above certainly moves beyond the narrative of the rural idyll, but it tends to view children and parents who live in rural and small towns as “one cultural grouping” (Matthews et al., 2000, p. 143). It does not account for how membership in associations like organized youth sport may shape the way rural parenthood and childhood are experienced. How might dominant child-rearing practices be constrained by living in the West Kootenays? How might they not? Dyck (2012) suggests that when there is great uncertainty in individual adults’ lives and of adulthood generally, there is greater attraction in emphasizing child rearing as evidence of a successful career and appropriate family formation (p. 55). If we consider the great uncertainty that many rural and small

town families are currently facing—no matter their social class, gender, race—we might ask whether, and how, they employ dominant child-rearing strategies. How might they leverage cultural activities at their disposal (like organized youth sport) in their child-rearing practices? Moreover, why might some parents and young people stay away from organized youth sport in rural and small towns? Answering these questions requires a place-based, life course perspective.

## **2.5. Theoretical Orientation**

The theoretical perspective that guides this ethnographic inquiry is one which brings together the life course perspective and the place-based perspective. Both perspectives have been used in the study of young people and families, yet neither has been taken up widely by sociologists of sport despite their promise. In the following section, I outline the life course perspective as developed by Elder Jr. (1974, 1985, 1994, 1998), Elder Jr. and Caspi (1990), Crosnoe and Elder Jr. (2015) and applied by Mitchell (2003, 2006) in her work on families and transitions into adulthood. I draw attention to key principles which are most relevant to this inquiry. After acknowledging one key weakness of the life course perspective—its limited conceptualization of place—I move onto a description of the place-based perspective. I draw on work in rural development (Reimer & Markey, 2008; Vodden, Gibson, & Baldacchino, 2015), the sociospatial geography of youth and families (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Holt, 2011), the spatialized sociology of youth (Farrugia, 2014, 2015a), and sociology sensitive to place (Gieryn, 2000). I highlight the contributions of a place-based perspective, noting how places intersect with discourse and practice. Together, the life course and place-based perspectives can shed light on how lives are “dynamic, socially structured, . . . historically embedded” (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015, p. 81) *and* “emplaced” (Holt, 2011, p.2). These combined perspectives can also help underscore the historical, structural, and spatial fluidity of concepts such as parenthood, childhood, and organized sport.

### **2.5.1. A Life Course Perspective**

This multi-disciplinary perspective can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century. It has its roots in age stratification theory and the work of prominent American sociologist, C. Wright Mills. Mills (1959) is credited with the development of the concept of a “sociological imagination” to encompass individual biography and history within social structure. This approach gained considerable momentum between the 1960s and 1980s with examinations of the development paths of children who grew up during the Great Depression and World War II (Elder Jr., 1974) and the collapse of rural land values in America (Conger & Elder Jr., 1994). It re-surfaced in the 1990s with a focus on the study of families and related transitions and aging (Bengston & Allen, 1993). During this time, notes Mitchell (2003), “rapid social change and population aging drew attention to historical influences and to the complexity of processes underlying family change and continuity” (p. 1051). Since then, research has focused primarily on how life patterns, transitions, pathways, and trajectories are socially, historically, and culturally organized (Mitchell, 2013). Particular attention has been paid to the sequencing of important life events, role status, changes, and transitions (Mitchell, 2003). While this present study does not focus on transitions or role changes, it does explore ideologies and practices of parenting and childhood in a specific social, historical, cultural, and geographic context. It also draws on the interconnected lives of young people, parents, and adults and for these reasons, it is well served by a life course perspective.

A key principle of the life course perspective is that lives are situated within a specific sociohistorical and geographical location. As Mitchell (2006) explains, our lives “are embedded in and transformed by conditions and events occurring during the historical period and geographical location in which [we live]” (p. 18). That is, our

behaviour and decisions do not occur in a vacuum—people and families are subject to the constraints imposed within a distinct socio-historical location. In this way, the life course perspective offers a view of behaviors that is temporal and contextual. People and family members are situated within a unique historical context that interlocks with economic and political environments that are constantly in flux. (p. 19)

She notes that “geopolitical events (e.g., war), economic cycles (e.g., recessions) and social and cultural ideologies (e.g., patriarchy) can shape people’s perceptions and choices” (pp. 18–19). Within the context of this study, this principle helps us understand how processes of rural restructuring, ideologies of the “good parent,” and “parenting in the countryside” may shape participants’ experiences of organized youth sport.

Mitchell (2006) differentiates between three types of time: individual time, generational time, and historical time (p. 17).

*Individual . . . time* refers to chronological age. It is assumed that periods of life such as childhood, adolescence, and old age influence positions, roles, rights in society, and that these may be based on culturally shared age definitions (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985). *Generational time* refers to age groups or cohorts in which people are grouped, based upon their age. . . Finally, *historical time* refers to societal or macro-level changes or events and how these affect individuals and families such as political and economic changes, war and technological innovations (e.g. information access through the Internet).

It is understood that “a different birth year exposes individuals to vastly different worlds, with their associated constraints and options” (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015, p. 83). The young people and their parents/adults in this study may come to organized youth sport with noticeably different experiences and expectations owing to the “vastly different worlds” into which they were born. They may also experience their towns and sport systems differently based on the social roles they take in these contexts (e.g., young person, parent, adult).

Another principle is that lives are lived interdependently and that “the circumstances and experiences of one individual can affect other people to whom they are connected” (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015, p. 83). Because lives are linked, “one generation can transmit to the next the ‘reverberations’ of the historical circumstances that shaped its life history, such as living through wars or the feminist movement” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 24). This principle highlights the link between the experiences that young people, parents and sport administrators bring to, and forge as a result of, their journey through organized youth sport. It also stresses that a person’s past can shape not only their future but also the future of others to whom they are connected (Mitchell, 2003).

The life course perspective also draws attention to the ways individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances. The key is that “human behaviour is constrained by structural ‘forces’ or external factors” yet “individuals are [never entirely] passive recipients of social structure” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 8). Thus, “social forces not only ‘trickle down’ from social structures to individuals’ lives but also ‘percolate up’ from individuals’ action to modify existing social patterns and institutions and perhaps create new ones (Mayer & Tuma, 1990, p. 5)” (p. 26). This is important to consider within the context of “rural risk” (Looker & Naylor, 2009) and raises the question, how do parents navigate child rearing in the context of rural living?

In his work on hockey and Canadian identities, Whitson (2001) draws attention to these first three principles. He notes that childhood and hockey have changed since the years when the baby-boom generation grew up. Nostalgia for the Canada of the 1950s or 1960s when televised NHL broadcasts were “simply part of the rhythms of Canadian life” ignores “the trend of new cultural realities that are emerging out of historically unprecedented patterns of global migration, global economic activity, and global communications” (p. 232). Even though young people continue to play hockey, it no longer “constitutes the common experience of Canadian childhood that it did—for better or worse—among earlier generations” (p. 232). Parents’ sporting preferences may not have a privileged status for their children because they are growing up and making choices about sport participation in a vastly different context. Nonetheless, the choices a child makes are necessarily “linked” to the lives of their parents (e.g., financial resources available for registration specific sports, pressure to keep the family tradition alive).

Recognition of heterogeneity or diversity in structures or processes is an important aspect of the life course perspective (Mitchell, 2003). Of particular importance for this study, life course theorists note that sources of variability can be related to geographic location. Where one lives, parents, or grows up can

reflect unique social or community contexts that can shape family relationships and opportunities. . . Region of residence can affect socialisation processes (e.g.,

through dominant religious organisations), job opportunities, and the availability of educational institutions. (p. 21)

There can also be diversity in family structure and within generations of age groups. Being born in the same year does not necessarily lead to a sharing of perspectives or life experiences. This idea is based on a key sociological principle that characteristics such as gender, social class, family structure, ethnicity, and religion can also shape individual lives.

Given these principles, the life course perspective presents itself as a useful “paradigm for the study of people’s lives, structural contexts and social change” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 15). Families are perceived as a micro social group within a macro social context, a “collection of individuals with shared history who interact within ever-changing social contexts” (Bengston & Allen, 1993, p. 470). Where the life course perspective falls short, however, is in its limited conceptualization of geographic context. Where one lives and grows up is more than just a geographic location—it is the material forms, meanings, and values that its residents and others invest in it. Where one lives is *not* just a setting or context “for something else that becomes the focus of sociological attention” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466) (e.g., differences in processes and practices of childhood and parenthood). Rather, place “is an interpretive frame through which people measure their lives, evaluate others, . . . and just make sense [of what is going on]” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 468). While the life course perspective recognizes that geographic context can shape lives, it does not adequately capture the spatial dimensions of the structures and cultures that make up contemporary childhood and parenthood (Farrugia, 2014, p.295). Therefore, I merge the life course perspective with a place-based perspective in order to develop a more robust spatialized understanding of organized youth sport in rural and small towns.

### **2.5.2. A Place-Based Perspective**

*She introduces me to her husband who says, “Wow, your study is really cool. It’s great.” And she says, “Oh, yeah, it’s just so nice to have someone who is interested in rural sports. They are just so different.”* (Fieldnotes, June 23, 2012, Creston, BC).

*Place mediates social life; it is something more than just another independent variable* (Abu-Lughod, 1968 in Gieryn, 2000, p. 467).

Geographers of children, youth and families have been particularly keen to explore the sociospatial dimensions of practice and discourse, and Holt (2011) calls attention to an “exceptional bourgeoning of research focusing upon the emplaced experiences of children and young people” (p. 2). Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) note three main areas of inquiry within this subfield:

- (1) Emphasizing the importance of place . . . ; (2) exploring the nature of the everyday spaces in and through which young people’s lives are made (including spaces for playing, living and learning); and (3) tracing the importance of ideas about childhood in spatial discourses which inform socio-spatial practices in different sites (practices which then reinforce, or occasionally challenge, our ideas about childhood). (p. 13)

Sociologists have also taken up this perspective. Sometimes called a spatialized sociology (Farrugia, 2014, 2015a), or a sociology informed by or sensitive to place (Gieryn, 2000), a place-based perspective calls for a sociology that is sensitive to macro level processes producing different places, as well as the local, emplaced ways in which people respond to and shape these processes (Farrugia, 2014). Said differently, it is a sociology which emplaces sociological concepts and ideas (e.g., childhood, parenthood, social class, child rearing); a sociology in which the reader learns about these sociological concepts in and through specific places (Gieryn, 2000).

Sociologists working on the social construction of youth and childhood in rural settings have been particularly keen to take up this perspective (see Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Farrugia, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Farrugia et al., 2014; Jones, 1999; Woodman & Wyn, 2015). Their central argument is that in their placelessness, guiding paradigms and theories on youth and childhood have normalized urban experiences and marginalized rural youth. That is, more than “merely a quantitative absence [,] the dominant theoretical motifs in [this literature] are based on specifically urban experiences, shaped by spatial processes that have remained untheorized” (Farrugia, 2014, p. 297). To address these concerns, these scholars have used placed-based analyses to understand biographies, identities, and day-to-day lives of people across different places and spaces. They have

drawn attention to the social construction of childhood and youth in different places, the significance of (im)mobility for understanding inequality, and identity construction in relation to place (see Cairns, 2011; Corbett, 2014; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 1999; Leyshon, 2008; Nairn & Higgins, 2015; Nairn, Panelli, & McCormack, 2003; Rugg & Jones, 1999). They argue that the “lives of all young people are structured by economic, cultural and political processes that have a spatial element” (Farrugia, 2014, p. 296) (not just a historical or ideological element), and for this reason, place needs to be considered as an interpretive framework.

The guiding principle of this perspective is that “nothing of interest to sociologists happens nowhere” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 466). A place-based perspective treats place as an “agentic player in the game,” “a force with detectable and independent effects on social life” (p. 466). It maintains that personal and social experiences are necessarily *i/emplaced* (Ching & Creed, 1997; Gieryn, 2000; Scourfield, Dicks, Drakeford, & Davies, 2006). The main idea is that people are not defined by where they live, yet their options are constrained or enabled by it and their experiences are informed by it (Henderson, Holland, McGrellis, Sharpe, & Thomson, 2007, p.14).

The concept of place is fundamental to this perspective and is why I bring this perspective together with the life course perspective. Place is a way of thinking about space that emphasizes the rhythms of daily life and habitation (Thrift, 2003). It is “space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 465). It is where biography and history come together with structure. While sociologists utilizing this perspective agree on the importance of place, they differ in their description of its defining features. Gieryn (2000) argues that place is made up of three components: geographic location (a point on a map), material form (built and non-built stuff), and meaning and value (interpretations, feelings, memories, and so on). Woodman and Wyn (2015) believe it is where “location (social, economic, historical), meaningfulness (culture and identity) and material form (built and non-built environment) interrelate” (p. 145). Woods (2011) argues that places are experienced through three dimensions: the imaginative (representations, discourses, narratives and ideas about place), material (social, cultural, economic,

historical, and environmental structures in places), *and* practised (everyday lives of people in these places).

Despite their different descriptions, these scholars agree that places are multidimensional. They agree that places “saturate” social life (Gieryn, 2000). Gieryn (2000) uses the analogy of gender to explain this principle: “to code a respondent as male or female is not the same thing as grasping how social institutions (and places) are gendered” (p. 467). Places are also not rigidly bound, “entirely self-contained enclosures” (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 53). Residents participate in the wider world too, drawing on narratives and discourses from and about *other places* to inform their local experiences. These narratives and discourses may also be from another time.

Under such a perspective, place is not a just a geographic context: it is “the interpretations, representations and identifications by people [in that] particular geographic spot, at a particular historical time” (Woodman & Wyn, 2015, p. 148). This is compatible with the idea that the lives of people who live in the West Kootenays (that is, a specific place at a particular historical time) are necessarily suffused with their own social, economic, material, and environmental location, the culture and identity of the region/their specific town, and ideas about rurality. That is why some residents, like the one quoted above in my fieldnotes, believe that rural sports are “just so different” (unique) even if, in many ways, they may not be.

Viewing organized youth sport through the medium of place does not lead to a dismissal of sport as being gendered, classed, or racialized. I am arguing that place is *one* medium through which social life happens (Gieryn, 2000, p. 467). As Massey (1993) explains, places are always constituted by power geometries. Places are highly differentiated and complex; they incorporate markedly difference experiences for those differentially located (Andrews, Silk, & Pitter, 2008). A place-based perspective helps make visible the ways in which social life is always emplaced without making invisible how it might also be gendered, classed, and racialized (Gieryn, 2000).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

The literature presented in this chapter argues that young people, parents, and sport administrators are experiencing organized youth sport in a historical time marked by ideologies of modern parenthood and childhood. The combined place-based, life course perspective illuminates how people live their lives not only in a specific sociohistorical context, but also in a spatialized one. The place in which young people are growing up and parents are raising kids also exposes them to ideologies on parenting in the countryside. It also embeds them in a unique set of economic and social structural circumstances. This includes, but is not limited to, rural restructuring which puts many of these parents and children at “risk of being rural” (Looker & Naylor, 2009). These factors play a role in experiences of organized youth sport. Finally, the theoretical approach taken in this dissertation argues that our understanding of organized youth sport in the West Kootenays will remain incomplete if we do not consider the linked experiences of young people and adults.

## Chapter 3.

### Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodology used for this research project. I start with an in-depth discussion of why I chose ethnographic methodology and what data collection methods were used because of this choice. I explain my process of participant selection and negotiating access. I also discuss the ethical considerations when doing research in rural and small towns, especially when it includes young people. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ways I negotiated my identities and potential bias throughout the research.

#### 3.1. Introduction

*The trip started to feel “real” when I lost radio signal (somewhere around Hope) and turned onto the #3 highway. (Fieldnotes, June 3, 2012)*

*That is the “Kootenay Way,” he told me, you’ll find lots of friendly people in the Kootenays who will want to talk to you. (Fieldnotes, July 1, 2012)*

Data collection for this project began as soon as I left the familiarity of the Lower Mainland. Traffic thinned out at the same rate as the houses along the road, and I immediately felt as though I had stepped into a different world. To borrow from Sim (1988), while I knew there was no strict line of demarcation for where the urban ends and the rural begins, I had no difficulty recognizing something distinctive about the new countryside. For the duration of the nine-hour drive towards my destination, I saw landscapes scarred by logging and mining, rows of homes or businesses “for sale,” and abandoned farmhouses. I also saw community boards with news of the next baseball game or country fair, patios filled with diners, and farmers’ markets abuzz with action. The complexity of rural and small towns became apparent immediately.

The research was loosely broken into two phases. The first phase consisted of “doing the rounds” of existing sport organizations and activities in the region to facilitate

introductions, yield useful information, and get myself oriented in the research setting. The purpose of this phase was to “learn a bit about [my] topic from different sources, . . . confront and challenge [my] preconceptions, and shape [my] design” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 41). I set off to visit recreation/community centres and read local newspapers. While websites are normally a valuable source of information on sport teams, programs, and leagues, they were nearly non-existent in this region. Instead, I relied on word of mouth, conversations with administrators, information in newspapers, and Facebook pages.

Once I had identified key teams/leagues/programs and had spent some time being “visible” in the communities, I turned my attention to more formal ethnographic research methods: interviews and participant observation. While the first phase of the research project focused more on the landscape of organized sport in the region, the second phase captured the day-to-day logistics of participating in organized youth sport. This included participant observation and interviews with young people, families, and other adults in the region who are implicated in organized youth sport in one way or another—O’Connor (2010) calls these adults “youth experts.” Finally, to put what I was observing and hearing in context, I spent a considerable amount of time “using the community’s facilities” (MacGregor, 2010, p. 243): I drove from town to town, trying to find ball and soccer fields, hockey rinks, and youth centres. I worked out at local gyms, sipped tea at local coffee shops, and spent time at local parks.

### **3.2. Why Ethnographic Methodology?**

While we know a lot about how organized youth sport is experienced, structured, resisted and interpreted in (sub)urban middle- and upper-class settings in Canada, we know very little about how these processes play out in the context of rural and small towns in British Columbia. This gap in theoretical and empirical knowledge requires an exploratory approach, and ethnographic methodology lends itself perfectly to this endeavour.

An exploratory project needs to be flexible to considering themes that were not anticipated at the outset. Researchers pursuing exploratory, in-depth, and open-ended

research need to “take cues from the field in identifying the salient issues and, in turn, the appropriate methods for their investigation” (Cohen, 1978, p. 3). This is one of the strengths of ethnographic methodology. “Rather than simply testing the validity of hypothesis or collecting information that supports one or another theoretical [position],” argues Dyck (2012), “[ethnographic] investigation intentionally remains open to taking notice of a far broader range of considerations” (p. 9). By being in the field and bearing witness to people’s actions, behaviours, and material and structural conditions in place, ethnographic methodology has a “built-in capacity to reassess and recalibrate at every stage of a research project the investigator’s understanding of what is being looked at, why, and by what means” (p. 9). In the “Analysis” section of this chapter, I lay out the how I recalibrated what I was looking at, why, and what that meant. For now, I outline the other opportunities provided by ethnographic methodology.

Theoretically, ethnographic methodology presents an important opportunity to illuminate disparities between accounts provided in interviews and actual scenarios observed. For instance, youths might express that there are “no sports here”; yet, a survey of local organizations unearths a list comparable to most suburban towns, and participant observation in the area reveals that young people are, in some respects, “overscheduled” in many of the same ways described in literature on contemporary childhood (Rosenfeld, Coles, & Wise, 2001; Shaw, 2010). The question is, why do these rural youths feel this way? In another example, while some adults in rural and small towns may say that their town is and always has been a “hockey town,” the empty arenas, low registration numbers, and visibility of soccer and skateboarding tell a different story.

Ethnographic methodology is also useful when attending to the multiple dimensions of rural places—it is only by being in these places that we come to recognize how they are defined not merely by, or in relation to, a geography, but also by the everyday practices of residents in these places (Woods, 2011, p. 23). Ethnographic methodology helps “capture people’s ordinary activities and the social meanings that are attached to these” (Heath, Brooks, & Cleaver, 2009, p.99). It also captures social relationships, processes, groups, and activities as they take place, in a specific place. For this reason, it is well positioned to help us “expand on questions of ‘what’ and ‘where’ the [rural] is to

questions of ‘how’ it is done; that is, enacted, lived within and made meaningful by those dwelling there” (Hamilton, 2015, p. 2). The same can be said for definitions and practices of childhood and parenthood. Ethnographic methodology helps us move from “who” is a child or parent, to “where” and “how” childhood and parenthood are enacted. Understanding these concepts requires paying special attention to what they mean to people in specific places like the West Kootenays and specific contexts like organized youth sport.

Ethnographic methodology also encourages researchers to move beyond comparing rural people to their urban counterparts. The frequent use of large-scale quantitative data tends to measure “the rural” against “the urban.” Rural people are often presented as disadvantaged because they have fewer choices (e.g., at school, after school programs, and job prospects). The same can be said about rural sport and recreation programs that, when measured against urban offerings, are considered deficient (see CPRA, 2015). Moreover, Shucksmith (2016) argues that rural people and places are often positioned as “passive recipients of modernity” (p. 1). He also argues that visions of rural areas (for better or for worse) are imposed on rural residents by hegemonic middle-class culture.

Research employing ethnographic methodology also helps reveal the previously unacknowledged agency of rural dwellers (Shucksmith, 2016, p. 1) and a multi-layered reality in which the usual dichotomy of rural versus urban, haves and have nots, is shown to be overly simplistic (Leyshon, 2011). As White, Wyn, & Albanese (2011) suggest, current structural conditions in rural and small towns are certainly not necessarily advantageous to young people. However, it would be a mistake to assume that “this can be read straight onto young people’s lives,” and asking for their views and experiences, as well as being in place to see these experiences play out, “suggests a more complex reality” (p. 107).

Finally, a more practical reason for using ethnographic methodology is that it allows the researcher to react to changes in the research schedule. This was particularly important as I was doing research in an area in which inclement weather often shut down

country roads as well as major highways. Had my research been entirely interview-based, a road closure could have, at the very least, required a lengthy process of rescheduling after the roads reopened. It could also have resulted in the participant eventually being withdrawn from the research process due to being inaccessible. Next, I describe the individual ethnographic methods that I employed as part of this research project.

### **3.3. Methods**

#### **3.3.1. Interviews**

I conducted over 110 interviews, ranging in duration from 45 minutes to 5 hours, 82 of which were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The remaining interviews occurred spontaneously, on the sidelines of soccer fields or in passing on street corners. For these, recording and transcribing proved impractical.

There are four reasons for which interviews proved to be an important source of information for this ethnographic project. First, interviews helped me discover past lived experiences of participants—a key dimension of the life course (Elder Jr. 2015; Mitchell, 2006). As I noted in Chapter 2, the life course perspective maintains that past biographical, social, and historical events necessarily come to bear on current life experiences. In this project, most adults who spoke to me had also raised children in the region. While they were no longer actively rearing their children, they could nonetheless speak to their past experiences raising children who took part in organized sport locally. Many of these adults had also grown up in the area and could speak to differences between growing up and child rearing “in their day” and today; they could also speak to me about participating in youth sport “in their day” and today. These interviews provided a window into how these adults’ paths into parenthood and rural living were necessarily embedded in and transformed by the (historical, social, geographic) conditions and events into which they were born and raised their families.

In a related manner, interviews helped illuminate significant events and changes in the region’s sport landscape. Little of the sport history of the region is documented, and

where it is, it is not a critical history (Szilagyi, 2015). Drawing on their lived experiences, research participants could make connections between socioeconomic and sociocultural changes and organized youth sport in ways that trophies and statues in museums cannot. For example, the documented history of hockey in the region does not reveal the reasons for the gradual withdrawal of Teck from community hockey.

Second, interviews helped remedy a weakness of participant observation—the inability to witness everything simultaneously. With participants from over ten towns involved in this research project and as much as 250 kilometres between some of their residences, I had to rely on people telling me about events they had attended rather than me being at all of them. I was also not able to make a full-time move to the region and therefore had to rely on interviewees to bring me up to speed with what had happened in my absence, particularly in the fall and winter (as I discuss later in this chapter).

Third, interviews helped me gain access to people and places which may have otherwise been closed to me (Brown-Saracino, Thurk, & Fine, 2008, p. 550). Without ethical clearance by both the Simon Fraser University Institutional Review Board and the West Kootenay school districts, observations on school grounds were prohibited. I could, however, make observations during sport events that were held on school grounds as these events are open to the public. It is for this reason that interviews off-site with young people and school administrators were essential. I was also not able to actively participate in the lives of young people outside of the sport setting (i.e., at home or during hangouts with their friends). These places are often socially closed off to adults apart from family members and friends. Sport places, on the other hand, are open to adults who actively observe—and play alongside—young people, so my presence was not concerning. I relied on interviews to gather information about the non-sport lives of my participants, especially the young people. Additionally, there were simply some sport settings that I could not access because they were in the off-season (e.g., skiing, baseball). Other times I could not track down anyone who was engaged in those sports (e.g., dancing) or I was not a proficient enough participant to join in (e.g., mountain biking).

## ***Interview Format***

For all interviews, I took O'Reilly's (2012) advice and came into these initial conversations and interviews "knowledgeable with regard to background information, but naïve with regard to the precise topic [I was] wanting the participant to tell [me] about" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 149). I made sure to know something about the community, the region, or the sport that the person was involved in. In the case of skateboarding, I made sure to drop by the skateparks dotting the region before I interviewed one of the instructors. When I was visiting a new town, I arrived early and drove around to get my bearings; this was quite easy given the scale of these towns. I read local newspapers and community boards and looked at what sorts of shops or businesses populated the main drag or the location and condition of the sport facilities (if there were any). I could tell that the participants were delighted when I knew something about their town or region, but not too much to the point of stifling their contribution to the interview.

In line with the iterative approach, planned interviews followed the conversational method (Kovach, 2009) or what O'Reilly (2012) calls the "collaborative style" in which the participants and the researcher explore themes together in an "elastic" format. The interaction was less about responses to research questions as it was about "sharing in relation to . . . questions" (Kovach, 2009, p. 124). I had made my participants aware of what the research was loosely about (i.e., organized youth sport in rural and small-town regions like the West Kootenays) but they were encouraged "to speak for themselves, in their own way" (Hoffmann, 2007, p. 139). Throughout the interviews, my goal was to make sure participants felt able to interject, to question, even to wander off the point. My job was to let the story flow rather than interrupt to get back to the question. Some of the best insights came from participants who went off script, so to speak. They eventually came back to the broad topic, just in their own way. I also I had to balance making the person feel important with asking for clarification and providing input when the opportunity arose. This loose style was particularly important where I was seeking young people's perspectives. As other researchers have found, young people are not always comfortable answering "all of [our] silly questions" (Christensen, 2004, p. 169) and interviews can end up being short and lacking the depth that researchers seek. A conversational style

interview provides children with the space and opportunity to provide their perspective (Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011).

Interviews in the field were framed as guided conversations (Hochschild, 2010) or opportunistic interviews (O'Reilly, 2012). Just as Levey Friedman (2013) did in her research on competitive youth extra curricular activities, I took advantage of individuals who happen to convene at a particular place or time (e.g., young people or parents sitting together on the side of the field or at a team dinner) or individuals in the right place, at the right time (e.g., the fellow I sat next to at the Trail Smoke Eaters game) and gently guided the conversation in directions I wanted to explore. I found that people did not mind me asking them questions (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 87).

Depending on circumstances, these interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours. While I am a very social person and do not find it terribly difficult to strike up a conversation, I did not engage in these sorts of conversations until I had spent a few weeks in the field and built up a small local lexicon. I found these conversations much more fruitful as the project went on and I could strike up a conversation sounding more like a local. As a matter of fact, after about a year in the field, I was frequently met with questions such as, "Where do you live around here?" or "How long have you lived here?." Eventually, those comments turned into, "Gee, you know more about this place than I do!"

I also held three group interviews (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 136): two with groups of brothers (three brothers in one family, three in another) and one with a senior boys' high school basketball team. For the interviews with the brothers, parents suggested I interview them together because they sensed the youngest (12 years old in both cases) would be more comfortable with his brothers around. Interviewing them together was also easier for the parents who did not want to worry about entertaining the other two boys and rotating them through interview shifts.

The interview with the basketball team happened because, in the words of Foley (1990), "knowing a golden opportunity to play [ethnographer] when one lands on me, I said: 'Sure, why not?'" (p. 56). One of the boys' parents emailed and asked if I wanted to accompany her to the boys' tournament. It would mean driving to and from the tournament

in the team van. Although this meant making a special winter trip to the region, I could not pass up this opportunity. The team consisted of 10 male players, who ranged in age from 14–17 and who lived in the different villages, towns, and cities that fed into the central high school. This was sure to be an ethnographically rich trip.

I interviewed the basketball team in the van on the way back from the out-of-town tournament. All weekend I tried to get them to sit down as a big group, but that proved to be impossible. In down time, the boys simply wanted to sleep or go run around outside. This was not entirely surprising given they were away from home and school and otherwise had a very tightly packed schedule with games and team meals. We decided to do the interview in the van on our way back home. While I am many years out of high school and stick out in a van full of teenage boys, I was nonetheless able to have a rich discussion with them. Four factors contributed to this. First, many of the boys on the team were also on a soccer team I had been shadowing since my first summer doing the research. (This is often the case in small-town sports. The same young people play most of the sports because without them there is no team). For this reason, I was not a stranger. Second, one of my key informants (the woman who emailed me) had a son on both teams, so both she and her son advocated for me to come along on the trip. She was considered the “team mom,” so the boys listened to her. Third, the coach was a young teacher and confided in me that he was happy to have someone his age tag along. Fourth, I interviewed the boys after what was considered a successful tournament, so they were happy to chat. The mood may have been more sombre had they been beat badly in their last game.

### ***Guiding Topics Used in Interviews***

In line with an iterative, exploratory approach, I pursued broad lines of inquiry rather than following a strict interview schedule. As there is little research on the experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators who participate in organized sport in rural and small towns across Canada, keeping interviews as open as possible was necessary. Nonetheless, the guiding topics presented below were drawn from salient themes in the literature presented in Chapter 2 and themes that emerged in the process of data collection. This included guiding conversations with adults towards a discussion of why they put their children in organized youth sport. In interviews with

children, this included discussions about what they enjoy/do not enjoy about sport participation. I was also curious about barriers that might prevent somebody from participating in organized youth sport. Finally, where possible, I gently guided conversations with all participants towards what Coakley and Donnelly (2009) call the “deeper game”—the deeper meanings and stories associated with sports beyond the statistics, the number of players, and the trophies (p. 2). Within the context of the literature presented, this included, but was not limited to, discussions of past experiences/memories in organized youth sport, perspectives on the role of organized youth sport in social circles, reasons for which people might withdraw from organized youth sport, and community tensions/identity around organized youth sport. These guiding topics helped me look for clues, gain some familiarity, and look for patterns or ideas emerging from the data (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p.6). They were not meant to prescribe the outcome of our conversations. I should mention that guiding topics, rather than structured questions, were particularly useful in interviews with young people because they allowed interviewees to guide the discussion—something that does not happen very often in conventional young person-adult relationships.

As is the case with exploratory, ethnographic research, guiding topics evolved over the course of the research as new insights were made. As Cohen (1978) remarks, “a project which begins and ends with the same set of issues defined as the central problematic should be treated with the greatest suspicion” (p. 3). While I had initial ideas about what might be important to investigate, periods of deep observations in the field led me to shift my focus. In the words of Cohen (1978), before I came to “know” the community, I was simply “not in a position to know what bore upon what” (pp. 3–4).

My initial list did not include hockey as a guiding topic because I was fearful of stereotyping rural people as hockey people. I did not want to “fal[l] victim to such expressions of nostalgia” (Wuthnow, 2013, p. xii). However, as the topic came up in more and more interactions, I realized I should pursue that line of inquiry where possible. As I continued with the research, I also noticed how important it was to guide adults into discussing their reasons for, and perspectives on, living and raising children in the region and/or in rural and small towns in general. This was because initial data analysis

unearthed a tension between wanting to live and raise children “rurally” all the while providing rich organized sport opportunities for young people—a theme which informs a substantial part of Chapter 6. It also became evident that young people had (strong) opinions about where they lived. What started off as icebreaker questions (e.g., “So you live in Trail? Tell me a bit about it.”) figured more deliberately into conversations about the suitability of rural places for young people in general, and more specifically those who want to pursue organized youth sport—another theme which is presented at length in the findings (Chapters 4 and 5) and discussion (Chapter 6.) The following is a final list of guiding topics that were used in interviews throughout the research project:

- Choices made around sport participation and non-participation (as players, coaches, managers, volunteers)
- Barriers to participation (as players, coaches, managers, volunteers)
- Role and visibility of organized (youth) sport in town/region
- Support for organized (youth) sport in town/region
- History and contemporary manifestation of hockey in the town/region
- Description of and support for youth programs/initiatives beyond sport
- Institutional knowledge of sport local sport organizations/associations (organizational/association structure and history)
- Perspectives and experiences on parenting/growing up in rural and small towns (and the West Kootenays specifically)
- Individual participant’s sport biography (which sports, when, and in what capacity?)
- Individual participant’s personal biography (communities lived in, employment, family structure)
- Knowledge of the region or specific town (historical, socioeconomic, cultural, environmental)
- Regional diversity in terms of culture, demographics, available sports

This list of guiding topics is robust, but there is one omission to which I should speak: the absence of deliberate inquiry into gender, sexuality, race, and social class. I am not dismissing the sociological significance of these categories. After all, these categories can be captured in the guiding topics of choices and barriers to participation—if not most of the topics on this list. But in line with ethnographic inquiry, a researcher’s job

is not to decide which of these distinguishing features of identity and experience has significance and which does not. Cohen (1978) cautions that applying such categories at the outset of fieldwork renders the findings those of “the observe[r], and not necessarily those which are germane to the field” (p. 4). By allowing these sociologically significant categories to seep through (rather than direct) conversations on choices, barriers, experiences and so on, I remained true to the ethnographic method. My goal was to “achieve an understanding of a social situation which most nearly comprehends the understanding its members have of it” (Cohen, 1978, pp. 4–5). As Cohen reiterates,

The [researcher] must recognise that social reality is what is perceived by social members; it is not what they would have seen had they operated with the same grand-theoretic logic as those who would explain them . . . people see what they see, and what they see affects how they will behave. Behaviour does not have a truth value. It happens; it is there, to be described. That is what ethnography is about. (p. 7)

As this dissertation will demonstrate, place and class-based identities came to bear most strongly on the experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators. Had I guided the interviews and my observations towards discussion of gender and race (categories which scholars have demonstrated influence experiences of organized youth sport), I fear the project would have presented etic rather than emic perspectives of organized youth sport. This is an approach incompatible with ethnographic methodology (O’Reilly, 2012). Given the centrality of place-based identity in my participants’ experiences, I next turn to the importance of place in interviews.

### ***The Importance of Place in Interviews***

A place-based, life course perspective recognizes the importance of geographic context, but it is the place-based perspective specifically which recognizes that where we do our thinking contributes to the knowledge we create (Riley, 2010, p. 652). The conversation between the researcher and the participant should always be situated in the surrounding environment, in the interconnection between the individual and the places themselves, rather than simply on the research questions. It is not enough to say “this project happened in town X”; a place-based researcher deliberately recognizes that the knowledge which forms the basis of the project is co-created “in town X” (Anderson, 2004).

This is particularly important for ethnographers because we rely on both participant observation and interviews. Whereas participant observation is by its very nature about observing behaviours and practices *in place*, interviews can divorce knowledge about behaviours and practices from their context. Namely, sit-down interviews take individuals out of the environment where the activities, experiences, and practices they are describing happen (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 459), which can be concerning for ethnographic researchers such as myself who are interested in the role that place plays in experiences. Below, I outline how I took care to explicitly account for the importance of place when I conducted interviews.

Where possible, I used what Wiederhold (2014) refers to as “mobile interviewing” or what Anderson (2004) refers to as “talking whilst walking.” This entails interviewing people while walking together from one place to another (as opposed to a static interview in a home or public place). Anderson (2004) argues that these “conversations in place” are different from traditional interviews because they “mak[e] the geographic context more explicit” (p. 254). For my research project, mobile interviews allowed my participants to guide me through the beautiful country roads of rural Castlegar, Salmo, and Nakusp, the secret teenage hang-out spots of Fruitvale, and all the few (youth) sites of Edgewood, including the fields, the school, the shops, and the homes. By sharing an environment with the participants, I was able to build familiarity with local places and achieve a sense of immediacy and connection with them (Wiederhold, 2014, p. 612).

One interview serves as a good example of how “talking-whilst-walking” can help the researcher and interviewee situate their thinking in context. When Sabrina and I decided to meet, she insisted on showing me *her* village. So away we went, recorder in hand. We walked through extensive trail networks that took us through the entire village. We went through the downtown where she talked about the history of each building and how some of them had been repurposed for more modern uses (e.g., from bank to bike shop). We continued to the lakefront, past the site of the yearly Logger Sports Festival. She mentioned that attendance had dropped, as had young people taking up logger skills. She worried about the future of the sport as a tourist attraction. Next, we walked past the skatepark. She wanted to point it out because it had been a contentious decision to place

it by the lakefront. Some residents wanted the young people “out of sight, out of mind,” while others were worried that nobody would use the park if it was too close to the waterfront (it often floods). Another group also did not want prime real estate used for projects for young people. After this, we walked through the neighbourhoods and then up the steep hill into the forest. We went up the raging river (which had recently caused catastrophic landslides in a town nearby) through some narrow paths. After about an hour and a half, we went back through downtown and sat on a bench, overlooking the Moyie, the world’s oldest intact stern wheeler,<sup>11</sup> and continued our conversation for another hour. A few parents approached us while we were sitting and after each conversation, Sabrina provided me with some background information on who they were and how they fit into the town and the sport program. Without this intimate tour of the town, the knowledge I would have gained in my interview with Sabrina (and with others later in the project) would have been difficult to contextualize in place.

It also bears mentioning that beyond prioritizing place, mobile interviews also help change the authority structure of the interviews (Brown & Durrheim, 2009, p. 925). Traditional interview settings in which the researcher and participant sit face-to-face can be intimidating and increase the air of interrogation and confrontation rather than knowledge co-production. This is particularly important to consider in interviews with young people, where age can act as an additional significant power structure (O’Reilly, Ronzoni, & Dogra, 2013). Also, traditional interview settings often perpetuate an environment in which the researcher is setting the agenda or determining what knowledge is applicable. Walking side-by-side, however, has the potential to decentre the emphasis away from one person (Riley, 2010, p. 659), and instil a more shared, democratic site of knowledge creation in which both researcher and participant feel as though they are “heading the same way” and “sharing the same vistas” (Ingold & Lee, 2008).

The health of the participant, timing, and weather prevented some interviews from being done on the move (Carpiano, 2009). I still considered the importance of place—just in different ways. One way was to ask participants to choose the location of the interview.

<sup>11</sup> Built in 1898 by CPR, the *Moyie* now sits near the water in downtown Kaslo as a tourist attraction.

This helped decentre the emphasis away from me, the researcher, and highlight my participants' local knowledge. I found that participants were proud to meet at *their* coffee shop or *their* rink. The following list demonstrates the diversity of locations participants chose: campsites, schools/colleges, coffee shops, participants' homes, sport complexes, parks, and workplaces. O'Reilly, Ronzoni, and Dogra (2013) note that allowing young people to choose the site of the interview can make them feel more engaged in the interview, as though they have a stake in what is to be talked about. In this project, I found interviews with young people to be most successful when they were given the opportunity to choose where to talk with me. Often, these young people chose to walk me through their neighbourhood or meet at a public park or a café instead of at home.

Paying attention to *where* interviews occurred also made me aware of the variety of circumstances in which residents in the West Kootenays lived, "baffl[ing] any attempts to simplify [these towns] as a particular type of place" (Hamilton, 2015, p. 3). The location of interviews, both in terms of towns and in terms of venues, represented the diversity that characterizes the region. Some interviewees lived in communities of 10,000 residents, others in unincorporated areas. Some interviewees could meet me in any number of cafés, many of which looked and felt exactly like those I would find in the hip, urban neighbourhoods of downtown Vancouver. Others lived in areas without cafés, public buildings, or parks, so interviews happened at their homes. Even homes were as diverse as the towns themselves. Some participants lived in homes located right downtown, which presented a problem for me as I tried to find free parking. Others lived 70 kilometres outside of town, which presented a different set of problems as I negotiated unpaved roads. (These interviews tended to last much longer because the participants felt badly that I had come so far!). Some lived in modern mansions with all the technological innovations found in show homes while others eschewed modern comforts in favour of hundred-year-old homes still warmed by a wood-burning furnace.

An interview in July 2013 serves to illustrate the heterogeneity of rural places and people. Randall's home was at the end of a gravel road in an unincorporated area which only exists because of the draft dodgers, tree planters, and cooperative living enthusiasts who have settled there over the past hundred years. People who live in this place have a

reputation as being self-sufficient and pushing aside most markers of modern life. He is these things and in many ways, could be considered “typically rural.” Yet, even though he had spent his entire life distancing himself from modern life, his house was filled with sports memorabilia. Everywhere I looked, there was a sport-themed tissue holder or soap dispenser, or some piece of antique sports equipment. I laughed when I recognized the juxtaposition of the sports memorabilia and the house built off the grid. Interviewing Randall at home afforded me the privilege of witnessing how deeply sport runs through his veins. This outing also raised important questions about the complexity of rural people and places. Why do some West Kootenay residents get involved in organized sport despite the challenges it presents? How do some West Kootenay residents reconcile their desire to become involved in organized youth sport with their desire to live away from the conditions which allow organized youth sport to thrive (i.e., infrastructure and population density)? Had I not met this fellow at his home, I would not have come to significant analytical insights that shaped the direction of this project.

### **3.3.2. Participant Observation and Go-Alongs**

In addition to interviews, I relied on participant observation to learn about the research context (O’Reilly, 2012). While the context of organized youth sport was familiar to me—having played organized youth sport throughout my childhood and adolescent years and remaining involved as a coach and administrator throughout this research—I had never done so in a rural and small town. The first step was therefore to engage in observation. This worked best in public spaces in which my presence was no different than that of a tourist. I attended hockey, baseball, and soccer games. I went to the local (sport) museums, attended community fairs and pageants, worked out at gyms, and ate at local restaurants. I also spent a considerable amount of time walking the streets of each town. In classic ethnographic fashion, I ‘just hung around’ (Willis, 1977). In many ways, and like what McGregor (2010) endeavoured to do, “I went out of my way to use community facilities to a degree that residents of the town probably did not”!

While observation proved useful in allowing me to get my bearings, it did not provide the rich interactions that are distinctive about ethnographic research. Mason

(2009) cautions against over-estimating our “ability to hang around in a setting or location to ‘soak up’ relevant data” (p. 90). Observations only go so far. Researchers must actively seek out involvement in settings that help us “produce rich, detailed, and empathetic understandings of cultural groups” (Anderson, 2004, p. 255). My next step was therefore to systematically participate in the everyday lives of young people, parents, and sport administrators who are involved in organized youth sport. When possible, I accompanied them as they went about their routines—in and outside of sport. I not only observed but also actively asked questions and listened, all in the name of exploring their experiences, practices, and interpretations as they happened and interacted with their physical and social environment. In this way, the “environment acted as a prompt for discussion” (Jones, Bunce, James, Gibbs, & Ricketts Hein, 2008, p. 3). Kusenbach (2003) refers to this type of systematic, outcome-oriented participant observation as a form of “go-along” (when it is done on foot) or “ride-along” (when it is done by car).

Go/ride-alongs sometimes require participating in the activities being observed or described. During most tournaments, I sat on the bench with players and in between helping with water and substitutions, I engaged in a variety of conversations with young people. In a separate instance, an interviewee insisted that I try curling to “really know what she was talking about” (Fieldnotes, September 19, 2012). So, one winter night her son pulled into the curling rink parking lot in his eighteen-wheeler, turned on the lights, and gave me a private curling lesson. I was asked to stick around to watch the young people practise. As I watched them from the upstairs bar, several long-time volunteers and staff gave me their take on the status of curling in the community. The skateboarding coach in one town told me that I would not understand the role that the sport played in the area if I did not try it myself. It was in the West Kootenays that I took my first skateboard lesson, side by side with young people age five and up.

Go/ride-alongs were useful because they helped me get past one of the main downfalls of traditional participant observation: the fact that people do not usually comment on what is going on while going about their business. This makes it difficult to “access their concurrent experiences and interpretations” (Kusenbach, 2003, p. 459). By actively asking questions and soliciting the participants’ thoughts and emotions, go/ride-

alongs can help bridge this gap. Go/ride-alongs also capture the ways in which experiences, practices, interpretations, and identities are not only talked about but also lived, performed, and embodied. In other words, they highlight how the body is shaped by “action and interaction in social encounters and often by means of institutional ritual” (Waskul & Vannini, 2006, p.7) such as those rituals attached to organized youth sport. Had I not gone-along with the team to their post-game dinners, I would not have understood their importance. I also would not have picked up on who is included/excluded from these rituals (e.g., families who cannot afford to eat out, families who cannot attend out-of-town tournaments because of work or family obligations).

Moreover, go/ride-alongs also capture how discourses of *places* are embodied and performed. Woods (2010) suggests that we pay attention to how discourses of rurality (or rural places) are enacted, as well as the material consequences of these discourses. He also suggests that we take account of the practices and performances of rural residents and how these contribute to the production and reproduction of discourses of rurality and the construction of rural places (p. 836). These ideas are particularly poignant for my research. Had I not gone on the road with teams, or sat with adults on the sidelines, I would not have been privy to conversations about the merits of living in one town over another, or about the quality of athletes (and their parents) from one town or another. It was not uncommon for parents and young people to measure their towns against those in which they were playing/competing. I noted this interaction in my fieldnotes:

After a few days of playing basketball in Nakusp, I hear one of the boys from Trail say, “Nakusp doesn’t have *anything*—they have no hockey teams.” Of course, we know this isn’t true. Nakusp *does* have a hockey program. The irony is not lost on me that the boys have just finished playing a basketball tournament in Nakusp meaning that, at the very least, Nakusp has basketball! So, while his statement isn’t factually accurate, it is notable. (February 14, 2015)

Go/ride-alongs also allowed me to better understand how certain sites play a more active role in the formation and performance of identities. The process through which this occurs is something that can be uncovered by spending time with the people and in these places (Moles, 2008). The most significant example of this was when I was coming back from the basketball tournament. It was a Saturday night, so I assumed that the boys would

be going to the Trail Smoke Eaters game. After all, it has been drilled into our “imagined rurals” (Woods, 2011) that hockey is what you do on a Saturday night, especially in places like Trail. Unexpectedly, not a single basketball player attended the game. Hanging out with the boys enabled me to see how certain sites (the hockey rink) played *less* of an active role in the formation and performance of their young, rural masculine identities than historical or narrative accounts suggested.

Finally, go/ride-alongs are sensitive to the schedules of the research participants. Instead of having to set aside time to take part in the research project, the research project is (as best as possible) integrated into the lives of the participants as they are already unfolding. This proved to be particularly beneficial when wanting to talk with families and young people who were actively participating in organized sport. Instead of setting up a time to chat, I met them at the tournaments or games and went with the flow of their family practices. Sometimes this meant moving from field to field between games, grabbing lunch with the family, or simply parking myself in the bleachers/stands for the duration of the event.

Data generation for participant observation and go/ride-alongs was facilitated through fieldnotes. On top of using a notebook, I used my smart phone. As O’Reilly (2012) remarks, the act of taking notes on a smart phone looks very similar to the general use of the device, which makes the act of note-taking appear less invasive. This is especially true around young people who are on their smart phones a lot. This brings up a whole other set of issues: when is it appropriate to use your smart phone? There are certain environments in which texting is rude but where note-taking (or, “journaling”) may be considered appropriate. I did my best to pick up on situational appropriateness.

### ***Limitations of the go/ride-along method***

Although go/ride-alongs offered a number of strengths, they also presented challenges. Just like Carpiano (2009), these challenges forced me to limit my go/ride-alongs to a dozen or so. However, where possible, I tried my best to mimic the conditions of a go/ride-along during general participation observation.

First, I would caution researchers looking to engage in go/ride-alongs with young people. As Christensen (2004) remarks, young people can get fed up quickly with researchers who ask them to talk about what they are doing—it can make them feel like you are questioning (in the sense of critiquing) their behaviour. To avoid this, he argues that researchers take a more restrictive, but not a passive role. They should listen attentively, not interject too often. This can help young people understand that you are genuinely interested and wish to learn about and understand their lives. By going “against institutional assumptions that talk between adults takes precedence over talk with [young people]” (Christensen, 2004, p. 169), this approach can encourage young people to see researchers as one of them. I found this a very useful approach with the youngest participants aged 12–15 when conversations would flat-line.

Second, many hours of participation observation occurred at out-of-town tournaments and events. As I will mention in Chapter 4, sport participation in rural and small towns is structured around tournament participation. There are very few home games. As a result, many young people participate in their sport away from their hometown. While I was able to hang out and participate in the lives of these young people and families on the road, our conversations were not based in the place I was writing about. I could not necessarily use the environment as a prompt. This does not make what we talked about any less insightful, but it necessitated a different method of data collection.

Finally, and perhaps most practically, I often drove myself to sport events and therefore could not engage in ride-alongs as much as I had anticipated. This occurred for a number of reasons. The first was that I suffer from carsickness; being a passenger in a car (never mind turning my head to talk to others) causes extreme nausea. Second, I often had to link events back-to-back: I had to be in Nelson during the morning and then Kaslo in the afternoon. If I accompanied a family to Nelson, I would be without a car to get to Kaslo. Third, I found parents were themselves linking events in different places and at different times. While I may have wanted to go to Nelson with them, I could not necessarily go back to New Denver with them. I just did not feel right asking these people to take me along with them and then drive me home to a town that might be 100 kilometres from where they lived. While these factors may have made it difficult to arrange ride-alongs,

they nonetheless proved to be analytically insightful as they illuminated conditions under which many young people and parents participate in organized youth sport in their towns.

### **3.3.3. Supplementary Methods**

In addition to interviews and participation observation, I also took photographs to “complement [my] thick description<sup>12</sup>” (Ghodsee, 2016, p. 71) and to emphasize the importance of place. I chose to focus on sport fields, complexes, and museums, as well as youth centres, and schools. I also took photographs of distinctive community features. These included natural features such as lakes, historical features such as memorials, and socioeconomic symbols such as mills, smelters, or dams. Ethical concerns about maintaining the anonymity of my participants (Ghodsee, 2016, p. 71) prevented me from publishing photos with their faces. However, I found that participants were eager to take photos with me at tournaments, games, or important events such as graduation. I was happy to oblige but used these photos as no more than memory and emotional aids. Other sources of data included local newspapers, websites, Facebook pages, community boards, and grey literature produced by local rural, sport, youth, and/or recreation groups.

## **3.4. Participant Selection**

O’Reilly (2012) suggests that while ethnographers tend not to use the language of sampling, we still must “make choices about who and what will be included in the research, and where and when it will take place” (p. 42). It is also not enough to simply identify and locate a geographic site (i.e., the West Kootenays); researchers also must “carve out an ethnographic point of participation” (Hamilton, 2015, p. 2). For this research, the point of participation was organized youth sport, specifically those individuals who “live the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998) of organized youth sport in the region. Living the phenomenon requires the individual to come in contact with organized youth sport—either

<sup>12</sup> The term “thick description” draws on the work on Geertz (1973). At its most granular level, this phrase refers to the practice of taking detailed, context-sensitive, and locally informed fieldnotes.

as a participant, observer, supporter, administrator, or abstainer. I set out to include young people aged 12–19, parents, and what O'Connor (2010) calls "youth experts." The latter are people who work, volunteer, or spend a considerable amount of time in youth-centred spaces. Within the context of organized youth sport in the West Kootenays, these people include: parents who have children who currently participate or have recently participated in organized sport; youth workers who volunteer or earn a living working specifically with youth in an extracurricular venue such as a youth centre, drop-in centre, or recreation centre; sport administrators who volunteer or make a living in organized youth sport; and school administrators who make a living in the school system, such as teachers, vice/principals, and educational assistants. In the words of O'Reilly (2012), these categories of participants represent the ways the community of organized youth sport "divides itself" (p. 43). Including them all provides a more complete picture of what goes on in the community.

My final choices for participant selection followed what Small (2009) describes as "case study logic"—a method he argues is well-suited for ethnographic inquiry. Qualitative and quantitative research often use a sampling logic through which the number of individuals is predetermined, the final sample is representative, and all individuals are administered the same questionnaire (in the case of interviews) (Small, 2009, p. 24). However, this is not in line with ethnographic methodology. Instead, ethnographers are encouraged to rely on the case study logic in which each individual "provides an increasingly accurate understanding of the question at hand" (Small, 2009, p. 25). There is no predetermined number of participants, individuals are not selected based on representative criteria, and each interview may result in different directions of inquiry. In other words, the researcher does not know who will take part in the project, and how many people will take part in the project, until the project is completed.

The case study logic works as follows. The researcher starts with the first case, often the first key informant. The findings that result from this initial case yield a set of questions that inform the next case (the next interview or instance of participant observation). The objective is saturation: by the last interview or days in the field, very little "new" is being learned. While this sort of logic may not be able to pursue lines of

questioning that are designed to provide statistically representative findings, it can ask “how or why questions about processes unknown before the start of the study” (Small, 2009, p. 25). For example, this research is not designed to state whether mothers in rural and small towns are more likely than their suburban counterparts to register their children in organized youth sport or whether visible minorities are excluded from organized youth sport in rural and small towns. It can, however, explore why parents in the West Kootenays register their children in organized youth sport or how young people experience organized youth sport.

As it became clearer that my project spoke to childhood and parenthood in rural and small towns, I altered each new interview or instance of participant observation to include increasingly refined guiding topics about different aspects of growing up and child rearing through organized youth sport in the West Kootenays. I did this in two ways. Through what Small (2009) calls “literal replication,” I found a similar case (e.g., another parent or another child) to determine whether my initial empirical or theoretical insights were also at play here. Through “theoretical replication,” I found a case that challenged my insights (e.g., somebody living in a different town, somebody with fewer children, somebody who had not grown up in the region). Each case helped me refine and re-evaluate my understanding of the phenomenon (Small, 2009, p. 26) (i.e., how and why organized youth sport is employed in child rearing strategies the West Kootenays).

While case study logic drove the selection of participants, I also relied on other strategies to identify appropriate cases. One strategy was snowball sampling; I used my initial contacts to generate further contacts. One drawback of snowball sampling is that the final participants are likely to know one another personally (Small, 2009, p. 14). This is simply the reality of doing research in rural and small towns, particularly in a specific community (organized youth sport)—no matter what type of participant selection one relies on. Another drawback relates to heterogeneity. O’Reilly (2012) cautions researchers to “think carefully” about the homogeneity of the group given the process by which initial contacts may suggest contacts with which they share similar biographies, perspectives, or experiences. Case study logic (also called sampling for range) was useful here. I deliberately sought out participants in towns across the region rather than in a single town.

There is a significant difference in population and infrastructure between towns with 200 people and those with 10,000, so I suspected participants' experiences might range more widely depending on their home base. I also selected cases to ensure the perspectives and experiences of one group (e.g., young people, parents, sport administrators) did not dominate my theoretical and empirical findings.

Practical limitations also influenced my choices (O'Reilly, 2012). I wanted to include participants across a range of sports. For reasons related to research seasons and availability of participants, some sports figured more prominently than others, notably, soccer, hockey, and basketball. Unfortunately, this means that participants in sports like downhill skiing and dance are virtually absent in this dissertation.<sup>13</sup> I had also initially gone into the project wanting to speak with any youths and youth experts who would talk to me about organized youth sport—this included those who avoided organized youth sport (either deliberately or because of material and structural conditions). However, it proved challenging to find adults whose children had never participated or were currently not participating in organized youth sport. Even adults who did not necessarily hold roles in the sport community (e.g., teachers, school principals) had some connection to organized youth sport. From a practical standpoint, it would have been impossible to approach every adult in each town until I managed to meet one who had withdrawn from organized youth sport. Had my project been rooted in a single rural town of 200 or 300, this feat may have been possible. However, in a region with a collective population of just over 90,000, it would have been impossible.

I also found it difficult to speak with youths who opted out of organized youth sport, especially without their parents' involvement in the research. This was compounded by the trouble I had finding contact information for and reaching any key informants at youth centres—locations with a high chance of attracting non-sport participants—which became

<sup>13</sup> Some of the respondents participate, coach, or volunteer in skiing alongside other sports. However, given the time of year at which field research most frequently occurred, I was not able to see these respondents "in action." With respect to dance, it proved very difficult to set up interviews or take part in participant observation. Despite my best efforts, emails and phone calls remained unanswered. The venues in which dance is performed are also not as open to the public as soccer fields, hockey arenas, or skateboard parks. This made casual observation impossible.

clear to me within the first week in the field. My first scheduled interview was with a local youth worker. However, shortly after starting the interview, the interviewee disclosed that the youth centre had been shut down and that his job had shifted to encouraging social inclusion more generally. This closure was not unique to this town: when I started my research, there were only three active youth centres in the entire region, two of them staffed very irregularly, which made it nearly impossible to get any leads. The good news is that by 2015, there were seven operational youth centres. Had I started my research project later, I may have found it easier to connect with non-sport youths.

There is another related factor to consider: the types of young people who frequent youth centres. While not necessarily always the case, many youth centres attract young people who can be classified as “at-risk” because of substance use, family troubles, or behavioural issues. When I started my research, two out of the three youth centres in operation catered to this population. Youth workers were not entirely forthcoming with information about potential youth participants. Perhaps they did not feel the interview would be a safe space for these young people; perhaps they did not see the benefit of participation in such a project. Whether their efforts were intentional or not, the youth workers prevented me from gaining access to young people who frequented these centres. My inability to do research in the schools also stifled my access to young people from the region—presumably some of whom do not participate in organized sport. Despite chatting with some teachers and principals, I found they were not forthcoming with information about how to reach these young people.

I could not rely on research participants either. They generally found it difficult to come up with examples of young people who did not participate in some form of organized sport, despite the ease with which they talked about “young people who do nothing but sit at home.” Given these difficulties, I soon narrowed my focus to young people who participate in organized sport, all the while remaining open to discussions about non-participation. In Chapter 6, I argue that it is worth noting the very “lack of visibility” of non-sport young people and parents considering the divisiveness that sport participation can create in these communities. Considering how organized youth sport might be

experienced differently by those who choose not to be part of it or who are unable to do so is also important.

### **3.4.1. Access**

Once I settled on my logic for participant selection, I had to negotiate access—an aspect of research which is a concern for all ethnographers (O'Reilly, 2012). Issues of access can be even more pressing when doing research in rural and small towns, places in which it often seems that “everybody knows each other.” By extension, ethnographers might feel as though everyone knows that they do not belong. While Wuthnow (2013) points out the unlikeliness “that everyone literally knows everyone else” (p. 102) he nonetheless understands how newcomers to small towns find it difficult to feel comfortable, to integrate. As one of his interviewees states, “If you didn’t grow up here, it’s very hard to commingle and truly become part of it” (p. 126). This could be challenging for an ethnographer whose goal is quite literally to become part of it. But Wuthnow (2013) recommends that assimilation into rural and small towns can be facilitated by one factor: children’s activities. Even for ethnographers without children (like me), youth sport events can be a good way of “meeting neighbors and making friends” (p. 127). “You go to football games and sit by somebody on the bench,” says one of Wuthnow’s interviewees, “and then maybe after the game you get together” (p. 127).

These observations closely resemble my experience of attempting to negotiate access for this project. I initially “cast my net” as widely as possible (Crang & Cook, 2007); I set out to establish potential contacts, talked about my project to anybody who would listen, and started contacting relevant groups (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 41), including sending project information to sport organizations in hopes that they would circulate it to their membership. While I found that organizational newsletters certainly yielded some access, it paled in comparison to the access I gained through equal parts serendipity, small-town character, and what Dyck (2003) calls the “mundane matters” (p. 64) of where adults position themselves when watching youth sport:

Anonymity is not easily preserved at the venues of child and youth sport, for there is an assumption that any adult watching a match will be likely to have a connection

to one or another of the players on the field or some other understandable reason for being there. Furthermore, the notions of domesticity and sociality associated with children's sports make it quite acceptable for nearby adults to speak to one another and to enquire into the reasons for their presence. . . . To situate oneself near one or another gathering of onlookers is to expose oneself to friendly interrogation. (pp. 64–65)

Despite the fact that I was a newcomer (and one from the city!), the access to young people, parents, and sport administrators that spending time at youth sporting events afforded me proved invaluable. It appears that Dyck (2003) and Wuthnow (2013) were right: children's sports events "are the best way of meeting neighbours and making friends" (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 126). Below I provide some examples of how this played out for this project, especially with respect to making meaningful connections with key participants (O'Reilly, 2012) and "encultured informants" (Spradley, 1979): people who are "consciously reflexive about the culture in which they live and are either in a designated position where it is expected they will explain things to outsiders, or are people who simply enjoy sharing local knowledge" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 46).

Within minutes of my arrival in the region, I noticed a girls' soccer team practising on the grass field next to the college dorm I was staying at for the summer. When practice was over, I nervously walked down to introduce myself to the coach, providing him with my business card and the one-pager about the research project. Owing to my nearly three decades of involvement in organized girls' soccer, I remember thinking to myself, "gosh, this is the only time I have *ever* felt out of place on a soccer field with a whole bunch of girls!" Luckily this coach was extremely generous with his time. After telling him about my general interest in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays, I asked him who and what I should include (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 43). He jumped at the opportunity to provide me with information about an upcoming school district track and field meet, as well as the provincial soccer play-downs that were coming up over the weekend. He suggested it would be a great place to meet teachers, parents, coaches, and kids. As it turns out, he was a former teacher, current athletic director at the local college, coach, former hockey player, and born and raised West Kootenay resident. He also had two young daughters, both of whom were involved in a variety of sports. He was "like a fairy godmother, [here] to help the forlorn ethnographer" (Rock, 2001, p. 34). Over the next three years, I

shadowed his girls' soccer teams, starting with the oldest daughter's team and then once she had graduated, moving on to the youngest daughter's team. I became an honorary team staff member, with my own I.D. card and coaching shirt.

At the coach's suggestion, I spent my third day attending a school district track and field meet. It was there that I met a school administrator who was also born and raised in the region and who had spent his entire working life (since 1979) around young people and organized sport. Within a few minutes, he had already taken my card, set up an interview, introduced me to a few teachers and parents, and pointed out kids with whom I should speak. Over the next few hours, conversations turned to teachers being worried about local schools shutting down, the prestigious track and field club was barely hanging on, hockey's cultural value in the region, and the "urban-centric" structure of youth sport whereby local teams must always travel to the city, not vice-versa. These initial insights helped me broaden my participant base to include teachers and school administrators, as well as retired local sport administrators.

No sooner had the track meet ended did the weekend arrive. Having no idea what jerseys the local teams were wearing, I found myself on the side of a soccer field, confused. It only took a few minutes before the woman standing next to me smiled and said, "You look just as confused I am. I have no idea where or when my son is playing. Who are you looking for?" It was at that point that I told her about my project and within a few moments we had exchanged contact information. She had four sons, two of whom still lived at home. I quickly came to learn that in a family of four boys—all of whom had been raised in small towns in Alberta or British Columbia—not one had ever played hockey. It was at this point that I revised my lines of inquiry to make sure I captured young people's feelings, experiences, and perspectives on hockey. It was also through her that I shadowed the youngest son's soccer team and, just as was the case with the girls' team, could network with a dozen additional young people and parents who then opened their networks to me.

Finally, upon the suggestion of my initial contact, I reached out to a prominent figure in the sports community. She would come to play a central role in connecting me

with local coaches, parents, and administrators. Her role as the mouthpiece for all things sport in the region meant that she had contact information for most sport groups. Sitting down with her early on proved to be instrumental in “mapping out” the region’s sport landscape.

Having firmly established relationships with these four key informants, I began pursuing leads. I did not ask people to commit on the spot to being interviewed but instead directly introduced and explained the nature of my project. In cases where participants identified persons as potential contacts (as was the case with these gate-keepers), and the potential contact person had given the participants their oral or written consent to be contacted by me, I contacted them via telephone or email to confirm their willingness to participate. This happened frequently, and I suspect it is due to the size of rural and small towns and of the respective sport community. Word does not take too long to travel in small places. Below, I discuss the challenges this presented to confidentiality and anonymity. Before I do so, I turn to a description of participants.

### **3.4.2. Description of participants**

Below I provide a description of participants, but I caution reading too much into the labels I use (e.g., male, female, White-European, and so on). As Dyck (2012) notes, ethnographers do not

seek to reduce or simply slot . . . individuals’ experiences into one-dimensional categories of social class, race, or gender. Instead, the focus [is] on the ways in which the entanglement in community sports of *actual* children and adults—as opposed to so-called average or typical children and adults, sons, and mothers, and so on—intersect with and illuminate broader social, economic, and cultural influences that mould individual, family, and community undertakings within this field. (p. 17).

In other words, while the participants in this study can be slotted into specific social categories, the latter do not drive the analysis presented in the findings and discussion.

Eighty-eight people were formally involved in this project. Many held overlapping roles such as parent and sport administrator. In the end, seven held the role of youth

worker, 33 of sport administrator, nine of school administrator (teachers or principals), 30 of parent (actively engaged in child rearing), 20 of coach, and 27 of young person. Countless other young people and adults were part of conversations and observations as they went about their daily lives. All but one adult interviewee over the age of 30 had children. Not a single adult participant had children who were not currently participating or had never participated in organized youth sport.

Apart from two South Asian mothers (and their children), all participants are of White-European heritage. Only two adult participants are first-generation immigrants, having moved from the United Kingdom, one in her youth and another in early adulthood. They are both White-European. I acknowledge that not all participants are “similarly white” (Kalman-Lamb, 2012, p.7). Many are children, grandchildren, or great grandchildren of Doukhobor, Quaker, or Italian migrants—groups that were socially and culturally ostracized over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Significantly, no participants identify as Indigenous or Japanese, two groups who also have historical routes in the region.

Women make up 56 percent (n=34) of the adult interviewees, men 44 percent (n=27). The gender segregation of most organized sport activities in the region allowed me to determine which gender the youth participants identify with within the context of sport. Of my youth participants, 48 percent (n=13) play on boys’ teams, and 52 percent (n=14) play on girls’ teams. While interviews did not focus on sexual identity, the participants’ language, as well as the stories they shared about partners led me to assume that none are members of the LGBTQ community. (I am aware that interviewees may have deliberately chosen not to disclose this information).

At the time of the research, adults ranged in age from 22 to “over 65,” while young people ranged in age from 12 to 19. Most young people (n=20) were between the ages of 14 and 17. Overall, the adult participants range from those with precarious employment to those with stable, very well-paying employment. Most, but certainly not all, adult participants can be considered middle-class, with enough disposable income to register their children in a few organized sports per year and take a vacation every few years. A

dozen or so adults have (very) high paying professional occupations, many of them in jobs related to the trade/resource extraction industries and others in health care (e.g., doctors, physiotherapists, dentist) and government. The rest work seasonally/temporarily in trades and resource extraction jobs, many low paying.

Participants live in 13 distinct areas across the region, from remote and very small (i.e., 200 residents) to centrally located with larger populations (i.e., 10,000 residents). One participant lives in a community of 500–600, three in a community of 900–1000, seven in unincorporated areas, nine in a community of 1000–2000, nine in a community of 3000–4000, 10 in a community of 10,000–11,000, 18 in a community of 2000–3000, and 26 in a community of 7,000–8,000.

## **3.5. Ethics**

### **3.5.1. Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality presents unique challenges in rural and small towns. Many practitioners (such as doctors) and their patients have outlined the hurdles they face maintaining confidentiality and anonymity because of the interconnected, overlapping relationships they share with their clients, as well as the visibility and lack of privacy in these communities (Osborn, 2012). Researchers face similar challenges. To start, while there is a long tradition in rural sociology and community studies in general of disguising the location of the study, I found this approach difficult. Just like McGregor (2010) in her study of Viroqua, Wisconsin, I had chosen the region largely because of its sport history and unique settlement patterns, so to write this history out of the study would have gutted it. Taking a place-based life course perspective also necessitated that I pay precise attention to the very things that make this place distinctive and that inform experiences of childhood and parenthood. To hide these characteristics in obscure field and endnotes would have taken the richness out of this project. While this practice might make some traditional community ethnographers cringe, it did yield some fruitful leads. Just like McGregor (2010), “because I was free to tell people where I was doing my research, I

stumbled on many sources of data and contacts I would not have had had people not known which town I was studying” (p. 251).

It also seemed, in the words of McGregor (2010), “ludicrous” to try and offer full anonymity in this project, as it did not take long for townspeople to know with whom I had spoken and for interviews to be peppered with “I heard you spoke to ‘so-and-so.’” As they say, news travels fast, especially in places that only have a handful of people who would “qualify” to take part in this research project. Having no interest in lying to my participants, I would concede that yes, “so-and-so” had spoken with me. On several occasions, I also found myself soliciting this information, saying “Yeah, I was speaking to so-and-so the other day for this project.” When I reflected on why this might be, I kept coming back to the importance of relationships in rural and small towns as a way of building rapport and legitimacy in the field.

Limited meeting places also proved to be a challenge to confidentiality. Considering rural and small towns provide few public places to conduct interviews (there is often only one coffee shop), interviews ran the risk of being overheard by other members of the “community of interest”—in this case, members of the organized youth sport community. Interviews with young people also ran the risk of being overheard by parents. Following Barker and Weller’s (2003) caution “not [to] underestimate the scale of wider concerns over children’s safety” (p. 214), I gave the parents the option of hanging around nearby during interviews. In three cases, the parents preferred that I interview their child at home or within “eyesight” of them at the park. In these situations, I had no way of guaranteeing the confidentiality of information as sound could have travelled far enough for them to hear what their child and I were talking about.

Anonymity also proved difficult to maintain given the number of photos that the youth snapped of us when we were at games or on the road. Taking “selfies” is a very common part of socializing with teammates (as a matter of fact, I sometimes wondered if it was more important than playing the game itself!). Since most of the young people had smart phones, it was a matter of minutes before pictures of us were uploaded to their social media sites.

Even providing anonymity in the final write-up (i.e., using pseudonyms and limiting identifiers) can be a challenge. This dissertation represents my efforts to balance the requirement of anonymity with my desire to provide the reader with rich ethnographic detail. In a workshop I attended at the *BC Rural Summit* (2012), one of the community members remarked, “Everybody is related and if they aren’t, just assume. You say enough and they’ll know it’s you.” I had also narrowed down my field enough to the point where some “titles” (e.g., Head of Recreation Commission) were only held by one member in the *region*, never mind the town. Due to the unique nature of rural and small towns, I maintained confidentiality, if not always anonymity, to the best of my ability but also recognized the need not to come off as distant in my writing.

All participants were still offered confidentiality within the limits of the law. In consent forms and informal conversations, I explained to participants that this meant confidentiality would be protected even regarding illegal activities, with the exception that I would report ongoing cases of child abuse or if participants posed a serious threat of imminent harm to themselves or others. I am fortunate I did not experience this. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could discontinue participation at any point during the research. No participants withdrew from the project. Finally, contrary to McGregor’s (2010) approach, I did end up using pseudonyms and removing as many personal and professional identifiers as possible from the final text. Even if these efforts may not have entirely made it impossible to know who was doing the talking, they nonetheless provided the participants with comfort in knowing they might not necessarily be outed. I should also say that none of the participants insisted I use their real name.

### **3.5.2. Consent**

All participants were invited to provide written informed consent to participate. Given that the probability and magnitude of possible harms incurred by participating in the research were judged to be no greater than “those encountered in...those aspects of [their] everyday life” (SFU ORE, 2009, p.1), participants age 12 and above were invited to

participate. Youth participants (ages 12–19) were only allowed to participate once parental/guardian informed consent was gained in addition to the individual's consent.

Consent was gained in various ways. Each potential participant was contacted and given verbal and/or written information about the study. After the participants confirmed their intention to participate in the study, I emailed and/or presented them with the consent form. The interview proceeded only once I had verbally reconfirmed that the participant had read and signed the consent form. Participants who expressed interest in being accompanied for go/ride-alongs and continuing with ongoing casual conversations or interviews were given a new consent form reflecting these other methods.

Consent forms were tailored to specific groups: adults, parents/guardians, youth. All participants indicated (through a signature) their consent to participate, after which I signed and dated two copies of the form to verify their consent. I kept one form and the other went to the participant for their records. It is important to note that children were not asked for their consent until their parents had provided consent for their child's participation.

While I anticipated having to read the consent form out loud and created a "speech friendly" version of the form for young people, I did not have to employ this strategy. I suspect this is because parents read the consent forms to their children. Since parental/guardian signatures were required for children's participation, adults were familiar with the form and could simplify it to their children. One issue with sending forms home with children/through email is that the researcher is not entirely sure what information was read to the children (or even adult). To remedy this, I always reaffirmed the basic conditions of the consent form when we met for the interview. I also anticipated reluctance by some participants (particularly younger ones) to sign an informed consent form because they may have wished to discuss their engagement in illegal activities (such as drinking or doing drugs) and may not have wanted to discuss activities of which their coaches or parents/guardians would disapprove. I did not encounter this resistance. In fact, children often spoke about drinking, drugs, and unfavourable activities with very little hesitation.

I had initially intended to provide study information to the president/chair/board members of the sports association to which my participants belonged. However, I found I did not have to do this because so many of my participants were either adults who held those respective roles or children of adults who held those respective roles. As I heard many times throughout the project, “it’s the same people doing everything.”

Where my go/ride-alongs took me to games and tournaments, I provided study information to the coach of the team. While I sought permission from the coach to attend team events and did ask coaches to pass along study information, I did not ask coaches for permission to interview individual team members. I did not seek consent from individuals who transition in and out of the public sites of organized sport (e.g., opposing team members or parents, officials, and any bystanders at public sports sites). Organized youth sport is performed in public spaces, making the presence of a participant observer not unusual. In addition, no personal information was collected from those not being interviewed, meaning that no informed consent was required (TCPS, 2010, p. 142).

### **3.6. Analysis**

In line with ethnographic methodology, this project uses an iterative approach to analysis: “a reflexive process in which the researcher visits and revisits the data, connects them to emerging insights, and progressively refines his/her focus and understandings” (Tracy, 2013, p. 183). Ethnographers are always ready to adjust and readjust their inquiries as the investigation proceeds to take account of emergent findings (Dyck, 2012, p. 9). Before I go into the steps of the data analysis, I will briefly outline my choice *not* to use Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo.

#### **3.6.1. On Doing Analysis Manually**

Tracy (2013) suggests that researchers “reflect on the ways in which [they], personally, best process the data” (p. 185). I am somebody who is “attracted to touching the data physically and seeing it” (Tracy, 2013, p. 187); I have always learned better by writing thoughts down, by reading paper rather than a screen. For these reasons, I knew

I was not going to give up manual analysis entirely. I also recognized the thousands and thousands of pages of data I collected over three years in the field and knew this would be too much to wade through using only post-its, coloured pens, and tape. I briefly entertained the idea of using CAQDAS but decided against it for a few reasons. Practically, I had not used CAQDAS at this point in my academic life and did not think that I had enough time to learn to use it proficiently (Seror, 2005). The “tactile-digital divide” (Gilbert, 2002, p. 216) can “seriously limi[t] CAQDAS’s useful in qualitative research” (Seror, 2005, p. 324). It is one thing to learn how to “drag and drop” into folders; it is an entirely different thing to exploit the programs to their fullest. Methodologically, I also heeded the warning of Bassett (2004) concerning letting the tool become the method (p. 36). I did not want to get lost in what to do next or get focused on coding each word or line. As she says, “the speed and efficiency of computerized qualitative data analysis can all too easily result in a lack of knowledge and understanding as to how the . . . results were achieved” (Bassett, 2004, p. 36). In the end, I used what Tracy (2013) calls a “computer-aided approach with everyday software” (p. 188). I maximized the searching and organizing features of Microsoft Word, all the while utilizing good-old “tactile handling of data” (Bassett, 2004, p. 35). In the end, I was able to “play with the data” (Seror, 2005, p. 323) just fine.

### **3.6.2. Analysis Process**

Once I had decided that I would not use CAQDAS, the first formal phase of analysis began. This was organization (Tracy, 2013). I organized fieldnotes and photographs based on date and location (Blair, 2016, p. 92). Printed and electronic interview transcripts were organized into, and read through based on, the following participant attributes (Tracy, 2013, p. 185): youth (girls), youth (boys), non-sport adults (e.g., youth workers, school administrators), sport adults (e.g., coaches, programmers, executives), and sport parents (e.g., currently had children playing sport). I did this for a few reasons. Regarding gender, research continues to demonstrate the influence of gender on people’s experiences of sport and perhaps the most obvious example is the segregation of sport teams (See, for example, Messner & Musto, 2016; Messner, 2009; Travers, 2006, 2008, 2016). Since my youth participants were registered in organized sport based on their gender, I was interested to see if girls and boys reported difference with respect to opportunities for sport

participation, the meaning of sport participation, and experiences growing up in the West Kootenays. However, I must admit this was a rather flawed approach; it was driven by what Cohen (1978) refers to as “the observer’s science” rather than “the subject’s behaviours” (p. 4).

I also wanted to resist the temptation to lump the voices of young people with those of adults. While adults certainly have rich experiences of and in youth sport, so do young people and it is important to pay attention to the latter considering it is, ironically, their experiences which research on youth sport rarely captures (Laurendeau & Konecny, 2015; Messner & Musto, 2014). Finally, despite the variety of ways adults experience organized youth sport, they nonetheless do so from specific epistemological standpoints (Dyck, 2012). The daily realities of sport involvement were discussed primarily by parents who are actively still involved in the process. It proved useful to read these interviews together. In the same way, sport administrators provided detailed information on the logistics of delivering sport in the region—something parents may or may not have understood intimately depending on their affinity for the administrative side of things.

I recognize that many of these standpoints are not static nor are they rigid. I also recognize that in rural areas, roles tend to be less specialized as there is often a shortage of volunteers/work force (Reimer & Markey, 2008). In this project, one interviewee was a parent with a child in sport, a school administrator, a sport administrator, and she had played sport in the region as a child. Another interviewee was a school board trustee, a coach, and a parent of a child in sport. In sum, I am aware that organizing my data this way “implicitly encourag[ed me] to notice some comparisons and overlook others” (Tracy, 2013, p. 185) and for that reason, I continued to zoom in and out between these groups and the larger collection of transcripts. From a life course perspective, doing so encouraged me to see the way in which lives are “linked,” even if they may be lived from a specific social role at any given time.

The next step involved immersing myself in the data. This first involved reading each printed interview transcript several times and asking, “What is going on here?” to generate initial tags or labels. Using pens and highlighters, I attached tags to segments of

data (interview transcripts, photos, and fieldnotes) to depict what each segment was about. My tags were words or short phrases aimed at assigning an attribute to that portion of the data. Some initial tags included “FRUSTRATIONS WITH LACK OF OPTIONS,” “TRAVEL REQUIRED FOR SPORT PARTICIPATION,” “EXPLANATION FOR LIVING IN W. KOOTENAYS.” I also tagged the data with respect to the *doing* of the research. For example, “CONFIDENTIALITY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES” and “BEING CONSIDERED A LOCAL.” I wrote these codes in the right-hand margins of the printed transcripts. Once I identified and generated a list of initial tags across the data set, I gathered and collated data relevant to each code. It was at this point that I opened an individual Word file for each initial code, copying and pasting text from the digital transcripts and fieldnotes. As Bassett (2014) and Tracy (2013) note, it is common for a researcher to jump back and forth between the physical and the digital copy of the transcript.

Next, I refocused my analysis at the broader level of themes (what Tracy calls hierarchical coding). I sorted the different tags/codes into possible clusters (themes). My participants—both young people and adults—often used the tags “RURAL MENTALITY,” “KOOTENAY CULTURE,” and “GOOD PLACE TO RAISE KIDS” in discussions about why they lived in the West Kootenays and what was distinctive about it. Thus, that general theme became “RURAL CHILDHOODS.” Tags such as “HOCKEY PLAYERS’ REPUTATION,” “MYTHOLOGY OF THE SMOKE EATERS,” and “HOCKEY TOWN” all spoke to the role of hockey in the region. As such, the theme became “HOCKEY IN/AND COMMUNITY.” I also revisited what Tracy (2013) calls my “sensitizing concepts” to ensure they were still relevant and interesting. I asked myself, which tags spoke to young people’s experiences of organized youth sport? Which tags spoke to parents’ experiences? Which tags spoke to the role of place (e.g., living in the West Kootenays) in experiences of sport? Which tags spoke to the role of place in decision-making around sport participation? Next, I “identif[ied] the ‘essence’ of what each theme [was] about and determin[ed] what aspect of the data each theme capture[d]” (Sparkes & Smith, 2013, p. 125). Below is the list of themes that eventually emerged:

- Community and Regional Characteristics (What is distinctive about the West Kootenays? What is distinctive about each community? How does the history of the region influence the delivery and experiences of organized youth sport?)

- Young People's Future Plans (Do young people ever see themselves moving away from their hometowns? What do young people want to do with their lives in the future?)
- Rural Childhood(s) (What is it like raising kids in a rural region? What is it like growing up in a rural region? What are some challenges? What are some opportunities?)
- Hockey in/and the Community (What role does hockey play in the region? What role does hockey play in respective communities? Who supports hockey and why? What is the history of hockey in the region?)
- Hockey's Culture (What is the culture like within the sport of hockey in the West Kootenays?)
- Rural Sport (How do participants describe rural sport? What are the logistics of providing sport in rural communities? What are the challenges of providing sport in rural communities? What are the unique features of sport in rural communities?)
- Rural/Urban Comparisons (How do participants compare their experiences, their lives, to people living in urban centres?)
- Young People's Social Life Outside of Sport (What activities do young people take part in outside of sport?)
- Young People's Sport Involvement (What are young people involved in? How are they involved? What reasons do they provide for being involved or for quitting?)
- Parents' Sport Involvement (How are parents involved in youth sport? What reasons do they provide for being involved?)
- Sport Travel (What type of travel is required for sport participation? What are the logistics around sport travel? What are young people's experiences of sport travel? What are adults' experiences of sport travel?)
- The Visibility of Sport in the Community (Why are certain sports given "priority" in each community? In the region? Which sports are made visible? In what ways are they made visible?)
- Adult Participant Demographics (What do parents/adults do for a living? What brought them to the region? How many children do they have and where are they living?)
- Social Identities (In what ways do gender, race, and socioeconomic status influence experiences of sport? What are the regional patterns of gender, race, and socioeconomic relations?)

At this point, I headed into what Tracy (2013) calls the "analysis breakdown" (p. 188), which required creating one Word file for each theme into which I copied and pasted the

relevant raw data. I organized this data with the basic table function in Microsoft Word. The right-hand column was for the data, the left-hand column for notes. These notes contained analytical memos and theoretical insights. It was also in this phase that I bolded specific quotes or passages which I found particularly rich.

The final step was writing. As Sparkes and Smith (2013) emphasize, “writing *is* a kind of analysis” (p. 155). It is worth citing Richardson (2000) at length on this topic as she sums up how this final phase of the research process can (and in my case, does) bring on new ways of organizing and weaving together themes (Sparkes & Smith, 2013, p. 126). She states,

I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of “telling” about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of the research project. Writing is also a way of “knowing”; a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable (p. 923)

Writing is a process of personal and scholarly discovery. It also complements iterative, ethnographic analysis used in this project (Luhmann, 2001). As Foley (1990) notes about his process of writing his ethnographic work *Learning Capitalist Culture Deep in the Heart of Tejas*,

ethnographers are not recording machines that simply present “facts” that speak. Ethnographers filter their experiences [in the field] through ideas and values that they use for making these “data” have meaning. In the end, ethnographic portraits may say as much about the author [both personally and professionally] as they do about the people being studied. (p. xix)

At first, I tried to find a story from the major organizational themes, but this proved to be more of a descriptive than an analytical story. By going back to relevant literature on childhood, parenthood, place, and the life course perspective, I made significant analytical breakthroughs and turned to the place-based, life course perspective as an interpretive framework for understanding practices of childhood and parenthood. Grounding my findings in the everyday lives of my participants allowed me to link the macro with the micro features of everyday practices of childhood and parenthood. I believe the findings and discussion I ended up with demonstrate rich “critical, reflective empirical accounts of

[my] personal fieldwork experiences,” what Foley (1990, p. xix) considers the purpose of ethnography.

Through the (re)writing process, my data revealed the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography and development (Mitchell, 2006, p. 17). When I looked back at my list of major themes, I realized many of them spoke to the impact of (macro) material or structural conditions on (individual experiences of) organized youth sport, parenthood, and childhood. The data revealed how individual experiences were embedded within historical, socioeconomic, and geographic locations (Mitchell, 2006, p. 6). Small populations (themselves intertwined with history and economic conditions) along with distance to population proved central to many of the reasons young people, parents, and sport administrators behaved in the ways they did. They also helped explain the shape of organized youth sport programs in the region, which itself has a bearing on practices of childhood and parenthood. This material forms the basis of Chapter 4. I also realized how many of my themes spoke to how people *felt* and what they *imagined* about living rurally and in the West Kootenays specifically (the imaginative dimension of place). In Chapter 5, I explain this by looking at the Kootenay Culture and hockey-as-small-town ethos. Finally, going back to the literature on childhood and parenthood (in rural places) helped contextualize what the place-based, life course perspective revealed. It helped explain why, within the material and imaginative conditions of the West Kootenays, parents and children engaged in a variety of parenting and childhood practices. That is why Chapter 6 contextualizes the findings within the practices and discourses on parenthood and childhood.

### **3.7. A Note on the Duration of the Project**

Ethnographic projects take a long time (Fine, 2003; Luhrmann, 2001; O’Reilly, 2012) and this one is no exception. My first day in the field was on June 3, 2012, and my last was in August 2015. Over the course of the four years, I travelled back and forth over fifty times between my home in British Columbia’s Lower Mainland and the southeastern part of the province—performing what Madden (2010) calls a “step-in-and-out

ethnography.” My primary base in the West Kootenays was Castlegar, although whenever necessary, I overnighted in other towns. Trips lasted anywhere from two days to three weeks and primarily occurred in the spring and summer, with occasional trips in the fall and winter. Between summer snow storms on the mountain passes, cancelled flights, and flooded or washed out roads, I put nearly 20,000 kilometres on my car, got more oil changes and fill-ups than I can count, and stopped at what seemed like an endless supply of family fruit stands.

While it was not my intention at the outset of the project to be in the field for 18 months (spread out over the course of four years), several reasons led me to do so. Perhaps the most significant was that I was not able to move to the region full-time due to personal and professional responsibilities. I had my sights set on teaching full-time upon graduation and this required getting teaching experience. This meant I could only do research during my non-teaching semesters, on semester breaks, or on non-teaching days. I was also in a new relationship (with my now husband) and, as other ethnographers have noted, it can be hard to leave family behind for research. I also continued to play on an elite women’s soccer team and could not step away from the game for extended periods of time. Personal obligations also extended the research. This included my marriage and honeymoon, the marriages of a few friends, the birth of my nieces, and my father’s heart attack and subsequent sextuple by-pass surgery and recovery. For obvious reasons, these events made it difficult for me to leave home full-time to be in the field.

There are, however, positive consequences to spreading out research over a longer period. One of these is the ability to “observe changes as they happen . . . instead of focus[ing] on static elements in people’s lives” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 93). In my case, I could witness important transitions in the lives of both young people and adults. I watched as some young people did not return for the next sport season, some re-joined after many years away, and others changed sports. I also watched as young people became teenagers and eventually high school graduates. In July 2015, I attended the high school graduation for the group of girls I met on my first day in the region. I watched as some went off to university and came back home for the summers, working at local companies. I watched as young people moved from one town to another, or out of the region entirely.

I watched as some parents changed jobs, some having to pack up and leave the region while others returned home from years commuting back and forth.

I also witnessed continuity and change in what was offered for youth. I observed as each year more and more skateparks and youth centres began dotting towns across the region—many of which had adamantly opposed the building of such facilities when I first came into the field. I was privy to referendums (and their consequences) on the fate of sport and recreation facilities. I saw coaches get fired, associations amalgamate, some grow, and others fold. I watched teams leave local leagues to join distant ones, just as I saw local players who had left to join distant teams return. I saw the boundaries of catchment areas get re-drawn from year to year, depending on the projected success of the local team.

Important socioeconomic and environmental events, as well as their consequences, also unfolded over the course of the research. One of the mills closed and re-opened, tree planting started back up, and several schools closed. Significant infrastructure projects also got underway, including a major dam project. In addition, I worked in towns that had no high-speed Internet or wireless service when I started but did by 2015. I was also in the area long enough to witness the consequences and the rebuilding efforts of towns devastated by local natural and environmental disasters. On July 12, 2012, a massive landslide killed four people and wiped out the entire community of Johnson's Landing. It was not until two years later that the final residents could come back (Drews, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Other significant environmental events include the fatal flash flooding in June 2012 and July 2013, the fatal wind storm in July 2012, the July 2013 jet fuel spill into the Slocan River, and the summer 2015 forest fires.

Spending a long time in the field also helped me build quality relationships with participants—a distinctive feature of ethnographic research. By returning year after year to the field, I showed the participants that I *enjoyed* being around and that I *valued* what they had shared with me. As O'Reilly (2012) points out,

<sup>14</sup> On March 27, 2017, residents of Johnsons Landing were once again forced to evacuate due to potential landslides ("Johnsons Landing on evacuation alert," 2017).

it takes times for others in the setting to get to know you, and to trust that you are not there to exploit them, to understand what it is you are trying to achieve, and to learn that yours is not a superficial smash-and-grab technique but a research methodology born of understanding. (p. 93)

Relationship building was especially key to establishing trust with children, their parents, and coaches. I knew I had established this trust when I was invited to help coach, stay with the team in hotels, referred to as a “big sister” (or as a daughter), invited for holiday dinners, and eventually invited to high school graduation. I knew young people wanted me to be around when, during recess, they ditched their friends to come say “hi” to me. Some young people even ran out of class when they saw me walk by the school grounds.

By the third year, my status had moved from “stranger” (“Wait, I don’t know who you are. Are you with the other team?”) to “familiar face” (“Sorry, are you someone’s sister? I swear I’ve seen you here before. Am I going crazy?”) and eventually to a “normal” or “expected” participant in group life (“We missed you while you were gone!”) (Chappell & Landza-Kaduce, 2010; Fine, 2003). Near the end, residents jokingly remarked that I was more of a local than they were, eventually asking me questions about their youth sport organizations. After four years in the field, joking around with members and gossiping meaningfully came easily so it was at that point that I knew I could wrap up the project (Fine, 2003).

### **3.8. “Would You Live Here?” Identity in the Field**

I think it wise to close this chapter with a review of how, at every step of the research process (i.e., from project design to writing up the final dissertation), I had to continuously manage and negotiate my (shifting) identities and understand the power dynamics that formed around relationships built upon certain identities (i.e., adult with child, researcher with coach, urban resident, and rural resident) (Christensen, 2004; Levey Friedman, 2013; McDonald, 2014; O’Reilly, 2012). While the fieldworker’s image is ultimately out of their control (Cohen, 1978), I read into my roles in all interactions that I had with my participants (Mason, 2009, p. 78) and in the greater communities of which I became a part of over the course of the research project. Throughout the project, I worked

to ensure “my own prejudices or biases did not come across too clearly for the respondents to feel they could trust me” (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 87).

The first role that I contended with was that of a researcher. While I did not feel the need to wear a badge that said “researcher” when I was hanging out at the local park or ball field, I was happy to talk about the project when asked. In some settings, I was asked to disclose why I wanted to hang out. I attended an annual general meeting of a local sports council. The president asked me to stand up and talk about my research. While I was just there to listen and take in the conversations, I was nonetheless asked to introduce myself. In other settings, executives/leaders of the organization knew I was there to do research but did not ask me to identify myself to the group. This was particularly the case in drop-in sport settings such as BMX and skateboarding where there is a constant flow of athletes and volunteers. When I was spending a considerable amount of time around young people (e.g., following a specific team at a tournament), I made sure to talk about my project with the adults (primarily parents) who were with the team, which was especially important where it was obvious that I was not a regular. It was at this point that I would tell them who I was and what brought me to the field or rink or park. It was particularly important to give a genuine response when I was around young people. I did not want to be mistaken as a loiterer.

Personal attributes like age also played a factor in the way I interacted with my participants and in the field sites (O’Reilly, 2012, p. 87). In a sense, I operated in this sort of “middle space” whereby I was considered young in some settings but old(er) in others. In settings where I was too young to have a child playing the sport but too old to be a participant, I was often asked, “Who are you?” When the project started, I found it hard not to consider myself a young person. I was in my late 20s, was not married, did not own a house, and did not have a full-time job—traditional markers of adulthood. The parents and adult administrators also considered me a young person, so much so that adult participants frequently referred me to as “kid” (e.g., “Hey kid, how are ya”?) and told me that I was way too young to be a researcher. I also had some parents tell me they were old enough to be *my* parents. Despite feeling young in these situations, I was also not delusional about the fact that I could not pass as a teenager. Given the pace of change

within society and the rapidly shifting nature of youth culture and experience, I was cautious of claiming any privileged insight into the nature of what it means to be young today (Heath et al., 2009, p.46). In other words, I tried to prevent my own memories of youth organized sport from “tak[ing] [me] away from [my] informants’ understandings of the world and turn[ing] [me] back in on [my]self” (Biklen, 2007, p.262)—even though I was often invited by the youth participants to hang out with them at the young people’s table rather than with the adults.

As the project progressed, I found that this relationship to the adults and young people shifted. First, many of my participants had graduated from high school and were one step closer to significant adult transitions. Many were attending post-secondary institutions—a world that I was still in as a student. Second, and more significantly, I got married and got a full-time job, and my husband and I started planning when we were going to have children. Because I was thinking about children and about the quality of life we wanted as a family, I was more interested in what the adults had to say about raising children in rural and small towns. I found it was easier to connect with my topic because there were personal consequences to what I was hearing. I wanted to know what it was like to raise children there. I wanted to hear the young people talk about living there. These conversations helped my husband and I think about what we wanted to do ourselves.

My background as a city-dweller who had never lived in a rural or small town was also disclosed to the participants—although many of them would argue I did not have to do much deliberate disclosure as they could tell I was a “city girl.” The townspeople in Wuthnow’s (2013) research argue that it is hardest for newcomers from the city to fit in because they “fai[l] to recognize and understand the subtle cues governing behaviours in small towns” (p. 127). Research participants also frequently asked me about whether my husband and I would move and raise our young people there. My answers were always delicate because I did not want to offend them if I said we would or could not raise our children there.

Finally, my involvement in sport came into play. My body displays the marks of athleticism and of a life of sport participation and so I had to be aware of the signals I was giving off. In fieldnotes I wrote in my first summer of research, I asked:

How does this affect the way(s) I am perceived by those I am speaking to? By those I am observing? Does my body allow me to fit in? (i.e., with the young people who participate) Or does it prevent me from fitting in? (i.e., with the young people who have “opted out”) Do my reasons for going home impact the ways my participants view me? (i.e., going home for soccer tournaments or board meetings for sports organizations?) (August 18, 2012)

The visibility of my sport involvement did prove helpful in accessing sport spaces; I believe I was invited to hang out on the bench with players, sit in the bleachers with parents, and stand on the sidelines with coaches because I looked the part and spoke the language. This is similar to what Foley (1990) experienced in his ethnographic work with young male football players in a small Texan town. In his early thirties at the time of research, he concluded that “being an ex-college basketball player and tennis player” as well as somebody who could often be seen “running around the high school campus in shorts and a t-shirt” (p. 208) made the young football players’ acceptance of him relatively smooth. While my sport background certainly benefited me in sport circles, I suspect it was equally a barrier in my quest to involve more non-sport parents and young people. I often reflected: If I managed to get hold of these parents and young people, would they believe I would be open and sympathetic to their experiences? As I will explain further in Chapter 7, it is reasonable to suggest that the lack of involvement of non-sport parents and young people in this project may have affected my understanding of all that sport means or involves for others who are not part of the sporting community. It does not, however, detract from what my participants have shared; it may have simply provided a different picture.

### **3.9. Some Notes on Word Usage**

When directly quoting a research participant, I have not edited the language used, even if some terms do not fall in line with definitions used in this project. For example, the term “rural” is used in a variety of ways by my participants and does not always correspond with scholarly or municipal definitions. Similarly, some of my participants use the term

“town” to describe places that are officially called cities. In these cases, I have left the language as it was stated.

When referring to specific geographic areas, and where appropriate, I use each jurisdiction’s self-definition, even if this may not fall in line with the Statistics Canada definition. According to BC Stats (personal communication, December 5, 2016), there is no official definition of city, town, or village. BC Stats relies on each jurisdiction’s self-definition—often determined by local or regional politicians, and sometimes for marketing purposes more than anything. In British Columbia, “cities” range in population from 692 to 650,000. Fourteen of these cities also fall under the federal definition of “small town.” There are also fourteen “towns” ranging in population from 2,500 to 14,000, meaning they all could also be considered “cities.” Finally, there are a total of 43 “villages,” ranging in population from 100 to 3,500, meaning some could also be considered “towns.” Due to this complexity, I simply rely on the community’s moniker such as “Rossland” or “Nelson.” Where I am speaking generically about a place, I use the term “town.”

### **3.10. Conclusion**

This chapter has grounded the findings and conclusions that are presented in the upcoming chapters. I make the case that an exploratory, ethnographic project is well supported by a place-based, life course perspective. Ethnographic interviews and participant observation capture the geographic, historical, cultural, and ideological contexts in which people make decisions about organized youth sport. These methods also create knowledge in context and “link” the lives of participant and researcher. Having outlined the methods used, ethical considerations, and issues of bias, I now turn to the everyday lives of my participants that were illuminated through ethnographic fieldwork. It is in their everyday lives that we can best come to understand how spatialized practices of parenthood and childhood are played out in organized youth sport. In Chapter 4, I focus on the material and structural conditions of the West Kootenays: precarious employment, low population, and distance to population. Chapter 5 focuses on people’s ideas about rurality: what they *imagine* or *represent* rural places to be and feel like and how this comes

to bear on their involvement in organized youth sport. I focus on the West Kootenay Culture and the hockey-as-small-town ethos to illustrate this. Together, these chapters demonstrate how individuals negotiate geographic, historical, cultural, and ideological contexts as youth participants, parents, or administrators. They also point to the interplay between individual agency and structure.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **People, Jobs, and Geography**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

Drawing upon a place-based life course perspective, the data presented in this chapter reveal how experiences of organized youth sport are linked to the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography and development (Mitchell, 2006, p. 17). The data speak to the impact of spatialized (macro) material or structural conditions on individual experiences of organized youth sport, parenthood, and childhood and illustrate that individual experiences are embedded within a particular historical, socioeconomic, and geographic location (Mitchell, 2006, p. 6). Small populations (themselves intertwined with history and economic conditions) along with distance to population prove central to many of the reasons young people, parents, and sport administrators behave in the ways they do. They also help explain the shape of organized youth sport programs in the region, which in turn has a bearing on practices of childhood and parenthood.

In the first section, I focus on the socioeconomic context. Conditions in the region have resulted in towns with small and unstable populations, with particularly low numbers of school-aged young people. I use the example of the Trail Smoke Eaters and their reliance on mining giant Cominco to illustrate the historical connection between employment opportunities and organized sport in the region. I follow this up with contemporary examples of organized youth sport's reliance on local industry, showing how weakening local economies have forced families to take up the burden of funding and managing these programs—something not all families are able to do (Oncescu, 2015). The next section focuses on numbers: how living in a place with a small population and unstable economy makes it hard to populate teams, retain coaches and volunteers, and build sustainable and successful programs. It also impacts young people's experience on the field, court, or rink, causing some to wish they had grown up elsewhere and others to

be grateful they grew up exactly where they did. The final section focuses on distance to population. I demonstrate that residing far away from cities and suburbs requires young people, parents, and sport administrators to travel to find teams to play on, to find higher-level teams, and to find teams to play against. I reveal that the direction of travel (mostly out of the region), weather and road conditions, and the cost of travel are significant factors which influence organized youth sport participation in the West Kootenays. I conclude by noting the consequences that this travel has on the choices people make about, and the experiences people have, of organized youth sport. These include opting out altogether, missing school and social activities, and leading busy lives. But they also include experiencing new cultures and meeting new people, as well as socializing.

#### **4.2. Context: “Is This the Year the School is Going to Close?”**

*When I first moved here, there was about six [adult] fast-ball teams. Now there's none. And there were two leagues. Fruitvale had its own league with about ten teams for adults and Trail had 12 to 16 teams, and now there's—I think there's a small Trail league, but that's it. I think it's a combination of not so many younger people around because for quite a few years there was no industry for them, like the people at Cominco weren't retiring. And so all the younger people were moving away. Yeah, like after high school, there was nobody under 30. Between 18 and 30, there was very few people staying around. There were no jobs for them. For young people's sport, even hockey for Terry, hockey has really changed drastically. You know, there used to be three House teams of every age level in Fruitvale, well, now they've amalgamated with Trail because they couldn't even get one House team. Yeah, that's for hockey. Baseball had, at one point, say, Little League, had three teams, and they could barely scrape up enough for one now. And Trail used to have, like, their own league. And now they have one team. (Patrick, Parent and Sport Administrator)*

“The populations have changed,” remarks retired sport administrator and teacher James, and this, he says, has directly impacted organized youth sport in the West Kootenays. As in much of rural Canada, the underlying problem facing people in the West Kootenays—as well as youth sport organizations—is that the region is economically and demographically declining (Oncescu, 2015). The population in every community is back

to numbers from 1966, and Trail has lost 37 percent of its population since 1966 (BC Stats, 2012). As I noted in Chapter 1, the median age has risen consistently since 2001 and is well above the provincial median of 41.9. Yet while the region is generally aging, the population structure varies considerably by community. There is an almost a 17-year difference in median age between Rossland (39.9) and New Denver (56.5) (Breen & Rethoret, 2017). While some towns may not be aging, the region has lost a considerable portion of its school aged young people.

“When I came here in the 60s, [the city of] Castlegar was its own school district. It had 11 schools, now they have four,” says James. More recently, long-time Fruitvale resident and multi-sport coach Greg recalls what happened across Trail, Castlegar, and Nelson when he moved back in the late 1990s: “There were 16 schools and eight were closed in one year. That is nuts.” When a school shuts down, the remaining young people disperse all over—some go to the closest high school, some do online education at a local learning centre, and others homeschool. In the case of Rossland, this has been worrying, says local parent Meredith: “They are wondering how they can make sure that at the end of the day, there is a place in Rossland for the young people to call their own. Their own space.”

Part of the decline in school enrolment, according to my participants, has to do with the culture of the West Kootenays. Home schooling and distance education are very popular in this area. Many participants attribute this to the laid-back, anti-establishment culture of the region (which I will explore in Chapter 5) as well as the geographic distances between some residences and schools. These distances are compounded when the school in the nearest town closes and young people must be driven or bussed even farther for school. At that point, homeschooling becomes a much more attractive option, at least for the parents. This is important because school closures have a significant impact on organized sport in these towns. Not only do they mean fewer teachers to help coach teams, but they also require local school-aged children to travel out of town for school. When a child travels for school, they are not likely to participate in organized sport in their host town or their hometown, which makes for further logistical and economic challenges for the provision of schooling and local sport organizations.

Schools do not only close because young people are choosing other educational opportunities. They also close because there are simply fewer young people around and this may have to do with people having fewer children now compared to the 1950s and 60s when most of these schools were built. James recalls the days when “In Trail, the Italians had four, five six kids. The Doukhobors in Castlegar as well. Now if you find families with two children, boy! The people who worked at the mills, the smelters, they had big families.” James is not too far off. The average Canadian fertility rate between 1950 and 1970 was 3.39 (this happens to be the period through which James was first teaching) (Statistics Canada, 2014). Today, Statistics Canada reports that the Canadian fertility rate is well below this at 1.59; the British Columbia rate is 1.4, the second lowest in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Across the West Kootenays, fertility rates have also dropped. In 1989, the oldest year for which statistics are available, the fertility rates were between 1.6 and 1.9 across the region. By 2015, these fertility rates had dropped to between 1.4 and 1.7 (BC Stats, 2016b). James is right that people across the region seem to be having fewer children now than they were before and that “this significantly impact athletics.”

Fertility rates are not the only factor influencing the number of young people around: economic opportunities for adults are also important. If adults cannot make a living in the region, they are unlikely to raise their families there. When they leave, so do their children.

#### **4.2.1. The Local Economy: The Smelter, the Mill, and the “Kootenay Shuffle”**

In Kaslo, “the biggest single factor in school enrolment going from 425 to 240—and that’s k to 12—was the closing of the mill,” says long-time resident Trudy. “That school was built in our existence. It was planned to increase population. Can you imagine?” In Burton, a community between Edgewood and Nakusp, a new, state-of-the-art primary school was built shortly before this research project started. Within two years of being open, there were only three children registered and the school had to shut down. “In that short of a time there’s, like, almost nobody with children there anymore,” says Edgewood resident Jeff. Elsewhere, while 2011 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Celgar Pulp Mill

in Castlegar (“Celgar celebrates 50 years of operations in Castlegar,” 2011), Juliana remembers when “people moved away from here not too long ago because the mill had shut down and all those people were laid off. That took away huge amounts of our community that we needed to keep growing.” Local resident Teagan remarks that because the mill has closed periodically over the years, “they’re [still] closing schools, closing schools, closing schools, right?”

Well, [the pulp mill] probably brought us more young people into the Kootenays. . . . And now there’s no question that there’s fewer young people. So, what happened was all those people that raised their children up here, they still live in those houses, they still occupy jobs at the mill or at Teck. So, I mean they still occupy those jobs but they have no children anymore. And there’s only a finite number of jobs, we’re not creating more and more jobs here, so that’s why probably we have fewer young people.

Eva sees the latter all the time. The nearest mill shut down in 2011 but had been operating sporadically for the preceding decade, with several lengthy shutdowns. It was demolished in 2014 (Ministry of Forests Lands and Natural Resources Operations, 2016). Eva adds,

This is an economically depressed area. We don’t have the industry or industry has left in a lot of cases. There are logging and mills and stuff like that, mining has all closed down in the last, I don’t know, 20, 30 years kind of thing. So, a lot of the jobs that supported people that were here 30 years ago aren’t available. And a lot of families do send one family member, usually the dad, out of the area to work seasonally, and then they come back, and they survive for the rest of the year. Rent is cheap. Or, you know, buying a house is fairly cheap, so it works for them. Lots of people are either up in Fort Mac or are, you know. . . . But there are people that basically—a member of each young family—the trend is that people will go, work, and come back in. Or you do like me and have four part-time jobs.

If there are no jobs in the area, or if people do not retire, it is difficult for others to picture themselves making it in the community. As Julianna asked, “What are the jobs in the small community and what is going to keep them here?” As a result, many families permanently move out of the region or send one family member away. Those who do stay often take part in the “Kootenay Shuffle.” As Carry from Nakusp described, “jobs are an issue for sure, to keep young families here. We all work many jobs; it’s called the Kootenay Shuffle.” Other interviewees spoke of being “versatile” (Meghan, Nelson), “creative” (Craig, Salmo),

or “taking as many jobs as you can get” (Jeff, Edgewood). Sylvie describes what a Kootenay Shuffle lifestyle looks like:

I’m a registered nurse, and my husband is an electrician. So, me moving back and getting work was no problem, but he had a little bit of—not that he couldn’t get work, he couldn’t get permanent position work. It was temporary and stuff and he actually had to work out of town for probably the first three—about three or four years. In BC, not so far, like Skookumchuck and then there’s just—in the East Kootenays type thing, so he could still come home on weekends, and, you know, then he would get laid off that job, and then another job, and laid off, just all over the place for the first, I don’t know, 10 years until something came up more permanent in that position. I mean he always seemed to be lucky, one job—you know, he was never laid off for more than a month or two. There always seemed to be something to jump into, but nothing permanent. But we thought no, we’ll just hang it out and see how it goes. It worked out fine. It’s the “Kootenay Shuffle.”

Suffice it to say that the West Kootenays is a region that has endured, and continues to endure, booms and busts that are hard for organized youth sport programs to weather. Even though regional employment at Teck has been relatively steady, well-paying jobs have not entirely disappeared, and Teck continues to invest in local infrastructure and facilities (Regnier, 2016a), between 2013 and 2014 the Kootenay District Region (encompassing both the Central and East Kootenays) still lost 9,000 jobs. In 2016, unemployment was at 7.4 percent—above both the provincial (6.2) and national (6.9) rates (Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 2017). Many participants identified economic conditions as a key factor influencing the number of young people and adults around. This directly impacts organized youth sport.

Perhaps the most well-known example of the intersection between economy and organized sport in the West Kootenays is the success and demise of the Trail Smoke Eaters. The connection between Cominco and the Trail Smoke Eaters is well documented in Szilagyi’s (2015) work, *Reprising the Trail Smoke Eaters: Men’s Hockey in a Mid-Twentieth Century Canadian Resource Community* and Decosse’s (2015) work, *New Geographies of Elite Hockey Production in the Neoliberal Age*. Below, I provide a brief overview to contextualize the current relationship between local businesses (and employment opportunities) and organized youth sport.

#### **4.2.2. Cominco/Teck and the Trail Smoke Eaters: “The Thing on the Hill Makes the Place Spin”**

The Kootenays’ hockey success in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a product of corporate support by the Consolidated Mining Company (Cominco)—now known as Teck. “There is a reason that the Kootenays at one time generated a disproportionate amount of elite hockey players: Cominco,” says Theo. “The guys all worked at Cominco, but they were there to play hockey. Each team, Rossland, Trail, Nelson Leafs, Spokane, Cranbrook, Kimberley: Cominco was in each town.” Participants from Decosse’s (2015) research also outline these links:

This is about these small-town athletes and why our [programs] were so good. It goes back at the turn of the century. . . . I am talking way back in the early 1900s; small towns that had industry would bring athletes to glorify their companies. . . . Here in Trail, the Smokies were in existence back in the 30s for sure...every time there was a good hockey player in the prairies, they would bring these guys here. . . . These guys would come in, get a job at Cominco and they would make more money than if they played in the NHL in those days. (Former Nelson Leafs Senior Hockey Player, pp. 58–59)

The major force behind [stars coming out of here] is the thing on the hill there, Teck. That makes the place spin; you look at these players that came in here. They don’t necessarily all come from Trail. They came to Trail because they were offered something to be here and I think . . . a lot of people forget. Ok, he is here now and retired but he also has a \$600,000 Teck pension and he got a trade on the hill and he worked there for 35–40 years on the hill and yet he did play for the Senior Smokies, but that smelter made this place run and it is probably the same for, I would suggest for all of rural BC whether it be logging on the island or the west coast, north coast. (Former Junior A Coach, p. 59)

Teck treated the hockey club like one of their own sons. They protected them, supported them with the jobs. . . . They were all treated like gods. (President of local junior team, p. 59)

What these interviewees express should not be entirely surprising given that from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, the BC government mandated that large corporate entities directly participate in community building (Young, 2008).

[Because] natural resource production involves intensive investment in grounded capital (built environment) [companies like Cominco] sought long-term labour stability to ensure continuing return upon their investment. Companies invested significant resources into social programs to avoid high turnover rates and to

ensure labour productivity. Residents often materially benefited from such investments in the form of modern leisure and sporting facilities, schools, electricity, indoor plumbing and various other amenities and infrastructure (Decosse, 2015, pp. 81–82).

Much like in other towns across Canada (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), Cominco paid players' salaries and actively recruited talented players from across Canada and the US to Trail to ensure competitive teams. It also donated the land and contributed \$500,000 to the construction of the Trail Memorial Arena in 1949, and in 1955 provided the town with \$275,000 for the construction of a gymnasium. During this time, notes Szilagyi (2015), "the end goal for the company was a winning hockey team, which in turn, meant a winning company and winning community" (p. 55).

Eventually this support waned. As Szilagyi (2015) notes, changes in the organization of senior amateur men's hockey in Canada and the United States in the 1960s, as well as union involvement and influence, caused difficulties for Cominco's recruiting efforts. By the 1970s, the company was largely uninvolved with the team. "Since there was no [longer an] opportunity for Trail to represent Canada on the international stage," notes Szilagyi (2015), "the company began withdrawing its paternalistic hand. . . . The team disbanded after the 1986–1987 season and the [League they played in] folded at the conclusion of the 1987–1988 season" (p. 90). While the team was resurrected in the 1990s, it did so without any explicit connection to Teck.

"Now," explains a local and retired Cominco employee I sat next to at a Smoke Eaters' game in February 2015, "it's hard to attract players because we don't really have jobs to offer them." He explains that "it's not like in the old days when they would have 2500 people working at Teck and so the guys would come and play for the Smokies and work at the smelter. Now the guys are too young to work there." He also mentions that Trail cannot offer these players many places to hang out when they are not playing hockey and that the schedule for hockey is now too demanding for them to be able to balance working and hockey. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, without the support of Teck, and with the inability of local ticket sales to cover expenses, the Smoke Eaters have continuously been faced with the prospect of shutting down operations.

Organized sport in the West Kootenays has always been intimately tied to local economic opportunities. Next, I demonstrate how these conditions currently impact the capacity of smaller, grassroots youth sport organizations like Minor Soccer and Minor Hockey.

#### **4.2.3. Precarious Employment: “How Do You Register a Kid for Hockey if You Don’t Know the Parents’ Schedules in Four Months?”**

*Most of the small towns were based around corporations so they supported it. Now it’s different. That’s the way it is in all the towns. In Quesnel, the sawmill supported, Williams Lake, Prince George the same thing. It’s like that all over BC. That’s the origin of most of the towns. Whether a mine, the railroad, or that sort of thing. Sawmills etc. Based on industry. They did support. But they don’t anymore (James, Retired Teacher)*

One way in which youth sport organizations rely on major employers is through jersey sponsorship. Recently, this support has been harder and harder to come by. For Kaslo Minor Hockey, notes Sabrina, “it used to be logging companies like Renco, Meadow Creek Cedars, but with them gone, we are actually at a point where our jerseys are garbage.” Others rely on local employers for general funding, and this has also been dying up. Regionally, Teck has always been a source of grants, scholarships, and general funds towards organized youth sport. Recently, even it has clawed back its local contributions in favour of Olympic and Paralympic sponsorship (see, for example, Teck’s official supporter status at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games). As Nelson parent Steven explains, “When Trail Baseball goes to Teck, it’s not automatic anymore. You know, and if I want to get a \$50 prize for this hockey tournament, it’s not automatic, whereas it used to be.”

The unpredictably of mills or mines can also have more immediate and serious consequences. In a conversation I had with sport administrator Daniel, he spoke of just that: “Teck laid people off in the mid-1990s and it was a change to [minor] soccer overnight—[the employees] all went to the bank, dropped off their house keys and left. Those were the rough times here.” What these participants highlight is how the financial burden of operating local sports has shifted from businesses to families and local sports organizations.

Families themselves are stretched, both financially and geographically due to the changing local labour market. On the side of a soccer field in 2012, Greg and I spoke about (young) adults all over British Columbia and across Canada flocking to Alberta's oil patch. At one point, he turned to me and said:

It's all kind of related and linked, right? So, then you go back to that one—the original conversation about the number of young people involved in sport and how that—or why that's affected. Well, this is a perfect example. If our area can't support the number of people we want to have in it, and we don't have jobs for them and we don't have housing for them and all that kind of stuff, they're not going to stay here. So, for the longest time, the financial picture in the area wasn't good. And there's lots of younger people going up to Alberta, to work up in the tar sands or, you know, up in the rigs, oil rigs and that, because that's where the money is.

Ronald and Trudy have felt the consequences of this movement firsthand. "Once the mill closed, there were families that packed up and left the Valley within a week. They had to work, so they had to go somewhere else. Some commute to the oil sands, some work in the coal mines in Elkford," Trudy explained. "And while some keep their house here, their children don't necessarily go to school here, so it kills the community."

In 2015, almost three years later, Greg expressed how he was still concerned about the impact of the local economy on organized sport participation—both in terms of players and volunteers. While the exodus of workers to Alberta had slowed a bit and more people were sticking around, local jobs were still hard to find, precarious, or had unconventional hours. As he observed,

You know, the jobs around here aren't what they used to be. I think people used to be able to work regular hours and have a steady job with steady hours. That makes sport participation much easier. The shifts are more structured and everybody is going to and from the same work place. Now, you have people doing the Kootenay Shuffle more and more—people taking on three to four jobs that each have random hours and locations. They are seasonal. That makes it very hard to coordinate, to think forward, into the next three months. How do you register a kid for hockey if you don't know the parents' schedules in four months? How do you commit to coaching if you don't know what your schedule is going to be?

Sabrina echoes Greg's analysis: "The majority of the parents here whose kids play hockey are either single income or a lot of them work in the Alberta oil patch. So, there isn't really that support network of 'let's get our kids to the rink.'"

Greg and Sabrina touch on one of the points made by many researchers interested in how parents balance their work and child-rearing responsibilities (Dyck, 2003, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Levey Friedman, 2013), namely, that the predictability of scheduling by sport organizations enables parents to organize and mesh their domestic and work responsibilities. Unfortunately, when the scheduling of work becomes precarious or the worksite becomes Alberta, this link breaks down. Together, the flow of residents out of town, the precarious labour market, and the Kootenay Shuffle impact organized youth sport: when economic opportunities are not good, the number of players and adults ready to coach, manage, and administer decreases. The disposable income that adults can spend on organized sport also changes and this is particularly significant given the amount of travel—and the costs associated with this travel—necessitated by participating in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays (a theme I turn to at the end of this chapter). Under such conditions, the sustainability of sports programming becomes at best more complicated, and at worst, impossible and this has very real consequences on the experiences of young people, parents, and sport administrators. It is this that I turn to next.

### **4.3. Small Populations: “It’s Just Straight Numbers”**

*To do organized sports in the interior, small towns, is so fucking hard. . . .  
Once someone moves, gets injured, or stops coaching, that’s pretty much  
it for the program. (James, Retired Teacher)*

The small population makes it very difficult to run consistent, sustainable programs. As a result, many participants described uncertainty as the most distinctive feature of organized youth sport in their towns. Uncertainty was loosely defined as the inability to predict whether a program or team would survive from one season to the next (or, for the season itself). It was tied primarily to the difficulty most teams and programs have in finding players, coaches, and volunteers.

#### 4.3.1. Finding Players: “We Need Every Warm Body”

*It is just straight numbers. [No matter the sport] you just look at the numbers. Even if you're kind of lumping in the entire region together, how many people do you need? (Ted, Parent)*

Finding players is not unique to sport programs in rural and small towns: it is a fundamental part of sport programming generally. Participants in this research, however, are adamant about one thing: finding players is a matter of survival in rural and small towns. One story I heard over and over was about the local baseball legend Andy Bilesky whose recruiting strategies became as legendary as his coaching career and winning record. Coaching between 1953 and the mid-1990s, Andy would get the birth data from the local hospitals so he could project how many boys would be available for his baseball program (Participants were sure no girls played on Andy's teams. At the time, it was uncommon for girls to play minor baseball). He would then wake up early in the morning and drive to every house to pick up the boys and take them to practice. Baseball-lover Randall spoke about how this unconventional strategy turned an otherwise “tiny program from a tiny town” into twelve-time provincial champions, five-time national champions (1967, 1980, 1981, and 1990) and Little League World Series representatives (Trail Historical Society, n.d.). This story serves to illustrate the extreme measures locals have taken to ensure that their programs thrive—and in some cases, simply survive.

While participants are certain nobody accesses birth records anymore, they nonetheless understand how vital finding players remains to the existence of their programs. Even those teams that manage to put together a full roster struggle with the uncertainty of not knowing if their team is going to make it through the entire season. “We had this girl who was very tall, but then they had a tragedy in their family and she went back East to be with other family, and then another girl broke her ankle,” says coach Karen. “When those things happen, they hit hard in a small community because you're losing those players that are key, and they're hard, if not impossible, to replace.” What Karen reinforces is that finding players is something that never stops and I witnessed firsthand the length to which some community members will go to find players.

Within a year of being in the field, a boys' soccer team I had been researching folded. Their team had been initially "scraped together with every warm body" said a mother on the sideline one day. When it folded, there was little hope in finding anybody new to join. For three subsequent years, the boys who wanted to play were left with a faint, but diminishing, hope that the team would be resurrected. It never was, and these boys never played competitive soccer again (It is not like in the city where the remaining members can be dispatched to other teams: there are *no* other teams).<sup>15</sup> The girls' team I met on the first day in the field almost suffered the same fate after a handful of players did not come back the following season: some due to injuries, some due to work commitments, and some due to other activities. It took significant effort on the part of the coaches and remaining players to fill those gaps and keep the team alive. Speaking about her own experience of what seems like a never-ending cycle of nagging her peers, 16-year-old Mariah tells me "it's weird or different [from what city kids have to do] because if we keep nagging at them, 'we really need you to play' then they're like, 'I don't want to.' They shouldn't have to. But we need them."

I also learned that some residents in the small town of Nakusp had been "eyeing me as someone who looked to be of child-bearing years" (Fieldnotes, June 8, 2012). While I laughed it off at the time, I came to understand how illustrative this moment was of the constant uncertainty that plagues these organized youth sport teams. In many towns across the region, one family moving in or out can mean the difference between running the hockey program or not. As Carry explains to me, "you feel it very acutely in a small town, because even if seven families move away and only five move in, you feel that dynamic shift, and it is really, really acute." Kimberley speaks of the same issues: "The loss of two to three young people in our area can close an entire school. So, when [a] family with four kids move[s] into the community that [is] huge." The point is that people involved in organized youth sport must rely on their knowledge of who is moving in and out and with how many children to ensure their teams and programs stay alive. When a researcher in her late twenties comes to town, especially one who is interested in sport,

<sup>15</sup> Due to this uncertainty, I made it a habit to check in with one of the parents every spring before I headed back into the field, just to make sure there was still a team to research!

she gets a lot of attention. In addition to finding players, organized youth sport programs must find coaches or volunteers if they are to survive. I turn to this next.

#### **4.3.2. Finding Coaches and Volunteers: “As Soon as They Died, It’s Over”**

*I came up here in ‘69. Trail and was a big sport town. Willi Krause<sup>16</sup>—these guys were still alive. As soon as they died, it’s over. Done. Nada, over. Complete. It’s amazing. The programs are over. We might have a track club with seven young people now and they’re not athletes, they’re just young people. It’s over. When I came up here, that was still alive. It was seriously alive. (James, Retired Teacher)*

Just as finding players is not unique to the West Kootenays, neither is finding coaches or volunteers. What the participants in this research insist, however, is that low populations in the rural and small towns of the West Kootenays impact the number of volunteers. The trickle, not flow, of coaches and volunteers causes great uncertainty from year to year, and this makes it equally challenging to run sport programs for the young people.

Lisa explains that “being in a rural setting, our coaches are only [coaching] because they were ex-players. But it doesn’t mean they know how to coach. And when they don’t want to coach anymore, for whatever reason, then our program is done.” This happened with the mini-soccer program in her community. It started with 75 young people and two years later was down to 20. Why? Lauren believes it was because “the adults who were spearheading it moved on with their children and some moved away. So, nobody was there to keep it going.” I heard of similar events in other towns. A year or two before the research commenced, one of the largest local minor soccer associations almost shut down due to a lack of volunteers. It had to publish radio and newspaper ads to attract volunteers, and it was not until the eleventh hour that enough people came forward, many of whom had no background in soccer.

<sup>16</sup> Willi Krause (1909–2008) was a long-time and prominent resident of Trail, BC. He was also a renowned track and field coach. He immigrated to Trail from Germany in 1958. Under his coaching, his athletes became well known at provincial, national, and Olympic levels. He was inducted into the BC Sports Hall of Fame in June 1982 (“Willi Krause,” 2008).

With such a small pool of adults to choose from, says Lauren, there are bound to be activities which simply do not have anybody around anymore to coach them. Thus, they close shop or at best lay dormant until somebody else picks up the pieces. This is particularly the case for young people who take part in “peripheral” sports which may not have an established presence in the region. For example, one of the young people in this project participated in judo for a few years. She was only presented with this opportunity because a member of the national judo team had decided to settle nearby. She had no family in the area but wanted a change of pace. But she moved after a few years, and the program died with nobody else to lead it.

Finding someone to pick up the pieces can be challenging. As parent and sport administrator Teagan says, “[In a rural area], we’re not exactly going to attract anybody with high levels of skill, right?” (Given these conditions, it should not be surprising that when word got out across the region that I was an “elite” soccer player, I was approached by some parents to help coach their local soccer teams, at the very least a summer camp). If teams or programs are fortunate enough to find skilled coaches, they must also be able to keep them. Given that very few people can make a living solely coaching in organized youth sport—even in cities and suburbs—keeping coaches may mean helping them find employment outside of coaching.

Parent, multi-sport administrator, and coach Dylan explains that the main employers in the area are the pulp mill, Teck, and the trades. “I mean there’s coaches that are also working at banks and different other places. But most of them are involved in the pulp mill.” In rural and small towns, the opportunities for employment are limited and sport organizations may find themselves facing a revolving door of coaches—or worse, no coaches at all when their shift changes, the mill shuts down, or ore prices plummet. Eighteen-year-old Raven’s experience finding a figure skating coach leads her to believe that “coaching is the major difference” between organized youth sport in the West Kootenays and elsewhere (presumably somewhere urban or suburban):

One year we didn’t have a coach—we had one in [town] then she stopped coaching because she had to work, and then we had one travelling in from [a community in another regional district], and then she stopped coaching, and then we couldn’t

find one, because no one wants to come [here] when there's not enough hours for them to have a full-time job, so they have to find another job on the side, and if it's just a small town where they wouldn't meet any people if they were single. So, it was hard to find one.

Because of the difficulty keeping a coach, she went a year without one, which was particularly troublesome as she was “at [her] peak and really getting into it.” To mitigate the impact of this loss, her “mom drove [her] twice a week to [a bigger town], which was two hours away.” She would “miss a couple of hours of school some days because [they] would leave before school ended.” As Raven experienced, even if some coaches may be very dedicated, it is sustainable work that keeps them in town. When it comes down to it, towns must be economically and socially attractive for coaches if they are to put down roots. If they are unable to live in the community, it is up to the families to travel for coaching, and this requires significant resources that many families do not have (a theme I explore later in this chapter). Raven's family owns a local company which has consistently been voted as one of the best employers in the region. Her mother does not work so can go on the road with her daughter. While Raven and her parents were able to mitigate some of the complicating material conditions, not all parents or children can say the same.

#### **4.3.3. Sustainability: “You Don't Have Good Programs, but Rather Good ‘Years’”**

*In regions like this you don't have good programs but rather good “years” or “age groups.” It's only when you get that group of young people mixed with a dedicated group of volunteers [that] you have this really successful team for a few years. (James, Retired Teacher)*

*Some sports fall off the map and you just don't even notice. (Fieldnotes, July 21, 2012)*

The difficulty cementing rosters and retaining coaches due to low numbers also makes it hard to build consistently good programs. “When we win,” says teacher and hockey coach Philip, “it's because there is a group of young people that comes through, or a group of parents or someone who is a volunteer coach who sticks with it for four or five years.” Ronald and his wife Trudy also agree that it is “very rare in rural sports that

you'll get a dream team without a dream coach and dream parents making it happen." In their 30 years of involvement in organized youth sport in their town—somewhat of a rarity these days—they have observed that “you get a sprinkling of good years, but it just happens. It's very organic. It's not a given.”

It's not a given, says septuagenarian James, because “sport in rural communities is driven by individuals, not [provincial sport organizations (PSOs)].” In his almost half a century of involvement in organized sport in rural towns, James has come to realize that PSOs “barely know [rural programs] exist. They barely recognize that [they're] here.” He explains that when he started coaching, he had little support or guidance from Basketball BC. He just “learned to do it” and his individual efforts resulted in a provincially ranked team for 20 years. Since then, nobody has been able to replicate his success. “Don't expect people will help you. You have to do it yourself. Nobody will help you,” he argues. For Rossland parent Kaitlin, this reliance on individuals is the big difference between sport in the Lower Mainland and sport in her rural town. If you are relying on individuals and have little support from provincial sport organizations, stuff “constantly pops up, stays or dies down,” she laments. “It ebbs and flows. This year might be a great year for this, and it was a great year for that.” But in the Lower Mainland “you could say, ‘Oh, Delta's had a championship team every year for the past 60 years in this sport.’”

What my participants explain is that while movies like *Friday Night Lights* and *Hoosiers* make it appear as though rural and small towns “breed” sporting success, or at the very least inherently nurture it, it is very rare because of the conditions in which these programs must exist. “You would need every kid in Iowa to register for baseball,” jokes Randall, “and every parent to coach. If they think that all the young people in rural Iowa are sitting there playing baseball or out on the field, they are living on a different planet.” Now, it goes without saying that many rural and small towns—including some in the West Kootenays like Trail and Nelson—*do* have rich traditions of sporting success. Nonetheless, what has to be kept in mind is that sporting success is not necessarily distinctive of rural and small towns. Rather, it is born out of circumstance: being in the right place at the right time with a sprinkling of what Ronald calls “dream coaches,” “dream parents.” It is also a matter of playing the right sport—one with a pool of local coaches or

a rich history in the region or that draws community support. For many rural and small towns across the West Kootenays, as with elsewhere in Canada, this sport has been, and remains, hockey. I attend to this in Chapter 5. But first, I turn to the consequences that uncertainty and lack of sustainability have on young people, parents, and sport administrators' experiences of organized sport in their rural and small towns. This serves to demonstrate the relationship between the structural and individual dimensions of experience.

#### **4.3.4. Lack of Options: “You Get Tired Playing the Same Teams All the Time”**

A low population means that many local sports only field a handful of teams, if that, in league play. Ali, a 14-year-old all-around athlete, expresses her frustration with this situation: “You get tired of playing the same teams all the time. It’s what I don’t like about living in such a small area because it’s not very many teams, and you kind of get bored playing the same teams a million times.” Even as a spectator, I admit to being bored watching the same teams play week after week. In soccer, some age groups only have three teams in the region, which means they play against each other every two weeks—not exactly a recipe for exciting soccer. I heard a lot of sideline chatter from young people and parents who suspected this was the reason for low attendance at practice, and sometimes games. After years of playing against the same people, there was not much left to practise or compete for.

I also want to note that some individual athletes talked to me about the challenge of being the only athlete in town participating in a specific sport. Under these circumstances, it can be challenging to stay sharp. “Because we’re such a small town, . . . I was one of the only senior skaters for the majority of the time,” says Raven. “I did everything on my own. . . . I kind of wish there was somebody there to work with me, push me in ways that would have made me better.” Eventually, Raven quit the competitive stream because she just could not find the support—both coaches and opponents.

#### 4.3.5. Quality: “The Players’ Skill Sets Are Vastly Different”

*I know one of the frustrations of the coach is, in his opinion, they had, like, an A team, when in reality it was like a D team, you know, and so there was three or four players that were awesome, but the rest were small-town kids, right? So, they weren’t a balanced team at all, and it was frustrating for the coach, but instead of, you know, realizing what he had and working with that, he got frustrated a lot, I think. But I think he just had other interests. (Patrick, Parent, Teacher, and Multi-Sport Administrator)*

When teams are scraped together with every warm body, players of all ages and skill ranges are often forced to play alongside each other. And this can cause frustration for both administrators and young people. Sabrina notes that “we have to embrace every kid that signs up. . . . All the small towns, we are begging them to register. No matter when! We have to take whoever we can whenever they sign up. We don’t have the luxury of turning people away.” In communities like Edgewood (population under 200), “there’s not enough kids [my son’s] size and age to have a proper team sport,” says Jeff. “So, students in grade 3 are playing sports with students in grade 7.” Across the region—in towns both big and small—it is standard practice to group two or three age groups together to form a team. When you have such a spread in age and skill, the result is not always a quality product, explains Jeff: “They’re trying to learn this stuff, and the skill sets that you’re learning in grade three compared to what you’re learning in grade seven is pretty vastly different, right?” For players, explains 13-year-old Ali, this can be tough:

I wish there was more girls my age that wanted to play soccer because my Rep<sup>17</sup> team, there’s only four people in all of the [area]. We always have to play up with the older girls. So, we’re playing teams that are two years old. It’s hard. But I wish there were more girls because then we could have our own team. I wish there were more people who were interested in playing more sports and stuff.

And for 15-year-old Julian, this often ends in frustration: “One kid might be great but the rest of them are in it for fun so the team suffers for that.” Speaking about his own community, 16-year-old Aaron finds it hard to deal with this same reality:

<sup>17</sup> This stands for the “Representative” program. It is comprised of the best representatives of the town or in most cases, region. These players represent their town or region on the road. It is used in opposition to “House” which signifies local, recreational sport or athletes who only “play at home”/“in town.”

It's just hard to get a team for any of the sports I'm into. Soccer, we don't even have enough for Rep teams. When we do, our teams always lose. No one's really interested in trying. All of the teams are kind of a joke to most people. So, it's not the most fun when you're trying to go and actually go and try. You lose every game.

Unfortunately for these young people, what stands out about playing organized sport in their towns is the lack of players and the lack of competitive opportunities.

#### **4.3.6. Inconsistency: “It Would Be Nice to Live Somewhere Where You Know You’re Going to Have a Sports Team Every Year”**

Some young people I spoke with use this lack of organized sport opportunities as a key reason for which they feel disadvantaged having grown up in the rural and small towns of the West Kootenays. Catherine, who is 14 years old, says in a sort of defeated manner, “I would like to go far with soccer, but it's pretty hard to, especially being from a small town. That is one thing about small towns—you don't get the same opportunities as people in Vancouver, and that sucks sometimes.” Shelby who is 16 years old and lives in the biggest city in the region, shares her thoughts on the matter: “That's what I don't like about small towns: there aren't any opportunities for sports. I want to do something with my soccer, but I feel like everybody's already so far ahead just because they have those opportunities to do things, at different levels.” What I find particularly interesting about Shelby's comment is that she lives in Nelson—the regional hub for soccer. It has a Whitecaps FC program, a soccer Academy at the local high school, and by far the most successful minor soccer teams in the region. Its team almost always goes to Provincials—something Shelby experienced firsthand when she moved to Nelson. As is revealed in our conversation below, there is always a lingering feeling for rural and small-town athletes that they, and their teams, are disadvantaged.

Me: How did you like going to Provincials, because you hadn't done that before, right?

Shelby: Yeah, it was pretty cool. It was kind of exciting to be in a higher—you feel like you're playing, like, something that means something. But, um, we were not really expecting to win when we got there. We were going to try our best, but it's nice that we just got there.

Some young people in this project were so frustrated that they wished they had grown up elsewhere—specifically, somewhere that would have provided stability and opportunity in sport. My conversation with Amy, a 16-year-old all-around athlete, hit on this particular point:

Me: Have you ever thought about moving to another community? Or what it would be like if you grew up in a different place?

Amy: In the States, they have volleyball clubs. I think it would be really cool to be in one of those. Just like being in any town that's like, where there are actual people who are on the team. Instead of trying to find players, and scrambling for them. You actually have a team already and a coach and stuff. It would be nice to live in a town like that.

Similarly, when I asked recently graduated Raven if she ever saw herself moving back to her small town, she emphatically said “no” and it was apparent that her answer had to do with her experiences in organized youth sport:

Me: Do you ever see yourself moving back?

Raven: No! It was great in some ways. There's obviously lots of pros to it. But just, the cons of just—I want to live in a small town but just not quite so small. Maybe like Nelson small, or where there are still more opportunities where you know you're going to have a sports team every year, you're not going to wonder whether, maybe we won't have sports for this year or won't be able to have a hockey team, like not be able to have the best coach for figure skating. We kind of felt trapped because we're like, okay, we want a different coach. If we fired this coach, then we may never ever get another coach again! You can't really start looking for another coach because they're on the same coaching websites. So, it's like you're trapped and they can run the show, they can do whatever. So, I want to be in a town where it's so small you can be involved in lots, and still got that community feel. But I still want to have more opportunity as far as sports. Most important is that you know you're going to have a team and a coach. And that you have more choices, like you can be part of a dance program, or gymnastics or volleyball when you're young, not wait until you're in high school to play volleyball, maybe something that will also happen during the summertime. That's what I wish my town was more like. That's why I wouldn't go back. But it's so beautiful, and I love so much of my childhood, that I grew up there. I love so much about it. But yeah, it was a little too small.

It would be unfair of me to suggest that every kid involved in organized sport in the West Kootenays is dissatisfied with the level of competition or opportunities afforded to

them. After all, for the size of population, Nelson has a robust sport system with a regional sport council, a Junior B hockey franchise, a soccer Club with over 900 young people registered, and an indoor soccer facility. Likewise, Trail invests an incredible amount of time and money into their hockey program. At least for these young people, the opportunities are a bit more abundant. But what happens if you do not live in Nelson or Trail? What happens if you do not play soccer in Nelson or hockey in Trail? In addition, what happens when, as a result of their increased population and resources, Nelson or Trail are the teams that *a/ways* win? The fact that one or two towns in the region have a bit more to offer can be defeating for some of the young people who live in smaller places. I heard over and over from girls on the Kootenay South Selects teams about how “annoying,” “defeating,” or “demoralizing” it was that Nelson *a/ways* goes to Provincials for soccer. The girls would talk about how they had “no chance” and that “it wasn’t even worth it” to play. In some circumstances, coaches opted out of playing in provincial play-downs entirely knowing they had no chance.

#### **4.3.7. Opportunity: “In a Big City, I Would Never Get the Chance to Play”**

I would be remiss, however, if I did not mention a positive consequence of having to ask everyone to play: that is, everyone gets to play! For those young people who consider themselves marginal athletes, this can be an opportunity otherwise not afforded to them in a bigger city. As Raven explains,

Sure, basketball was my worst sport. I wasn’t good at it. But being in my hometown—I was able to still play on the team and get involved and go to tournaments and have fun with my friends. So, I had time to improve. If I was in a big centre, I would have never played basketball, because I’m short, and I never played growing up, and so I wasn’t very good but at least I had a chance to do that here. It kept me in shape. Being involved in so many sports, it’s spread me thin. If I was in a big centre, I would have had to choose, and then I wouldn’t have played basketball. But it was fun.

For Raven, being needed for the basketball team was an enriching experience even if she was not good at the sport. Another positive consequence of having to pull teams together from across age groups is getting the opportunity to play with older players. “That was

definitely one really good thing about living in a small town,” says Raven, “I found it really good because you got to experience playing with better players, they made you better because they were better, and so just like keeping up to their level.” As a self-described shy girl, playing with older girls helped her “not be intimidated by other people,” something that she says helped her when she moved to a suburb of the Lower Mainland for university.

Shelly, who had recently graduated high school when we met, also speaks positively about playing with older players. “It’s nice because I’ve been playing on the senior team since grade 8. And I just, if we were in a big city, we would never get the chance to learn from them.” For the older players, it is an opportunity for mentorship: “When I was in grade 12, the grade 8s coming up, helping them with the little details, you know?” And of course, it is also an opportunity to make more friends: “You kind of get friends from all grades and you see them in the hallways and you’re like, ‘Hey!’ It’s not really cliques, it’s nice.” In other words, putting all ages together on one team can help break down barriers that are sometimes created by sport participation.

What I have outlined in this section is that scale matters. In the words of Wuthnow (2013), smallness shapes people’s lives. It shapes the economic opportunities in towns and regions which in turn shape the possibilities in organized youth sport programs. This smallness has very real consequences on the experiences that young people, parents, and sport administrators construct as participants in their respective programs and towns. I close this chapter by highlighting how distance to density (Lauzon et al., 2015) is equally imprinted upon the shape and experiences of organized youth sport programs.

#### **4.4. Distance to Population: “Every Time We Want to Play Someone, We Have to Travel and It’s Pretty Isolated”**

Just as rural and small towns are characterized by their limited economic opportunities and their small populations, so too are they characterized by distance to density. Their residents must travel significant distances to access larger populations, and as a result, more services. In the context of organized youth sport, young people, parents, and sport administrators must travel to find teams to play on, to find higher level teams,

and to find teams to play against. Without such travel, making organized youth sport work is challenging, if not impossible.

#### **4.4.1. Finding Teams, Programs, Facilities: “It’s All About Where We Can Find Ice”**

For many organized youth sport participants in the West Kootenays, travel is necessary if there is no sport facility in town. As Sabrina puts it, “it’s all about where we can find ice” even if that means driving 270 kilometres to Sicamous. For others, it is because they do not have enough players at certain levels and age groups to form a team. In this case, “[folks from neighbouring communities will] get together to form teams or [the folks in one town will] play in a different association if they don’t have a team to play on in their own,” explains Jacqueline. In more extreme cases, players across the region, not just in neighbouring towns, must join forces to form a team. Amy, who is in grade 11, provides an example of this situation: “So, [my guy friends play hockey and their] team is based out of Nelson this year. All my friends from Trail have to drive to Nelson five days a week. And then, the year before it was based out of Castlegar. But Nelson is pretty far away.” Even if the team’s home base rotates, someone must travel. This bottom line is this: “We don’t have that many young people in this community, so they have to travel to get on competitive teams, otherwise it’s just nothing,” says Castlegar resident Krista.

The requirement to travel to access facilities or opportunities is more immediate for those living in more rural, remote or isolated places in the region; these towns seldom have enough young people to form teams or resources to build infrastructure. For example, Salmo has very few organized sport programs outside of school sports, so young people who want to play hockey or baseball must travel at least 40 kilometres to Trail or Nelson. Kaslo and Nakusp have no soccer or volleyball programs outside of school so local young people must hit the road if they wish to suit up. Similarly, young people who want to participate in gymnastics in the Slocan Valley may be able to learn the basics in their local community hall (if there is a coach), but they must drive to Castlegar or Nelson to access proper gymnastics facilities. In extreme cases, notes lacrosse parent Dylan, “we

have some players who billet out for weekend games and come home to go to school during the week.”

#### **4.4.2. Finding Higher Level Programming Within the Region: “If They *Really* Want to Play Soccer, They Go to Nelson”**

Others travel because the level of local programming available in the community is not high enough. While the community may have drop-in soccer or hockey, it may not have a league. Fruitvale has “House” soccer but it does not have “Rep” soccer. Its players must play on a team 45 kilometres away in Castlegar. Hockey players from Nakusp and Kaslo must travel 120 kilometres to access Rep hockey. Amy explains that even though there is a Rep program close to home, many of her friends from Trail play out of Nelson—a 70-kilometre drive—because the level is “much better.” As she explains, “if they *really* want to play soccer, they go to Nelson.” Others go as far as to move high schools to access the Soccer Academy run by the Whitecaps, a program that only exists in Nelson. Moreover, some families move out of their villages and into one of the three larger cities of Castlegar, Nelson, and Trail to access opportunities.

Steven recounts the story of one family that moved from Grand Forks to Trail to accommodate their son’s hockey pursuits. Grand Forks plays in a lower tier than Trail and Beaver Valley (Fruitvale), so for their child to pursue hockey, they left town. Eventually, the dad filed a leave of absence from his job at the lumber mill for a year and took a job at Teck in Trail. “I mean he moved so his son could play on that bantam Rep team this season!” says Steven. “The year before that, the same dad and three other parents took their kids and put them in the Beaver Valley team. So, those kids drove from Grand Forks to Beaver Valley twice a week, and for games. That’s insane.” Of course, there are several barriers such as finding a new job, leaving friends and family, and transferring schools which prevent many families from making this type of move. But the key point remains: with low populations and few players around, many towns do not provide appropriate opportunities for those seeking higher levels of competition. Families find themselves on the road. “So, you know, again going back to the whole hockey thing,” says Tamara, “you just can’t compete unless you drive for a minimum of 100 kilometres every weekend.” She

recalls, “one parent on James’ team was even bragging that they spent 20 weekends of the year out of town!”

#### **4.4.3. Finding Higher Level of Programming Outside of the Region: “If You Don’t Move Away to a Different Town, for a Different Team, You’re Pretty Much Done”**

Sometimes, entire teams or programs seek more competitive opportunities outside of the West Kootenay region. As James recalls, this has always been the case: “If you want to be a provincial level team, it’s all about travel. [When I was still coaching] I would travel 10 weekends in the winter. With the weather, and the passes. You learn to deal with it. The kids sleep! [Laugh].” Patrick’s son played spring hockey on a team 230 kilometres away in a different country. In Trail and Castlegar, entire Midget and Bantam (Tier 2 and 3) hockey programs play out of the Okanagan Mainline Amateur Hockey Association (OMAHA)—their closest opponent in Kelowna, 500 kilometres away. Patrick joked, “my son’s [actually] happy now when we play in Spokane, it’s only a three-hour drive as opposed to, you know, Kelowna is four, and Kamloops is six.”

For players and parents who seek these opportunities, it might mean a permanent move out of the region. As sixteen-year-old Amy explains, “if you don’t move away to a different town, for a different team, you’re pretty much done.” This is especially the case for sports that are not as well established in the area. For example, Minor Lacrosse only goes to the age of 16, and there is no junior team in the region. If you want to continue playing, you must move. As Dylan recognizes, “we just don’t have anything for [my son] here so if he wants to keep playing, he’ll have to move to the Okanagan.” Even in sports that are more widespread and established such as soccer, there are simply not enough competitive opportunities within reasonable travelling distance. The only two Rep programs in the region are with Nelson Youth Soccer and Kootenay South Youth Soccer (an amalgamation of several communities in the Central Kootenay and Kootenay Boundary regions), and there is no guarantee there will be a team in each age grouping, never mind each year. This makes it hard for those seeking scholarships or professional careers through soccer or lacrosse to access consistent and appropriate competition.

What is considered reasonable travel can vary from family to family and from sport to sport. What remains is a recognition either on the part of the parents or the child that they can no longer pursue their sport at the level they want and be based out of their hometown or the West Kootenays. As a result, some young people and parents think seriously about moving out of the area. At the age of 15 one participant considered moving to the Lower Mainland to stay with family friends and pursue soccer through a local school academy. In October 2016, I received an email from a parent saying: “[Our daughter] is in grade 11 now and we need to make some decisions. . . . I think she needs to break out of the Kootenays” (October 2, 2016). She followed up with me in November 2016, saying “here in the Koots, we feel quite cut off, so it’s time for [my daughter] to head to the Coast if she wants to take it to the next level.” She continued:

Everyone says that’s what needs to happen—the Whitecaps Academy coaches, her [local club] coaches and my BC Soccer contacts. [She] has definitely outgrown her teams here and really thinks if she doesn’t go to the Coast now, she will lose her chance to improve her game and find out if she is any good or not. (November 24, 2016)

In more extreme circumstances, entire families move from the region to accommodate their children’s sport pursuits. One family in my project moved to North Vancouver to help their son pursue his swimming.

Even those young people who play hockey and baseball—sports with an established history in the region—face a similar fate. In an interview, Daniel clarifies the idea that a child can go straight from Trail Minor Hockey to the NHL. He scoffs at the myth that the West Kootenays have *ever* bred stars. Sure, the stars of bygone eras may have been *born* in the area. But was their hockey talent forged here? Daniel says “No!”:

Daniel: We have a lot of really good hockey players in this area. They easily could have gone pro.

Me: Well, they can do that locally in hockey, can’t they?

Daniel: No, they still have to go away to make it to the next level. You can’t make it here.

Me: But in the old days, were you able to?

- Daniel: No! You look back to Caesar's<sup>18</sup> days, local boys that played in net for the Canucks, he left here. You don't hear about that. Jason Bay,<sup>19</sup> where did he do his ball? Oh, he did it here and then he had to leave the area to get to the next level. I'm sorry but that's the reality you have to deal with. Even if Teck was booming, Jason Bay still would have had to leave this area to get to the next level. You just can't do it from here, we are small towns.
- Me: Those histories seem to leave that part out. They always emphasize which small town the player is from.
- Daniel: Yes, but you need teams to play against, you need competition. And that's why Ferraro,<sup>20</sup> Tambellini<sup>21</sup> had to leave.

Rural and small towns in the West Kootenays cannot provide the opportunities that are required to compete at the highest level—a level defined by urban and suburban access to resources (Decosse, 2015). Even in the case of historically and culturally significant sports such as hockey, travel (and the support of family members) has always been and remains a necessity. While there may be lots of talented young people in these regions who work very hard, they cannot make it without the full support of their parents and sometimes, a move away from home.

#### **4.4.4. Finding Opponents: “There’s Nobody Close By”**

Finally, young people, parents, and sport administrators must travel to find opponents. As hockey administrator Jacqueline points out, “league games can be a day of travelling because there is nobody close by.” Raven understands this very well. Reflecting on her experience with school sports, she says: “Because we’re not a big enough city to have two teams, . . . every time we want to play someone, we have to travel and it’s pretty isolated, so that would be two hours at minimum, and when it’s snowing—

<sup>18</sup> He is referring to Caesar Maniago, a local goalie who had a storied career in the NHL.

<sup>19</sup> Jason Bay is a professional baseball player who was born in Trail. He went to the 1990 Little League World Championships with Trail (“Jason Bay,” 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Ray Ferraro is a former NHL player who was born in Trail but played his junior hockey in Manitoba and Oregon (“Ray Ferraro,” 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Steve Tambellini is a former NHL player and general manager who was born in Trail. He played junior hockey in Alberta. His father, Addie Tambellini was a member of the Trail Smoke Eaters who won the 1961 World Championships. His son, Jeff Tambellini, played in the NHL (although he was born in Calgary) (“Steve Tambellini,” 2017).

it's crazy." With only one high school in town, and the nearest community without a school, students like Raven travel a lot to take part in games or competitions.

The closure of schools means that the distance a school team in this region travels has increased over the years. Not only have some programs lost their closest competitor, they might also have lost the next closest competitor. According to Thomas, the local high school used to play against schools within just over an hour of travel. Unfortunately, none of those villages have high schools now. There are high schools in the Okanagan but Thomas says reluctantly that "they have their own schedule. We're not on the priority list. It's sort of, we'll fit you in when we can." Even though Mt. Sentinel (at the South Slokan junction) is the closest high school, it is still 125 kilometres away meaning that Thomas does not "have a trip that's less than about 3 hours, 3.5 hours round-trip of travel time. Not containing the game time while you're there." As a result, "We need to shop around, try to find actual competition, and competition that's not too far above, too far below us," says teacher and coach, Kyle.

Just as with travel to access teams and programming, participants living in (remote) villages of the region bear more of the burden of finding opponents than do those living in small to medium sized towns. Jeff speaks at length about how frustrating finding opponents can be when living in the unincorporated settlement of Edgewood:

People just wouldn't come down to Edgewood for games, and I just—so we don't even play [games]. It's more practice and scrimmage, we have to go other places and play other teams from other places, because I was thinking about maybe trying to work on that again but I just got put off, like we got the . . . schedule, and all our games are in Nakusp, and I said, "Well"—I told them before they made the schedule, like, we understand that people do not want to come down to Edgewood too much, but we should have a couple of games in Edgewood just, you know, for—to be egalitarian, equalize things a little bit at least, and, but people really—they could have scheduled games in Edgewood, but I doubt if anyone would show up anyway because it's a long drive. You get used to it if you live in Edgewood and you have to go to Nakusp all the time, it's kind of part of the package, but for Nakusp, people didn't want to travel down here so much.

What I have outlined above are the patterns of travel that young people, parents, and sport administrators engage in as result of their participation in organized youth sport the West Kootenays. Whether in search of a team or program, a higher level of

competition, or an opponent, participants in organized youth sport must hit the road. The conditions under which they do so are not necessarily the same as those encountered by metropolitan residents or by rural residents in other Canadian provinces—all of whom also engage in travel as part of their sport participation. In this vein, I now turn to the characteristics of this travel that are distinctive to the West Kootenays as a rural and small-town place: the direction of travel and weather and road conditions. Linking the macro with the micro, I conclude this chapter by highlighting the consequences that this demanding travel schedule has on participants' experiences of organized youth sport. For some, the time, distance, and money required for travel are prohibitive. For others, they are a nuisance that is compensated for by the opportunities that arise because of this travel.

#### **4.4.5. One-Way Travel: “We Always Have to Go Their Way”**

The first characteristic of travel that I want to point out is the direction of travel. Many of my participants find it hard to get opponents—especially those from urban and suburban towns—to travel into the West Kootenays, and as a result, residents feel that they are always the ones travelling out of their region and into another. One of the first conversations I had in the region was with a principal with over three decades of involvement in local organized sport. He mentioned that it was “so hard to get teams to come [this] way. We always have to go their way. [Lower Mainland teams] can't make the drive, we have to. Sometimes they'll go to Kelowna, but that's even a stretch” (Fieldnotes, June 5, 2012). In a separate conversation, a teacher and hockey coach with almost four decades of coaching experience explains what he believes is “reality”: “We have to travel every weekend because no one is going to come here because they've got no one to play.”

#### **4.4.6. Weather and Road Conditions: “We Hit a Deer, Just Splat”**

*Just the geography dictates a lot of stuff, because you do not want to be going over the Monashee in the winter, so it might be close in terms of kilometres, but it's still unattainable. (Jeff, Parent and School Administrator)*

Weather and road conditions also pose unique challenges to travel associated with organized sport participation in the West Kootenays. For those living in more rural and small towns, road conditions are less than ideal because of deterioration caused by heavy equipment and trucks used in the forestry and mining industries (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2005). Travel to and from sports activities can mean using logging roads, going over several dangerous mountain passes, or encountering potential mid-summer snowstorms, road wash-outs or closures. It can also mean travelling over an hour without cell phone reception or gas stations and spending the night at a motel. It can mean travelling on narrow, dark highways where road conditions and weather can change in an instant. “Sometimes,” says Shelly, “if there’s a big snowfall we have to email Cranbrook and Nakusp and Trail telling them they are going to have to drive two hours in the snow to come to practice.” Wildlife is also a concern, jokes 17-year-old Neil: “On the way to Fort St-John for hockey provincials, it was crazy. We hit a deer, all you could see in the windshield, it was like a horror movie, just splat. It was awesome.” Sasha also recounts what she says was a normal day travelling for her sport:

One time we were crossing the ferry [on my way to practice] and the waves were coming over the boat on the car, and the ice froze to the windshield, and we had to chisel it off. That was ridiculous. We never got blocked because the people in the Kootenays through Revelstoke, they plough really well. But when you go on the Monashee [on your way to Vernon], that’s where it gets crazy. One year we were going to soccer practice. We were driving my mom’s car—she didn’t want me driving. I’m so happy I didn’t have to. We were in two feet of snow on the ground, and she was waiting for this truck, we were driving a little car, to plough it with his bomber. I think it took us three hours to get over the Monashee.

While these research participants certainly understand that urban driving presents its own challenges (e.g., traffic), they nonetheless believe that the weather and road conditions under which they travel come from the fact that they live outside of big urban centres—and I can see why. In my 25 years of participation in organized youth sport (and the thousands of hours on the road), I have seldom encountered travel conditions like the ones I experienced during this project. The few times I did, I was travelling into the Interior of the province for games or tournaments. Snowstorms, wild fires, road-washouts, erratic wildlife jumping across the road—when I was a kid those were once in a lifetime stories.

Over the course of this research, they were regular occurrences, conditions I had to think about before setting off for an interview or to watch a swim meet.

Driving to this region at any time of the year can be hazardous. In Spring 2013, I encountered a snowstorm shortly after leaving the Lower Mainland. I had to out-drive a moose that ran next to my car for a few kilometres, swerve to avoid hitting deer and bears on over two dozen occasions and dodge the aggressive pot holes that form as a result of the winter wear-and-tear on the roads. Even flying into the region is problematic. The largest local airport is nicknamed “Cancel-gar” after the constant fog that socks in the region, and there is a full-time staff person at YVR dedicated to dealing with flight cancellations on this specific route. In February 2015, I experienced this firsthand when my flight was cancelled four times, back to back on the same day. What was meant to be a safer and faster way to get me to the field in the winter turned out to be a whirlwind of an adventure. I took a flight to Kelowna (four hours from the field), rented a car, and drove the rest of the way. I can only imagine what people would do when flying is not an option.

#### **4.4.7. Social Exclusion: “The Travel, Time and Money Keep People Away”**

The distance, time, and money required to travel for sport participation impacts participation in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays. Consider the distances that people from Nakusp must travel if they are to take part in organized sport: Each way, it is 150 kilometres to Nelson or Castlegar, 120 kilometres and a half hour ferry to Revelstoke, or 200 kilometres to Vernon. Given that this travel occurs on one-lane highways which negotiate mountain passes and curve around rivers, it can be slow going. This means that somebody who lives in one place but who practises in another may travel 300 kilometres round-trip after school. Others participate in sports that have morning practices due to limited facility availability. In this case, this travel must occur before school. “For my [oldest] daughter,” jokes parent Sylvie, “she opted to have her sleep. And so, that was the end of figure skating.”

Tammy speaks of young people in Salmo. Salmo does not have an ice rink, and therefore any child who wants to play hockey must do so out of Trail. But that can pose problems for these young people. “They just cannot come to a 6:30 a.m. practice in the morning and still make it back to school at 8:00 a.m., right? So, they can’t do the morning practice.” In this case, young people coming from out of town have three options: change schools, drop the sport, or risk continuing but losing play time because they do not attend practice. Changing schools would solve the issue of practice attendance, but it would not solve the issue of travel as parents would still be travelling to and from school as the school bus service would not work for residents outside of the catchment area. What happens then? Young people do not participate.

Take another example of the young people who live in the settlement of Edgewood. “It’s just too bad,” says Jeff. “They come to school in the dark and leave in the dark.” They attend primary school in town but after that, they must go to Nakusp Secondary School. The journey is 80 kilometres each way and also requires a ferry. Patricia had a long conversation about this with me early on in my fieldwork. In our discussion, she recalls that nothing has changed in forty years since she grew up outside of Nakusp:

Those young people from Edgewood that did play any type of school sport or sport in Nakusp had to pile into cars, drive an hour just to get to school and then how are they going to get back? The bus leaves right after school and makes the long journey all the way to Edgewood—that’s across the ferry! If the young people have to do all of this logistical legwork, they just don’t play. They go home and stay at home. Or they would have to stay at someone’s place in town. We would have them sleeping over. Do you want to be at your basketball game until 8:00 p.m., get home at 10:00 p.m. and then have to get up at 5:00 a.m. to take the school bus? (Fieldnotes, July 6, 2012)

When accounting for different sports, different seasons of play, and the need to play opposition out of town, the travel required for organized sport participation presents such a barrier that many young people from Edgewood do not participate. Jeff elaborates:

Students that are excellent athletes that live out of town [in Edgewood] but who go to the high school in town, they can’t participate because their parents can’t drive them around and stuff. . . . There’s one guy in particular, if he lived somewhere else, he would be snapped up by private schools. He’s in grade 8 now, I guess,

and he is just an absolute wizard. The guy is—I've never seen such a great athlete. Somewhere else, he would be getting, you know, looking at scholarships already and stuff. He would be scouted for teams and stuff, I'm sure if he lived in the city. As it is he just has to come home on the school bus, and he can't even participate in sports.

As a result of these conditions, many athletes from towns like Edgewood are underrepresented in sport programs around the region. Dylan sees this firsthand in hockey and lacrosse: "We have the occasional kid from the Slocan Valley but not from Kaslo or Nakusp," he says, "that's too long for practice."

It is not only time that impacts sport participation—it is also money. The type and amount of travel that young people, parents, and sport administrators must take on as part of their involvement in organized youth sport can also pose a significant burden on the financial resources of families and programs. "While travel is expensive anywhere at a higher level," suggests Tamara, "in a small town everyone is impacted, no matter what level." Everyone must buy equipment and pay registration fees, but the travel associated with finding a program to play in or an opponent to play against can be financially prohibitive in rural regions like the West Kootenays. Because there is rarely a team "just around the corner," says Jeff, "every time you go to do something, it's going to be an overnight trip." Of course, that's more expensive: "You're paying for a bus driver, which is really expensive for an overnight trip. And all the associated costs. So, again, the price goes up." "And," says parent Lindsay, "the price of gas and wear and tear on [a] vehicle is just too hard to afford." Below, a few participants discuss just how much they spend travelling for their children's sports:

You can usually get away with a two-night stay, but once you factor in meals, and especially if you're travelling as a family—maybe not quite a thousand per weekend, but it's getting up there. (Greg)

If they're going to eight tournaments a year, you're looking at a good, \$500–600 a weekend to go away between lost wages, hotels, meals, fees to get into tournaments. (Marissa)

It's expensive. It's something you need to bring up. Every tournament costs a family \$1,000, and I have to be honest, it can be more depending on where it is. (Tracey)

It's a fortune—thousands of dollars a year. I have to work just to keep him going. (Tamara)

The financial commitment. It was huge. Hotel rooms, gas, you have to have the proper vehicle to do it in too. Their ice time, gear. And everything. And time. (Rob)

I would say our boys, to play hockey and to play lacrosse, and go to the Provincial Championships and do all the things that they do, we spend between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year. . . . Even if you are just coming [to the Lower Mainland] to come on the Thursday, and you go home on Sunday, so you've got four nights in a hotel at \$200-plus a night. You get all your meals, you've got your travel. I mean your gas and whatever else is expensive, right? It could be easily a \$1,000 weekend. And we did that five times throughout the season, so there's \$5,000 just for one kid to go to all the tournaments and all the games. (Dylan)

The impact of this cost is magnified when regional wages are considered. As Dylan remarks, "the economy's different than it was 20 years ago, there's not as much expendable income." "Sure, you've got some loggers and truck drivers that are making great coin," points out Jeff, "but alongside them are people that are unemployed and/or are marginally employed, like me. I work when I can get the work, and my wife works. But we're always balancing around, trying to, you know, figure out where the money's going to come from."

As I outlined in Chapter 1, the region is home to a real mix of income levels: many individuals in Rossland make well above the regional and provincial median wage, yet in communities up and down the Slocan Valley as well as those on Kootenay Lake, median wages are roughly half of those in Rossland. While this wage gap presents significant challenges for individuals who wish to participate in organized youth sport within their hometown, it also presents a challenge for teams that must rely on these children and parents to create teams. There are simply not enough young people in Rossland to put a Rep soccer team together. It needs to amalgamate with surrounding towns. While some Rossland residents may be able to put forth the resources for Rep soccer, if those in neighbouring towns cannot, the team will not go ahead.

The time and money associated with travel not only impacts young people—it also impacts coaches and parents. When I consider the adults I met who volunteered a significant amount of time in organized youth sport, many work in the school or college

system. Others work in public service and have many weeks of vacation that they can use toward travelling for sport. On the other hand, parents who I saw the most infrequently and who could not come on the road with the teams were the ones who work out of town, in manual labour, and/or who have very little vacation. Along the same line, when I consider the young people in the research project who participated most frequently, they all have one thing in common: their parents either work in the school system, work shift-work, are retired, have high incomes, or have one stay-at-home parent with another who makes good money. Take adults who work in the school system as teachers or principals for example. They have working hours that suit after-school activities and are encouraged to volunteer their time in extra-curricular activities. When they need a day off work to hit the road with their athletes, it is easier to come by support.

Below, Sasha explains how her mom's job as a high school teacher allowed her to pursue soccer at a level that required her to join a team outside of the region.

[Travel was always part of playing sport but] then I got to grade 11 and the travelling was ridiculous. The day after I got my [Learner's Licence] I was driving my mom all over so she could be sleeping and doing her marking; she's a teacher. And it was just driving three hours, practice, drive three hours home while she was working, and she would get, an hour off school two days a week. They had to get a sub for that. And it's a lot of commitment from the school. The Principal would do that for me. Which you don't see that elsewhere. That made me feel good—that somebody would believe in me.

Without the support of her mom's workplace, Sasha would not have been able to participate in competitive sport. Aaron is another young person whose mother was at almost every one of his sporting events and who frequently acted as the team chauffeur. He participated in sport all year round and refereed as well. How could he do this? His father is retired and his mom works a part-time job to pay for any extras that the pension does not cover. In his grade 12 year, she quit her part-time job to make sure she could come to every one of his games, practices, and refereeing gigs. Other young people have parents who hold high paying jobs or who are school principals, nurses, chemical engineers, physiotherapists, doctors and so on.

While these young people and adults are able to make it work, “not everybody can make sports a priority with the time and distances and expenses,” says Jeff. As a result, “there’s probably tons of young people out there, even in [the bigger towns around here] who could play, would be successful, but don’t because their parents don’t have cash or time.” Speaking from personal experience playing sport, 16-year-old Mariah emphasizes the importance of parents when it comes to travel:

It’s so big. Ridiculous. Because, think about how small our teams are. Sometimes we didn’t even need a bus or it’s too much money. We can’t afford to take a bus every time. Unless we took the boys’ team with us [and they would have to be playing at the same time and in the same place]. But my mom, seriously. She drove for probably every game, every tournament. Parent drivers are crucial. Ridiculously crucial. If you don’t have drivers, we can’t go. Sometimes that was the factor. We don’t have enough drivers, so we can’t go to this tournament. We can’t afford a bus, or it’s just not worth it in the long run. She was just incredible like that. She would always be willing to drive anywhere. . . . Not many parents of the younger kids understand that. I don’t think. If their kids are just getting into sports, they need to understand they need to be pretty dedicated parents too. But my mom knew that because my sister is two years older than me, and she did sports too. My mom has been doing it for a really long time.

While there is no doubt that Mariah’s mom was dedicated, she also has the job flexibility that allowed her to go on the road. Mariah’s family owns a relatively large and successful company in the area, which means that her mom and dad are their own bosses.

For many young people, their parents simply cannot take the time to go with them and their clubs or associations may not be big enough to warrant spending money on a bus. “And this,” says parent, and sport administrator Anthony, “is sad”:

All young people should have access to all sports, [but] as soon as you move that House program base out of your backyard . . . there’s already 100 young people who have already quit. Because parents don’t want to or can’t make that commitment to that extra amount of effort to get their kids to practices. . . . And the little kids, if you’ve got a kid in kindergarten, you can’t—and parents; you can’t justify that. And some people just can’t do it. And it’s not fair because all young people should have access to all sports.

As Anthony suggests, sometimes parents simply cannot make it work. Tammy recognizes the time and extra money associated with this travel as one of the “disadvantages of playing organized sports in a small community.” In her position on the board of a local

sport association, she sees firsthand that people will not commit because with each “tournament out of town, by the time you sleep and eat, it is probably 400 bucks easy. It adds up, right?” She suspects that they might be dropping or losing players because of the cost of playing. Sure, she says, “there is the registration fee, whether it’s 300 bucks or 400 bucks. But that’s not the issue. It’s the travel and the time . . . that is keeping some people away.”

Taking part in organized youth sport in the region requires increased travel and this results in having to take time off work, wear and tear on vehicles, increase gas consumption, bus rentals, overnight accommodations, meals and so on. These costs add up and can become prohibitive for many families or entire programs. This is particularly the case for families living on the outskirts of the region, for those who play less-developed sports, or those who play on regional teams (as is sometimes required for girls’ teams which must draw from larger areas to form teams).

#### **4.4.8. Missing School: “You’re Out of School Thursday and Back Tuesday”**

While many young people must opt out of sport participation because of the time and financial resources associated with travel, many continue to play, but the demands of travel do not go away—especially for those who want to pursue the highest level of their sport. Marissa explains that for these young people, the only option is a regional team because there are not enough teams to play out of their hometowns. As she says, “in any rural community, the regional team is a farce.” Their mandate is to keep the young people in school—to keep them here instead of going to play Juniors where they travel so much. Given the need to travel to find competition, most of these teams play multiple games per weekend and this means that the young people are not home very much:

You might go play the North team for a weekend. So, you’re out of school Thursday at noon, you’re back Tuesday, then you go back on the road again next Friday. That is not keeping them in their own beds, it’s not keeping them in school, and it’s not keeping them at home. And I think it’s a real travesty that they have taken the young people from grade 10 to grade 12 and decided to pull them into this format. Again, it works in a Vancouver setting, it works in an Island setting. It does not work in a rural community.

Young people with whom I spoke were keenly aware of how much school they missed for sport. Shelly, an elite hockey player understands this very well. “Every weekend we would be going somewhere,” she recounts.

I was usually here Monday and Wednesday for sure, and then if we went to Vancouver or Prince George or something, I would stay at a friend’s house in Trail after practice on Thursdays . . . and we would leave Friday at 6 a.m. and 5 a.m. and get on the bus. We missed a lot of Fridays.

She also adds that her experiences are a bit different than those of her friends who live in the bigger towns in the area (as opposed to in the rural and remote towns). The girls on her team from Nelson and Castlegar “don’t understand that we have to do homework at night because we have to leave right after school and we don’t get home until bed. They can go home and do homework until hockey.”

#### **4.4.9. Missing Social Activities: “It’s Just So Much Time, They Can’t Do Anything Else”**

The travel required for sport participation also means that young people are pulled away from their school friends and miss out on some social activities. When I asked 13-year-old Nick what he misses out on when he is on the road, he says “friends. I always miss friends’ birthday parties. I missed one birthday party four times!” Catherine, who is 14 years old, says her friends “hate it” that she’s always gone for soccer. “They are really mad, they’re like, ‘Why are you always gone?’ and I’m like “guys, that’s my soccer, I have to be gone, it’s not your choice.” Sylvie says the only times she sees her 13-year-old peers is when she is downtown: “Because, I play soccer a lot, and they play their sports. And my friends are like, ‘Oh, you’re never around because you’re always playing soccer.’” Shelly argues that young people like her who live in the more remote and rural towns in the region feel this even more: “Young people in Nelson and Castlegar, they got a lot more opportunities. They could still play hockey and have a social life,” she says:

Where I felt like I was kind of, well, during hockey season, those are my friends, I didn’t really, my other friends. If I had a weekend off, I’d hang out with them. “We haven’t seen you in forever” or like, see me at school or something. So it’s like, I guess, all my other friends have boyfriends and stuff and I had no time for that. I was away all the time. That’s how it went for a bit. And I just, even if I tried, I can’t

hang out. This day, this day, this day. I'm moving this until here, and we've got our phone taken away on trip so, no talking [to them either]. And I feel like a lot of my friends had jobs. And there were a lot of parties that I missed out on. When everyone was like, "Oh, are you going to the party?" I was like, "No, I have hockey" and if we had like a day off from school, but on Thursday night everyone was going to a party and I was going to hockey practice.

Whereas her friends could have jobs, go to parties, hang out with friends, have partners, she could not because she was gone so often. While she stuck with hockey until she graduated from high school, some of her teammates had enough and quit. Speaking about a friend who played on the Major Midget Wildcats, Amy remembers: "She used to [play hockey] but she said it took too much of her time. Every single day you have to at least do one thing with hockey." Raven also found the travel required for competitive figure skating out of her town was too much and she eventually dropped down to recreational skating so she could "spend more time with [her] friends, doing other sports, and not worry[ing] so much about figure skating." Even though she was practising just as many hours a week, she eliminated most of the travel by dropping out of the competitive circuit. "I did still go to competitions in the area," she says, "but I'd do a program and that's it. Just for me."

Even young people who play their sports out of the bigger towns in the area witness similar patterns amongst their friends: when travel becomes too expensive and time consuming, causing them to miss out on social activities, they quit or take up more local sports. Speaking about her experience figure skating, 16-year-old Amber says she "didn't like it very much. It was expensive because you had to buy ice time, and you had to buy to be in the Club, and competitions and travelling." She recalls her frustration with the amount of travel: "You only got one or two minutes on the ice with each competition. So, I mean, you could drive, five hours, three and a half hours to Penticton, and it wasn't good." When she was no longer medalling, she decided "the travel was not worth my time. I hit a fork in the road so I quit and took up soccer." Below, 14-year-old Rory describes what he noticed when the Trail hockey teams started playing out of the Okanagan League:

Rory: It's just this year. I notice a lot of my friends have quit [hockey].

Me: And focused on other sports?

- Rory: Yeah, well it's kind of this. In Bantam, my friends' brothers and their age group, a lot of them quit just to ski and snowboard and do other stuff like that.
- Me: Do you think maybe it has to do with your age? Or more to do with being intense and they just want to have fun?
- Rory: I think a lot of people could be the intensity. How much hockey costs and [only having] one day off? But it's just so much time, they can't do anything else.

It is not that Rory's friends do not want to be active. It is that they do not want to commit every waking hour to hockey. Suddenly, the three ski and snowboard hills within a half-hour drive (with a free community shuttle) look like reasonable alternatives. In the end, says 16-year-old Julian, "a lot of people quit because their families can't afford it. It can be really expensive. But it's also the time commitment." He acknowledges that it is usually the families who "actually make the call." But, "the young people want to have more free time, hang out with their friends. Some start getting jobs too. That's a big one."

#### **4.4.10. Busyness: "We're Out of Town Every Couple of Weeks"**

The amount, type, and distance of travel also mean that families end up having very busy schedules. "We are pretty much on the road from August to May, every weekend pretty much for hockey," says Sabrina. While busyness is the case for many North American families involved in organized sport today (Bianchi et al., 2006; Dyck, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Levey Friedman, 2013; Thomson, 1999), the travel out of town as well as the sheer distances covered require exceptional levels of time management. I witnessed this firsthand as a researcher trying to schedule interviews. I found it exceptionally difficult to coordinate meetings in town. I had the most luck catching adults on their break from work and young people during the off-season or on the road.

Over a rare Thanksgiving weekend home, parent Denise tells me all about how busy her life is a result of her children's participation in organized youth sport: "Both my daughter and son play winter and spring hockey. So, we might have Saturday night free. But we're literally—we have one free weekend with him from now until February 15th." In a mid-week, post-work, and off-season interview, Tammy shares similar descriptions:

So, I mean, from November until mid-July, we're probably out of town every—on average, every three weeks. Between tournaments and out-of-town games, you're busy until, you know, early February. We get a bit of a break in March, and then he skis like crazy. And then April starts. You know, March, April is quiet. There's just local practices, and then, you know, between early May and mid-July for lacrosse, we're away every couple of weeks.

The hectic schedule does not end there. As Dylan describes, “normally for us a road trip is a drive there [of about 4–5 hours], check into the hotel, go the rink, play the game, sleep, go to the next game, the next game, the next game, the next game, and then drive home.” Because travel is so frequent, it must be organized in such a way to maximize game time and minimize the impact on work and school. This requires leaving after work or school and arriving very late at night. The subsequent days are jam-packed with as many games as possible, the return drive is almost always done entirely in the dark, and the family pulls into the driveway in the late hours of the evening. Considering road trips are the bedrock of organized sport programs in the West Kootenays, most young people, parents, and sport administrators spend a significant chunk of their year like this.

It is not just the weekends that are busy. The travel to and from practice makes for very hectic weekdays as well, as evidenced by Shelly's description of her involvement in hockey:

Tuesdays and Thursdays, I'd get up, go to school, eat lunch, go to school again, then right after school, I lived two minutes from the school. I'd run home, I'd already have my gear packed in the morning. And then I would get picked up right away because there was another girl who played from here. So, her mom usually drove and then we would get picked up right after school. We'd both go to my house, get picked up, and run up to her house, grab her gear that was already loaded, because her mom came from work. That half-hour was pretty stressful, and then we got on the road, and it was fine, get to practice, go to practice. Practice was usually, at 6 or 7. Usually we wouldn't get home until 10ish. So, the next day I wore sweatpants (Laugh).

Given these hectic schedules, it is not surprising that when I asked 12-year-old Jaimie what he enjoys the most about the off-season, he yells “I can sleep in and relax!” Dylan's 14-year-old son echoes this feeling when I ask him what he does when he is not playing sports: “Hang out with my friends outside or we're chilling inside because it's the one time I get to relax.” Between lacrosse and hockey, he only gets one month off and I

can sense the excitement in his voice when he says, “I basically just veg. I go outside with my friends, I’ll go boating, we’ll go biking, we’ll do a bunch of stuff like that. But really, it’s more or less vegging, we just sort of relax.” When Terry and I are talking about what changes he noticed in his life after he quit hockey, he replies: “I like not travelling anymore because I get way more time to relax. I don’t know, I just like sitting with my friends. Go to friends’ houses lots.”

While I have highlighted some of the challenges associated with organized youth sport participation and the travel it requires, research participants made sure to emphasize that travelling is not always necessarily a burden. Catherine lived in a very isolated community in Northern, BC before moving to the West Kootenays in late elementary school. She notes that the travelling she does in the West Kootenays is much less than she did when she was living elsewhere. When I ask her if she is bothered by travelling a lot for soccer, she exclaims, “No, when I travel for three hours, I’m like this is awesome!” It is to similar statements that I turn next.

#### **4.4.11. New Horizons: “I Get to See New Things, Meet New People”**

For some young people, travelling is fun. “I like travelling,” says 16-year-old Neil, “just because, like, we get to play different people.” His 13-year-old sister Stephanie thinks travelling is fun because “she gets to be with her friends.” “After a while,” Neil says, “we’ve done so much of it so it’s not that big of a deal anymore.” “Sure, I don’t really like the driving part,” says 14-year-old Branden, “but I like the new experiences, and, you know, I get to see new things, meet new people.” David provides a hilarious account of why travelling was not all that bad for him or his players:

We used to go to the Coast or Island for the weekend. We would get an extra day off school. We used to love it. The kids loved it. And we’d be rushing back on a Sunday night and then I remember this one time I hear, “Mr. Hickey, we need to go pee” so we stopped to go pee in this doohickey little town. Only place open was the bar and so I had to bring 40 high school girls into a bar and the owner just scratches his head and says, “Ok, but don’t look at anyone or listen to anyone.” Turns out the bar patrons were hootin’ and hollerin’ at the girls. The girls still talk about it to this day!

Apart from meeting new people, travelling can also be enjoyable because it means accessing luxuries that are not part of the young people's daily life at home. When I ask 13-year-old Natasha if she likes travelling for soccer, she exclaims, "Yes, the shopping!" Branden's 12-year-old brother Nick says he "loves the fast food and staying at the hotels. They have Internet. And my dad always brings his laptop, and I can play computer games." Jaimie, who is 12 years old, says he also "loves going to eat at restaurants." And finally, 14-year-old Rory says that he "loves the food, going paintballing, watching a movie at the theatre and doing games and all that. Sometimes we just go to the pool or just, a movie or something. So, you can do something as a team, it's nice."

For the parents, travelling is not so bad because it exposes their children to different places and different cultures. "Because all the [spring] hockey tournaments are normally in the Lower Mainland," says Sabrina, "our little small-town . . . kids go there and they are like 'OMG, there are hoboes living in the woods behind here.'" Chuckling, she continues: "We went to the coffee shop in the mall and we saw these 70-year-old ladies that could have been models, they had yoga gear on. The kids thought they were so funny looking!" Teacher and coach Kyle thinks that these sorts of experiences are "good for the kids, it's good to get them out of the community, away from the community. I mean, there is real learning that goes on there." Kate and her daughter Amber talk about their own experiences getting out of town:

Kate: I mean it was—you may disagree but overall it was a positive experience, even when you had to follow your brother around, at least we left [this town] and went to other places, which you wouldn't have done. We went to Kelowna a lot more, we went to Cranbrook.

Amber: Yeah, Penticton, Osoyoos, stuff like that.

Kate: Penticton every summer. You'll probably find that not many people here actually go anywhere.

From the parents' perspective, while they may not be luxurious overseas vacations, these trips nonetheless allow the family to leave the region, something Kate suspects young people from the West Kootenays who do not play sport rarely do. Her daughter Amber also thinks that "what makes it fun is that you can do things you normally don't get to do. You can wander around. Here, there is nowhere to go. We can hang out in the mall,

explore, which is fun.” Not only do trips take young people out of their towns, but they also expose them to different cultures.

Travelling often is also not so bad, according to one sport administrator, because it creates tough athletes. As James says, “We’d load up at noon, and they would be asleep before I was out of the parking lot. They built a nest, then done.” He continues: “You get there late, on a bad road covered in snow. You need to change in the bus and go out without warm up and play. That doesn’t happen in the Lower Mainland, and it makes for tough athletes.” Being a tough athlete is important because “when you’re playing against the Lower Mainland teams, you have to be tougher. You will never be as good because you don’t play enough. But at least you’ll be tough.”

The experiences of my participants seem to fall in line with researchers who suggest that the travel associated with sport participation may be a way for young people living in rural and small towns to “get out” (Spaaij, 2009b, p. 1140). By “going on the road,” rural and small town sport participants may have the chance to experience different people, cultures, and environments (Rapport & Overing, 2007, p. 268)—experiences normally limited for these youth (Robertson & Williams, 2004) yet coveted in contemporary public discourses on what it means to “grow up” (Amit & Dyck, 2010).

#### **4.4.12. Social Time: “We Get to Hang Out a Lot, So We Know Each Other Really Well”**

Finally, travelling presents an opportunity to socialize, both for parents and for young people. Speaking about her son, Tammy suspects that

the distance bothers him, but at the same time he’s a tournament junky, and he likes that social bit outside. He really likes the social aspect of organized sports and hanging out, you know, 24/7 while you’re away on the road, he just absolutely loves it.

Socialization is very important in cases where teams are made up of families and children from across the region, rather than from in-town. For these teams, tournaments provide an opportunity to get to know each other. When I ask 13-year-old Avery if she likes

travelling, she says: “Yeah, because we stay in hotels, and all the teams stay in one hotel, and we get to go to the pool together and kind of hang out a lot, so we know each other really well, rather than kind of not knowing some people in the team.” Some parents feel the same way. “So, we made a lot of really, really good friends, actually, through it,” says Denise. Parent and school administrator Tanya adds, “we were always going places, and socially it was great. They were all our friends. We used to have a blast on hockey trips.”

## **4.5. Conclusion**

By focusing on the everyday lives of young people, parents, and sport administrators trying to “make sport work” in the West Kootenays, this chapter illustrates how the material and structural conditions (i.e., the geographic, economic, and demographic features of place) are imprinted on the decisions people make about, and their experiences of, participation in organized youth sport. It reveals that people cannot simply engage in organized youth sport on their own terms; there are real spatialized, material, and structural factors that shape their trajectories through organized youth sport—both as parents and as children. It also reveals the way in which those living in more rural and remote towns are impacted by these material and structural conditions in different ways from those living in bigger towns and cities in the region. Even though all my participants live in rural and small towns and are all living in the same historical and geographic context (Mitchell, 2006), they are not all “similarly rural” and therefore do not experience organized youth sport in homogeneous ways.

## Chapter 5.

### Hippies and Hockey

#### 5.1. Introduction

*The man sitting next to me at the library asks me what my project is about and I tell him. After a brief pause, he says, “Well, I was doing work in the forestry industry a few decades ago in the Slocan Valley. There was talk of building a community ice surface for hockey. And I tell ya, that ice rink came to be symbolic of the West Kootenays. There were the forestry people who wanted to use their lumber to contribute to the community—you know, build something with local resources that would help the local community. They didn’t want some mega complex, just something built with their own hands and their local resources. Then there were the solitary types, the anarchists who wanted nothing to do with the establishment—who wanted nothing to do with a project that represented industry in any way. It went on for months. The rink was never built. But you know I kind of understand why there was such resistance, tension. The region is full of people who live there explicitly because they want solitude from rules and regulations and the involvement of big corporations. But they want it for different reasons and for different outcomes. So maybe some people saw the ice rink as a symbol of everything they were trying to escape and others thought, ‘Well wouldn’t that be cool to build something for the young people with our own hands, our own trees?’ Who knows.” (Fieldnotes, May 12, 2017)*

In her book on the Slocan Valley, Gordon (2004) urges us to consider that geography *and* mindset are equally important and often work together to form our understanding of our rural or small towns. As she suggests, one’s town “is not just a place where people live—it is a place that people imagine” (p. 12). In complementary fashion, the place-based, life course perspective moves us beyond a purely structural explanation of experiences to one which accounts for human agency. That is, to one which accounts not only for what is but what people imagine their lives to be(come).

In the first section of the chapter, I provide a detailed examination of the production and reproduction of the idea of a West Kootenay Culture. I consider its imagination and representation in participants’ discourses and narratives about living in the West Kootenays. I then examine its translation in the world of organized youth sport in the West

Kootenays. I reveal how ideas about the West Kootenay Culture are imprinted upon the decisions young people, parents, and sport administrators make about, and their experiences of, participation in organized youth sport.

In the next section, I focus on the sport of hockey. I reveal that the decrease in participation and support of hockey in the region can be attributed to a change in interests and recognition on the part of parents and young people that hockey “just isn’t the place I want to be.” In many ways, what is happening to hockey is representative of what is happening in general across the region (and in Canada) as families and young people shift their attention to non-traditional sports and activities (Whitson, 2001). At the same time, hockey persists in the region. I demonstrate how some residents draw on working-class social arrangements and ideals of rural and small towns to justify the place of hockey in the West Kootenays.

## **5.2. West Kootenay Culture**

As noted in Chapter 1, Rodgers and Ingram (2014) believe that there is something distinctive, a mindset that brings people to and keeps people in the West Kootenays. As diverse as the region may be, and as connected to the wider world as its residents might be, it is recognized that there is a West Kootenay Way or Culture. According to my participants, the West Kootenays draws peach farmers and logging truck drivers alike. As Trudy notes,

I remember being . . . a young hippie raising our kids on peaches. Then I went to work at the mill across the river there. There was Frank. . . . This redneck logging truck driver. At some point, it occurred to me that Frank could go anywhere he wanted to. They were here for the same reason we were here. Because we loved this place.

Whether a member of a commune or a worker at the mill, these people ended up in the same place and it is argued they do so because of a shared history of distrust of authority and structure. Kimberley says that this makes the West Kootenays “a very odd area for a lot of different reasons.” Below, she discusses the key regional historical moments she believes have born a shared attitude of distrust.

You have the internment camps of New Denver, the influx of draft dodgers in the area particularly. You've got the Doukhobors who were here and whose communities were broken by government, taking their young people away. Then you've got people who are very, I don't want to say this for everybody, but I think a lot of people are jaded, and rightfully so, by the way they were treated by Hydro when they damned the lakes, because really, they got the shaft. There's a lot of really terrible things that went on in the '60s that have carried on through generations of people, and it is sort of entrenched in the culture, too. So, there's a lot of anti-establishment, hurt communities here, of people who do not trust authorities, and I think with good cause, because of their histories. But that attitude is pretty entrenched here as well.

While the West Kootenays certainly have a history of dissent, Rodgers and Ingram (2014) caution not to lump everyone into the same category. One only has to walk through the streets of Nelson and Trail or drive through the Slocan Valley and Rossland to see the difference. In the words of one teenage boy on the basketball team, in this region, "you see, there are hippies, rednecks, and then there is everyone else." As I will establish in the chapter, the idea that there are differences between the hippies, rednecks, and everyone else comes to play out in very distinct ways in the decisions people make about their involvement in organized youth sport.

### **5.2.1. Ideological Conflict: "If You're Going to Have An Association With 900 Young People and You Don't Have Structure, Yikes!"**

There was a general sense among the participants who were most involved in organized youth sport that people who fit the "relaxed," "anti-competition" way of life of the West Kootenay Culture are a pain for administrators who want to run a conventional sport system. A specific idea of the West Kootenay Culture—one linked to anti-competition and back-to-the-land ideals—is considered problematic. As Lisa says, "it used to be really about sport here. But now, it is a bit relaxed. But it has to do with the parents and their mentality, just the way they're on Kootenay time. It's a totally different generation, a totally different way of thinking." According to Craig, when the attitude of hurt and anti-establishment translates "into a fear of competition and fear of organization," this directly impacts the operation and experiences of organized youth sport in the region.

For these parents and sport administrators, this way of life is frustrating. When registration deadlines and uniform rules are taken as suggestions rather than regulations, remarks Stuart, it can be irritating:

That's the thing. Sure, Nelson has 10,000 people but you have 5,000 living in the woods, simply because they are hiding from society. Some of them are nature lovers and I would love to live in the woods, but for completely different reasons, because I like my quiet when I'm not dealing with people. I like nature. I think it's beneficial; it's healthy, peaceful and all that stuff. However, a lot of them are hiding because they can't deal with people. Okay, and they don't want to abide by those rules. And I'm not saying, I mean, I don't want to be police, but you have to have it, if you're going to have an association with 900 young people and you don't have structure, yikes!

He laments that "in rural areas like the West Kootenays you deal with people who come from [the] boonies, you know, that just don't even have email or computers. I'm not saying that they're less smart, all I'm saying is that they're not accustomed to structure, rules, and that's something." Speaking about his frustration trying to run a soccer program, a parent at the Castlegar Minor Soccer Association in 2013 said this:

As organizers and coaches, we're desperate. We are always in a desperate situation. Not enough numbers. We can't coach the teams in a hard way or a disciplinary way. "My son doesn't want to come to practice he just wants to come to the games but he still gets to play." And parents don't want the soccer league to go on any farther because, "hey, that's summer holidays. I don't want to drive my kid somewhere in the middle of July. Soccer should end when school ends." And so, in my opinion, THAT temperament, THAT lack of commitment to this sport, is just as much a part of the problem as anything else.

Stuart and this soccer parent are not the only ones who think this. One of the managers for a local girls' soccer team was "beside herself" that a parent would email three days before Provincials to say they were "double-booked" and could not bring their daughter the last two days of the tournament. When I asked her how that happens, Linda responds "That is just the Rossland Way, or the Kootenay Way really" (July 10, 2015). Sabrina seemed very eager to tell me how frustrating this way of life can be for those trying to make sport run in the West Kootenays. She explained:

It's incredibly frustrating. We are trying to—we created a deadline for registration. People don't follow it. We ask them if they are playing hockey and they say "Yeah!"

But Kaslo doesn't *believe* in deadlines. They don't get why it is they are not on the ice until October, why they need to pay ahead of time. They don't get larger policies etc. So, then we say, "you have to pay; you can't just register" but they don't. Slocan is the same way. We were sitting next to the coach of the Slocan soccer team and he was like, "Does anybody know who is showing up today? [Laugh] and it was like at half time, three young people show up and they are like, "Oh, I thought it started at 10:30a.m." And they were in their pyjamas. So, it's just too laid back. Whereas Nelson and Trail would just say "You can't come, you are late." And I get that.

Some recreation planners believe this way of life is why major recreation, sport, and public infrastructure projects are not well supported, which can be very frustrating for those who believe in the values and merits of such projects. Evan explains this:

Some of the people. It depends on their viewpoint. Some of them don't want to contribute to recreation because they never use the services and they feel that they moved here because they just want to live on their own farm and take care of themselves. And so, I think that some of them feel that they are much more self-sustaining. Some of them feel like, "Oh well we never use it so we don't want to pay for it." And they can never see themselves or any member of their family using it. Of course, it sort of starts to change sometimes when they have grandkids (laugh).

This way of life can also impact organized youth sport in more innocuous ways. Referring to the unofficial main industry of the region—marijuana farming—a local sport administrator jokes: "Where else would you have people so insistent on paying in cash for registration?!" Even Sabrina admits that a little Kootenay Culture is not always a bad thing:

Well, so we play New Denver, Slocan, Nakusp in soccer and it's fantastic. We were actually laughing with the parents because of the names of the kids. They are like, "Go Asland!" There are no Brittneys and Jessicas. They are all "Willow, Ember." And all the kids come and their water bottles are all mason jars and tea bags or cucumber in them. And in Nelson all the young people have a latest gear and they are totally all, skilled, which I guess is different and good as opposed to the teams we normally play against. There is just a different sense of competitiveness. The kids we play against are asking what the kids' names are, where they go to school, what their favourite colour is etc. Whereas in Nelson, they are like, "We are not going to talk to you."

What frustrates these parents and sport administrators is that "West Kootenay Hippies" don't play by the rules that govern interactions with institutional representatives.

They do not get what organized youth sport is about. These rules are decidedly very (sub)urban or at the very least, not reflective of the way of life that many people who live in the West Kootenays are said to seek out. Are they not, after all, just playing by *their* own rules? But there are benefits and costs to both logics of organized youth sport. This way of life may be frustrating to some sport administrators, but it may also be the reason the region is known for providing so many alternatives to traditional organized youth sport—something I will explain below.

### **5.2.2. Middle-Class Hippies: “You Have a Lot of Athletes Now That Are Skateboarding”**

*You see all those young people, you have a lot of athletes now that are skateboarding, that are riding these little BMX bikes. (David)*

*Our community highly values its outdoor recreation, most of which is informal and not conducted through programs. (Greater Nelson Parks and Recreational Master Plan Survey Report, 2012)*

As explained above, residents believe that the way of life followed by some West Kootenay residents favours all that is non-structured and non-regimented. On the surface, this would seem to favour a complete disregard for any organized youth activities, particularly sports. Any in many ways, it does. There is certainly evidence to suggest that those parents and young people who live in more rural and remote corners of the region choose to do so because they can live off the land, away from others. It is their choice to live there, and they know this will mean giving up access to a long list of organized sport programs for their children. As one parent who lives in a very remote corner of the region explains to me, “That’s the way things work around here—personal choice—we’d move if we didn’t want to be limited with recreation” (Fieldnotes, October 16, 2012). For these parents, there is no (or very little) complaining about not having an ice rink nearby; it is their choice to live a lifestyle and to live somewhere that does not easily lend itself to participation in these activities. As Teagan remarks, “That’s a choice that you make, right? My girlfriend lives on a farm up the Valley; she’s not going to be doing organized sports with her kids because it’s a 45 minute to an hour commute, depending on the time of year to the main road.” Some families across the region *do* drive more than this for their kids’

activities, but for the families that live the back-to-the-land lifestyle, it is simply incompatible with their lifestyle choices.

People who live the “back-to-the-land” or “anti-competition” lifestyle do not all come to it from the same ideological place. As many authors have documented, the back-to-the-land movement has historically been populated with just as many people who come from a farming and subsistence upbringing as those who do not (e.g., Agnew, 2005; Daloz, 2016). A substantial portion of these people who come from the city seeking to live a simpler life are unwilling to shed their middle- and upper-class ideals of individualism and self-actualization, especially when it comes to their children (Rodgers, 2014). Interestingly, these are the very same ideals which encourage young people to pursue, and parents to support, “enriching” activities. As a recent conversation with a gentleman who lived in this region illuminates,

You know, this generation of parents now, they are the offspring of the middle-class wave of Kootenay migrants. Those who came with money, who came with urban and educated ideas. They had the choice to live the way they wanted to because they had money, education, knowledge. They weren't working the farm because that's all could do. They worked the farm because they wanted to. This is a very middle-class reality, one in which choice is not a luxury—it's a lifestyle. Others in the area worked the smelter, worked the mines, worked in logging because that's all their world could afford them. These people didn't have a choice. They did what they did. So, what do the young people of hippie offspring parents do now? How will their parents raise them? It's an interesting question, isn't it? (Fieldnotes, May 12, 2017)

Similarly, Marissa reflects:

Well, yeah, and a lot of people move into Nelson to get away from bigger cities, to move to a smaller centre, but they don't change their expectations, and especially their expectations around their kids because they still have family or connection in those other places, and they do not want their kids to fall behind, God forbid!

Across many West Kootenay towns the decreasing focus on traditional organized sports (i.e., hockey and baseball) has been accompanied by a rise in what might be considered non-traditional activities. Reflecting on what has changed since she grew up outside of Trail, Juliana remarks that “before, there might be six things available to you. Now you have 46. If you want to do martial arts, there's probably 17 things you can do

here. If you want to go in dance, there are 38 different kinds of dance. It's unbelievable. Who would have known there was Zumba and belly dancing? None of that was available when I was a kid!"

There are some "hippies" (and their children) who have no interest in registering for organized sport, but there are others who simply want to take part in activities that fit their lifestyle. Youth surveyed in the *Castlegar Youth Engagement Report* (2011) expressed a desire for youth-friendly spaces to hang out that were not targeted to youth involved in sports (p. 35) and were beyond the cultural norms of accepted activities such as hockey, baseball, and soccer (p. 63). It was not that they were disconnected from civil society, living in the backwaters of the region. Rather, they just wanted something different. In Nelson, a youth worker told me that they have "tried to put on structured activities, but they are not well attended. Young people are asking us to let them decide what they do with their own time." This was similarly experienced by Anthony who says that while organized hockey numbers have dwindled significantly in Nelson (as I will speak about later in this chapter), what has taken on popularity is "anything that is non-regimented." He says, "You know, ironically I sit here and talk about hockey dying, but you come to our public skates, and they're packed. And I go to lots of places and the public skates are ghost towns." Similarly, Andrew's sons, who do not play organized hockey, nonetheless play drop-in hockey at the Castlegar Arena with their parents once a week. Julianna observes that the push for different activities has meant the "pendulum has swung from very few options for young people to overwhelmingly so many"—an unusual circumstance in rural and small towns, which are often described in terms of what they cannot offer young people, rather than what they can.

This abundance of alternative activities has negative consequences for those organized youth sport administrators who struggle to put programs together. "We're splitting the same 300 people in too many directions," argues Eva, who finds it difficult to get programs up and running in her community because there are too many activities getting off the ground. "If you had the same number of sports as in 1969, you wouldn't have a problem getting young people to play," recognizes James. "A lot of sports will disappear. They can golf, ski, skateboard, they can play softball, soccer, and Tae Kwan

Do judo. For me in '69, there was no swimming pool. There was nothing to do except what the high school provided. Trail had the best rink in BC. They had a great facility that Cominco built for them." Like James, sport administrator Heather laments that while more people may be active and engaged, it waters down the sports that have traditionally held firm in the area. Of course, underlying James' and Heather's concerns is an assumption that sports like hockey, baseball, basketball, and volleyball—the traditional sports—*should* be kept alive (a reflection of a competing discourse on rural and small towns which I pursue in the next section).

Other residents, however, believe that the broadening of acceptable activities has meant an opening up of possibilities for those young people and their families who are not interested in participating in traditional organized sport or who do not have the resources to do so. "There are so many options for young people to choose from now. Including not sports at all," says parent and sport administrator Teagan. "There are a lot of young people who don't do organized sports," adds parent and sport administrator Tammy, "and they are snowmobiling and dirt biking." Since he started teaching over 35 years ago, David has noticed changes in what young people are doing. "I've been teaching this age group for so long now, and I see different interests young people have. Lots of young people are fishing, hunting, skiing, and skateboarding." He elaborates:

Sure, there's fewer young people participating [in traditional organized sports], and yet at the same time there's a lot of those young people that are going to the skatepark that, are picking up a board, that are picking up a bicycle, doing whatever, because they do not have to follow a schedule per se. They can do it when they want to do it. It's pretty easy to get to the skatepark in this community, and it's not overly busy. So, you know, there's a lot to be said for that.

It is important to underline that while the "relaxed" and "back-to-the-land" idea of the West Kootenay Culture may frustrate some sport administrators and be the reason some young people and parents pursue unstructured activities, it is not the *only* idea of the West Kootenay Culture in operation. One only has to look at Nelson to see how different ideas about rurality and child rearing can compete within the same place.

### 5.2.3. Nelson: “That’s a Whole Different Crowd”

Participants almost unanimously agree that “to generalize, everyone in Nelson is a hippy” (Sasha), “they are all skids, they all smoke weed” (Basketball player, 16 years old), and “they are chill and amazing” (Basketball player, 17 years old). The uniqueness of Nelson is perhaps best described in a story Juliana tells me about her family’s very occasional trips to Nelson (even though it is only 40 minutes away):

Nelson is very, you know, laid back. Everything’s unique and diverse, you can be who you want to be, and everything’s well accepted in Nelson. When we drive to Nelson we see a man in a skirt. And [my husband] goes, “Oh, my God, just get what you need and let’s go home.” Like, he’s just, like, “I can’t handle this. Why do we come here? The weirdness of it?”

While these accounts of Nelsonites certainly fit with anecdotal evidence, media representations, and my general observations in Nelson (one of my interviews with a 16-year-old kid was cut short because she was set to meet her friends at the nudist beach!), they certainly do not fit my observations in organized youth sport.

When my participants talk about organized youth sport in Nelson, they almost completely drop their discourses of rural hippies and instead adopt a discourse of middle- and upper-class professionals who “take their life and sports seriously.” As Marissa says of her own city, “In Nelson, the impatience, the busyness. Whatever happened to Kootenay Time?” Below is a part of a conversation I had with a husband and wife who live in Castlegar. The conversation was about what is distinctive about the different towns across the region. Midway through their conversation about Nelson, they come to realize that the Nelson they know through organized youth sport (their son played out of Nelson because his age group did not have a team in Castlegar) is very different than the Nelson they know through everyday life.

Mother: It was interesting, though, living in Castlegar, we kind of have this impression of Nelson being kind of flaky and I have to, say, though, like, meeting the parents of the kids on our son’s team, like, they’re just—they’re always nice and—

Father: That’s because all the potheads missed the soccer deadline—if you’re not participating in that alternate economy, you’ve got to be making a decent living to live in Nelson.

I saw this disconnection firsthand. In one of my first weeks in the field, I attended a soccer tournament in Nelson. I was mortified when, within a few moments of being at the field, I heard a coach shouting. I was so shocked that I sent a letter to the Regional Sports Council telling them about how off-putting this behaviour would have been for park patrons.<sup>22</sup> In the letter, I describe the event:

After a wonderful afternoon of watching supportive, energetic, and positive soccer down at Lakeside Park, I was stunned to hear what bordered on verbal abuse coming from the adjacent field. Upon closer inspection, it became apparent that this verbal abuse was coming from one of the U11/U13 Nelson coaches. I stayed to listen more closely and was stunned, worried, and disgusted by what I heard. He was yelling so loudly that you could hear him from the shopping centre. He was screaming—and I mean screaming—at the girls when they were not in formation, or did not make the “perfect” pass. He was screaming out instructions to them in a manner that would not be acceptable even in the harshest of military environments. I can’t do justice to the tone in writing but rest assured that the following phrases could have been traumatic to even the most thick-skinned individual: “Get. The. Ball. OUTTTTTTTTTT.” “Come. On. GIRLS!! This is TERRIBLE. SHOCKING, SHOCKING!” “What. ARE. YOU. Doing!!!!!!.” These phrases were also coupled with vicious body movements—hand up and down, stomping on the ground, passing, punching the air and so on. I must add that the following day at the U15 game of Nelson vs Castlegar a similar situation arose where a prominent member of the Club Staff was trying to coach the game from the technical area (not permitted unless you are a team coach). He was asked repeatedly by the referee to leave and only did so after a five-minute yelling match (for which the game had to be paused). He took his time to be escorted out of the park, and not without yelling slurs and inappropriate things at the referee.

In the days that followed, I spoke to parents about this event and they assured me that this was not unusual for Nelson considering they take their soccer very seriously. In my fieldnotes on May 29, 2012, I wrote:

A comment about the Nelson coach yelling at his players sparks a conversation amongst the parents about how they just take it “so intense” “over there in Nelson.” I say that it’s funny because they portray themselves as these “artsy, fartsy peace-loving people” but then they seem so intense on the soccer field. One of the

<sup>22</sup> I did not receive a formal response to the letter. However, I did speak with somebody at the Sports Council a few days later who assured me they had received the letter and understood my concerns. There was no immediate action taken with respect to the coach as he was liked by some parents and disliked by others. He also “brought results.” The member of the technical staff left the association within the year.

parents turns to me and says, “Oh kid, that’s a whole different crowd. Those are not the same groups of people.”

Finally, at the Castlegar Minor Soccer AGM, it was brought up that Nelson did a much better job with their soccer program than did Castlegar and Kootenay South (the Rep association that combines all towns except Nelson). One parent captures this well:

When you talking about soccer in Nelson, it’s serious. They care about soccer. When people get into soccer, it’s like, “Yeah.” My kids go to Mt. Sentinel Secondary, what a difference. The kids in the class that are in soccer, it’s like “Oh yeah, you play soccer.” My kid’s hockey game this weekend got delayed in Nelson because the kids that were in soccer were going to be late. So, they take their soccer seriously. So where do you think that commitment comes from? Where do you think, the young people get it? It’s the parents and coaches.

What these examples illustrate is that ideas about rural places and child rearing are necessarily fluid and enacted differently in different contexts, by different people. While there is very little denying that Nelson, Salmo, and the Slocan Valley “have a different, laid-back mentality” (Marissa), within the context of organized sport this changes due to the types of people from these towns that participate in organized youth sport.

In the next section, I focus specifically on how competing ideas about rurality and child rearing operate in the sport of hockey. Just as Nelson has developed a reputation as a “super intense” sport town, Trail’s historical success in hockey has equally earned it this reputation. By examining the contemporary status of hockey and the historical roots of the sport in the region, it is revealed that different ideas about the role of hockey in the region and child rearing exist and that they have real material effects on the everyday lives of my participants.

### **5.3. Small Towns, Hockey Towns?**

One of the most powerful and enduring ideas about the Canadian rural is that of hockey as the centre of the community. The image of a frozen lake, cleared of snow, with a young boy silently skating, hockey stick in hand is recognizably “small-town Canadian.” Buma (2012) calls this the “hockey-as-small-town ethos” whereby rural and small towns

are almost instinctively associated with the sport of hockey. This discourse suggests that hockey somehow belongs to Canadian rural and small towns; that Canadian rural and small towns are naturally “hockey towns”; that hockey has always been and remains the prominent cultural and sporting activity for both young and old in rural and small towns; and finally, that a love for hockey is what differentiates residents in rural and small towns from those living in urban centres.

According to this ideal, hockey is also a testament to the distinctive passion and strength (physical and moral) of the Canadians that blasted through mountains, built roads on the side of cliffs, and cut down forests in unbearable conditions. This is the character that marks the construction of Canadian rural and small towns and keeps these places distinctive from large, urban centres. As a resident from a different small-town region in British Columbia remarks, “I think the Valley in general is a very blue-collar, hard-working town, and you know what? That’s what hockey is. It’s blue collar, it’s hard working, it’s exciting” (McGinley, 2008). In many ways, the West Kootenays is no exception. Owing to its working-class, company town roots, Trail has an exceptional history of hockey success which has earned it the monikers “BC’s Number One Sports Town” and “Home of the Champions.” Like many typical rural and small-town residents, those in Trail moved to the region “seeking new opportunities and a chance to make a fortune” (Valentine, 2001, p. 258). Enduring the hardworking life that accompanied this dream meant that the emphasis in Trail was as much on the pursuit of individual success as it was on community (Valentine, 2001). While the discourses of the rural and child rearing presented by hockey parents may be at odds with an anti-competition and non-regimentation West Kootenay Culture, it is nonetheless one that allows/ed for the flourishing of a rich organized youth sport culture.

### **5.3.1. Where Has Hockey Gone? “Hockey is Not What It Used to Be”**

*That’s not true, for sure not true that everyone knows about hockey. That’s the thing, maybe it’s the biggest, well-known thing, but I really feel like it is pretty insular. (Kimberley, Local Resident)*

*This area, I wouldn't say it's a classic example of the literature. (James, Retired Teacher)*

*Hockey here is definitely not, like a big cultural monolith like it is in other places in Canada. (Jeff, Parent and School Administrator)*

Consistent with data from across Canada, registration numbers compiled using BC Hockey's Annual Reports between the first year of the project (2012/2013) and the last (2016/2017) show that registration numbers have dropped across the region, both for boys and girls. The only exception is Greater Trail which saw an increase of 7 percent (n=28), most of which can be attributed to 22 new female players joining and to the amalgamation with Beaver Valley Minor Hockey. Elsewhere, Castlegar saw a decrease of 8 percent (N=18), Kaslo and Nakusp 20 percent respectively (n=10), and Nelson 30 percent (n=72). While these numbers reveal that hockey is certainly not "dead" or as "abysmal" as some sport administrators suggest, there is at least a sense that this decline in numbers is noteworthy and a sign of changing times. As people who grew up in the area in earlier decades, some adults remember when it seemed that "everyone played hockey" and that "every town had a team." The young people now, they believe, are growing up in a very different time (see Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Whitson, 2001).

Before I proceed, I should note that what is important is not whether numbers are in fact much lower than they were in the past. As Atwell (1988) establishes, there were 500 players registered in Trail Minor hockey in 1950, drawn roughly from 1400 boys aged 5–19. Thus, 36 percent of boys played hockey. It can certainly be determined that not everyone aged 5–19 played hockey (especially considering girls did not play in significant numbers). In 2016–2017, BC Hockey reports that there were 347 registered male players in Greater Trail Minor Hockey (which includes Trail, Warfield, Rossland, Fruitvale, and Salmo), drawn from a population of roughly 1255 boys (Census, 2016). That means 27 percent of boys play hockey. This is certainly a drop, but not the seismic one that some hockey commentators suggest (Tremonti, 2016). What is important is that some people believe these decreases are indeed seismic and that there is a noticeable change in the value, meaning, and visibility of hockey in the West Kootenays from what they experienced as young people or young adults.

“You know,” adds Dylan, “15, 20 years ago, in the 90s, every kid played hockey. And now fewer and fewer young people do.” The change in participation is also recognized by Juliana who grew up in the area and has raised both of her children here: “When I was a kid, it used to be everybody did hockey. If you didn’t do hockey, what were you doing? It was very odd if you didn’t play hockey.” Thomas adds that “it’s really not the best athletes playing hockey anymore like it used to be.” “It’s interesting,” says Veronica, whose sons have never played organized hockey, “I’ve noticed in the last few years a shift. Ian is from a year that had a lot of really serious hockey players, but a bunch of those parents this year were saying, ‘Yeah, I don’t know if my kid is going to play next year.’” This is similar to what sports commentator Bruce Dowbiggin recently said in a CBC interview: “There’s a lot of parents who sit at the table with their son or their daughter and say, what sport are we going to choose? And hockey isn’t necessarily it” (Tremonti, 2016).

Marissa, who has been volunteering with minor hockey in the region for over 30 years, reflects on what hockey used to be like in the region: “Kaslo, Nakusp, Castlegar, Beaver Valley, Trail, Rossland, and Grand Forks all used to have teams. This year we have one Midget Rep team in the entire West Kootenays, one!” Even Eva, who is in her thirties and has recently moved to the area has “heard repeatedly that hockey is not what it used to be.” She shares her observations with me:

I was just at the Kaslo arena, and they’ve got a beautiful facility. It’s huge, it’s, you know—it’s really beautiful. It was rebuilt about fifteen years ago, [in the late 90s] or something like that. But it’s a beautiful facility. And they say that fifteen years ago, it was booming. That fifteen years ago, there was hockey for adults all the way down to tots. Now, I don’t know what’s changed, but they’re really, really struggling to get an adult team together. They’ve got minor hockey. But, again, they’re always scrambling or fighting for resources or members, you know. Membership is just dropping like crazy.

Sabrina has firsthand experience with the changes that Eva identifies. Speaking about her son’s peers she says: “In a class of 30 born in 2001, my son is the only one that plays hockey!” This reflects what Campbell & Parcels (2013) note when they say “go into any elementary school classroom . . . and there’s a good chance you won’t find more than a handful of kids who play organized hockey” (p. 325).

Even in bigger towns like Castlegar and Nelson, numbers are not what they used to be. Paul, a father from Castlegar, agrees: “You know, in [my son’s] class, there are only two boys that play hockey.” Speaking of community support, not participation, Anthony says, “You know, the stands are empty 90% of the time!” But all of this raises the question: Why have the participation and support numbers decreased? It is to this that I turn to next.

### **5.3.2. Choice: “There Are So Many Other Things to Do Now”**

*When Nelson started really investing in their soccer, their hockey numbers dramatically went down. They can’t field teams in Nelson anymore. (Parent, Castlegar Minor Soccer Association AGM, 2013)*

As children of the 1950s to 1970s, the adults and parents in this project were born into a unique historical context. Their parents’ generation had experienced a period in which professional hockey teams were established across many small towns across Canada (including over 10 in the Kootenays alone) and “the magic of radio” made NHL seasons a “ubiquitous feature of popular life and conversation” (Whitson, 2001, p. 220). Then, notes Whitson (2001),

the introduction of televised games on CBC in 1952 served only to reinforce hockey’s role in bringing Canadians together around a common interest, as across the country the children who made up the baby-boom generation would grow up watching NHL hockey every Saturday night from autumn until spring. By the late 1950s, the NHL season was simply part of the rhythms of Canadian life, the Stanley Cup playoffs a ritual of Canadian spring, at least for most men and boys in that period. (pp. 222–223)

As children born right into this historical moment, many of the parents and adults in this project have vivid memories of hockey as the “common experience of [their] Canadian childhood” (Whitson, 2001, p. 232), even if they did not participate (as was always the case with the women interviewed for this project).

When I was a kid, you know, that was the entertainment in Rossland. You know, everyone went to watch the Warriors play. They had their own Junior Team. So, no matter what you’re doing, everybody always usually ended up there or headed off from there afterwards. You know, it was kind of a cheap entertainment. It was good. I think with so many things to do now, the young people are involved in so many things. I don’t go to as many games just because, you know, when you have

a free night off, I just, like, relax at home. I mean sometimes they'll go with their friends, you know. (Gary, Parent)

I was dragged to the arena and got to watch [my brothers] play hockey. What I remember is when I became a teenager, and the Smoke Eaters were there, and the Night Hawks were playing, that was our thing to do as teenagers. I don't know why, I don't know if it was so much the hockey or just something to do, you know. Was it the hot chocolate? I'm not really too sure. We would go and just for something to do, you know, some friends to get together and go watch hockey, and, yes, we did enjoy it. It was something for us as teenagers to do. And it was always full in there. (Sylvie, Parent)

Mom is a Canadian, and, in fact, my mom's side of the family goes back generations and generations and generations in this area. Grandparents were the first ones to build the store in the rural area. Everything like that. But where they met was at a hockey game. The Civic Centre, which was a place where people met. That was the mall. You know, that was the only thing really to do in town. So, everybody did meet there. And so, hockey did have that—it was the social thing. It's what everybody—even if you didn't play, chances are you went to a game. And it's not seen as that anymore. (Anthony, Parent and Multi-Sport Administrator)

[In small-town, farming, Saskatchewan, where I grew up], if there was a game, everybody was going to the hockey rink. . . . So I'm talking '60s. And I think it was a huge part of the community. It's a huge social event, it's a reason to come out, and it's a way to socialize and touch base with everybody in that community. I wouldn't say that everybody was a hockey fan. I wouldn't say that everybody even sat in the seats, but they were there to socialize, and especially having long winters, it's an important thing to do. And in the summertime, everything was based in around the farm, of course. So, you didn't socialize a whole bunch in the summertime because you're busy running the farm. (Marissa, Sport Administrator)

“In each generation,” articulates Whitson (2001), “young people will construct both individual and collective identities out of the symbolic and narrative materials available to them” (p. 232). In the childhoods of my adult participants, this included hockey. Today, however, it is no longer the case for a number of families in the West Kootenays. In line with observations made by scholars, some young people, parents, and sport administrators argue that participation and support for hockey have dropped because there are so many other activities for families to engage in (Tremonti, 2016; Whitson, 2001; Wilson, 2006). It is not that these people are pushed out of hockey; rather, they are pulled into other interests—interests available in their rural and small towns in ways not previously possible.

Nelson multi-sport administrator Anthony thinks “in general across the Kootenays, [hockey] is partly dying because . . . it’s not attracting the same percentage of kids as it was in the past, because there’s not the value seen in it as there used to be.” He says that with the “advent of choice [in the West Kootenays], whether it be martial arts, swimming, people are definitely diversified in what they’re doing.” To be sure, the advent of choice is quite recent and it is parents who are currently raising or have most recently raised children who have firsthand experience of it. It is also sport and recreation administrators who have noticed the shift since they were children or directly involved in child rearing. Reflecting on what has changed in Castlegar since her son was in high school in the late 1990s and early 2000s, recreation administrator Adrianna says:

There’s a lot of different sports now. That has changed. When my son was in school, he was not a hockey player and it was very prevalent. You know, the first day, the young people that played hockey had their jerseys on. But you know, it’s not the end all and be all anymore and the attitude around the whole community is changing. They are recognizing that there are a lot of other things for their young people to be doing.

As a father of teenagers, Paul agrees saying that “hockey is not as much of a ‘must’ as it was before for young people,” especially for boys:

There are so many different opportunities, choices for young people now. There isn’t as much pressure in saying, “Well, if you’re a boy, you need to play hockey because that’s Canada’s game, and it’s a small-town thing, and everybody’s at the rink.” I don’t think that’s the case anymore.

Meghan (who runs a martial arts program in the area) adds that “it’s just not the centre of the community. There are so many other things for young people to do. So, it’s not so much hockey anymore.” Even Jacqueline who has been (and remains) involved in hockey for more than 30 years recognizes this change. One sunny summer morning, Jacqueline and I sat in the bleachers of the empty Trail Memorial Arena, surrounded by championship banners, trophies, and the Trail Sports Hall of Fame. She said,

It’s not just hockey for the kids anymore. You know, not so much as it used to be. You know, you used to come down here for hockey games, and the stands were full. Now, you know, even for the junior hockey, there’s not as many people coming to watch. But there’s just other things to do. You know, more variety of things. But

I mean there's still, there's still a lot of emphasis on sport. You know, but you know, it's diversifying, right?

Below, two 14-year-old boys speak of just this:

I had a good experience with hockey. I just like snowboarding better, and I was getting tired of—like, because last year I tried to go in competitions, but almost every single one I missed due to hockey. So, this year I was like, yeah, I'm not letting that happen again, so I didn't play hockey. (Branden)

Some of my friends have stopped playing hockey because they like other sports. Like this one guy is a goalie, he wants to be focused on soccer. So, I think he stopped hockey. And this other guy, he was pretty good but I think he wanted to play more or he actually totally quit and focused—he's got a job now. So, I think he wanted to do that, start saving up towards his future, and all that. (Rory)

Over the course of my research, I found it particularly difficult to find families in which all the boys, never mind a single boy, played hockey. I interviewed three families, each with three or more boys, yet only one was currently playing hockey (the others had never even played hockey and had no interest doing so). As Patrick says of a family with three boys, "I don't even think there was even a question of them playing hockey. I mean they would be doing something else like skiing or whatever. I don't think it is unusual at all anymore." Grant, who has never played hockey, agrees: "It's not so prominent as like, 'Oh my god, you don't play hockey? Get out of my face' kind of thing."

I am certain my difficulty in finding boys who played hockey is due in part to conducting research in the hockey off-season. As I will illustrate later, registration numbers are not as abysmal as some people make them seem and there are, indeed, lots of boys playing hockey. Nonetheless, I interviewed over a dozen boys and just shy of a hundred parents and adults (many of whom had boys, who, for various reasons I did not formally interview). The fact that only a handful of them had boys who played hockey is still interesting considering the discursive association between small towns (especially the West Kootenays), childhood, and hockey.

What I have revealed here is that some young people and parents believe that hockey numbers have decreased because people are pulled into other sports and activities. In the words of Canadian sports media lawyer Paul Riley, "it's two generations

now that has had that kind of love, and I think that gets old after a while” (Tremonti, 2016). Next, I demonstrate how others believe hockey’s role has changed because people are pushed away from hockey in ways that they may not have been before.

### **5.3.3. Lack of Local Talent: “They Pull In Players From All Over Timbuktu!”**

*How many of them actually come from the town where the team is, right?  
It’s become that. (Juliana, Parent)*

Beyond the diversity of activities, locals also mention that support for hockey is down because the teams are no longer made up of local players. As Anthony bluntly says, “Junior hockey is no longer a program that delivers to local residents. We’re delivering it to young people’s parents from California!” Marissa says something along the same lines. In her 30 years of involvement in hockey around the region, she has witnessed a significant shift: “Junior hockey is still surviving, but they are having to pull in players from all over Timbuktu, to make those teams work.” A search of the current rosters illuminates this: out of 22–23 players, only four Trail Smoke Eaters are from the West Kootenays, two from Trail. Only eight Nelson Leafs are from the area, only four from Nelson (this information was not available for Beaver Valley Nighthawks and Castlegar Rebels).

With his long history in the region, Daniel knows the impact that this can have on town support—even in Trail, the proverbial breadbasket of hockey talent: “This team thrives when they see their local kids on the ice. Once you get rid of the local kids, they don’t want to go watch kids they don’t know. This is still a highly driven community: it doesn’t matter if it’s the Smokies: if it ain’t a local kid, nobody is interested.” In our interview, Kimberley (who I suspect is in her 30s or early 40s) makes similar remarks: “I think it’s a myth that everybody knows about hockey in small towns. I go to games when they’re here and I know about it. But if I don’t know about it, if I don’t have a kid in hockey, I’m not going to know about it.” Juliana, who also grew up in Greater Trail, notes a similar shift:

Before, because you had the families that grew up here, their kids grew up here, their kids will grow up here. And, you know, there are those generations of Italian

families that you know what? They would all live in Trail because that's where they were bred and born, right? And so, then you would have the generations of the hockey players and supporters. I don't think you have that anymore because there isn't that opportunity to finish high school and then carry on so the players leave earlier and the fans don't come.

Marissa, whose son played Junior hockey locally and who herself has been involved in hockey for decades, also notes that change:

I think hockey as a culture, and hockey as a draw is still there, yeah. But not in the same sense—we're talking about kids not playing in your community. It's not your girlfriend's son or nephew from down the street. When that's the case, that what draws them in. But now, that's where you lose it in the regular season, because it's Joe Blow from who knows where, and occasionally you'll hear about, you know, "I'm going because my neighbour's nephew is playing." There has to be a draw, and we've lost that, we've lost that by farming the kids out into these other towns.

She believes this shift has negatively impacted the community feel of small towns that many scholars note makes them distinctive from urban and suburban towns. "When my son played, he could look around in the stands and recognize and know that the community was there for him. And I know the Junior players now don't have that. There's very few local, local players." She continues, "so maybe in some ways it's less local here than it is in an urban community. Those young people are staying at home to play. It takes away from the community feel. Which I guess is considered typical of smaller towns." She thinks this is bad not only for the community but also for young people:

And it's sad. I think it's really—it's not good for community, and it's not good for those kids because they don't feel that same acceptance, and that same support from their community, because they don't know who is sitting in the stands, whereas before you could go "Okay that's my uncle and that's my cousin, and that's my neighbour." You know who's there, and you know they're there to support you. You don't have that anymore, from either side, the fan to player, or the player to the fan, we've lost that. I think now people are sitting at home, watching TV, watching the big boys make the big bucks, play, as it may be now, and it will be interesting to see what happens.

These comments help explain some of my experiences in the field. I came into the field soon after the failure of a referendum to expand the Castlegar hockey Arena and another to renovate the Pioneer Arena. When I asked Castlegar resident Dylan what happened, he explained: "They said, 'we're going to build a new hockey rink.' Well, three-

quarters of the city said ‘Well, none of us play hockey, and we’re never going to use it, we’re never going to step foot in it, so no, you can’t increase my taxes to do that.’” He suspects that when hockey meant more in the region, when it was a collective experience, it would have been a no-brainer, but since it is just one of many activities now—both for young people and adults—the fate of the arena was up in the air. Soon after, Rossland-Trail Minor Hockey and Beaver Valley Minor Hockey amalgamated after almost 10 years of discussion (Rossland and Trail amalgamated in the late 1990s) (Guy, 2005). For many residents, this was a reminder of how things have changed since the days when you could not “say Trail without saying Smoke Eaters. I think it’s world renown[ed]” (Taylor & Manna, n.d.)

A few years later, in February 2015, I spent five days on the road with the Trail Senior Boys’ basketball team. As we were rolling back into Trail around dinnertime, I read on the billboard that the Smoke Eaters were playing. What was surprising was that not a single boy on the basketball team mentioned there was a game that night. In fact, there were Junior A or B hockey games being played in every community in the region and not a single player mentioned it. When I asked the boys directly if they were going to watch any of the games, not one answered “yes.” In a region known for its hockey history, and in the dead of winter, I did not see one of these boys later that night when I attended the game. I was also surprised by how empty the arena was in general. In my fieldnotes I wrote this:

Ticket in hand, I walked towards the arena entrance. I asked the door person where I should sit if I wanted to cheer for the home team. He looked at me a little funny, saying “wherever you want.” I took a few steps inside the arena and realized that there were so few people—it wouldn’t really matter where I sat. I can’t imagine there were more than a few hundred max. Where were the adults? Where were the young people? Even Trail—a town known worldwide as the “Home of the Champions” for its hockey dynasty—can’t fill the arena. (February 14, 2015)

“I am worried there won’t be a team next year,” said the fellow sitting next to me at the arena in February 2015—and he was almost right. Not surprisingly given my observations, the Trail Smokies were sold off in October 2016 by the city and the non-profit that had run the club for more than 50 years, citing financial and attendance issues (Regnier, 2016b). While the Smokies have been the “lifeblood of Trail for generations with a long and storied

history” (Trail/Rossland Sport Hosting, n.d.), they no longer attract the crowds they used to and found themselves broke.

These changes in fan allegiance are not made in a vacuum. As Whitson (2001) notes, when many of these adults or parents were growing up, fan allegiances were expected to “ritually reaffirm traditional, place-bound ways of defining ‘us’ and ‘them,’ to register publicly the individual’s membership in a local . . . community” (p. 232). This was easy when most players on the local Junior teams had family in town. As outlined above, this is no longer the case. With more options in town, few local players, and in an era of sport migration (see Maguire & Falcous, 2010), young people’s (and adults) affiliations are more likely to be “elective” rather than prescriptive.

#### **5.3.4. Values: “Hockey is Not a Good Place For Their Young Boy or Girl to Be”**

For one couple, the reluctance to register their four boys for hockey or to bring hockey into the home (e.g., watching televised hockey games) was related to a self-described “deep-rooted hatred” for hockey players and hockey culture in small towns. When the family lived elsewhere in Canada, the father had experienced what he referred to as the stereotypical “code of silence within the Hockey Family and the favouritism afforded to hockey players in small, industry towns.” He explained how one of his sons had been beat up by a group of boys who turned out to be on the local hockey team. Nothing was done and no charges were laid. The police told the father not to ruffle any feathers because “these were hockey boys.” As we sat around talking over dinner, this father said, “I never want to come near a rink or hockey player. If those young people bring those bottles for a fundraiser near me, I’ll kill them. Hockey is a culture—it’s a disease; a mentality. And rig rats breed rink rats” (Fieldnotes, June 2, 2013).

Not all young people, parents, or sport administrators express such vehement opposition to hockey, but they nonetheless express varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the values, behaviours, and issues presented in youth hockey. They see “socialization

through participation in hockey” as problematic (Macdonald, 2014). For this reason, they stay away from the sport altogether. As Meghan says,

In just talking with other parents that aren't involved in hockey, it's almost like they do it purposely to not be involved in hockey. They say, why do you want your kids exposed to that? And so, then they put them in other sports and activities on purpose. And I remember growing up like that, too. You'd go to a hockey game, and there would be parents cursing and swearing in the stands, so it hasn't changed that way. It's kind of like it's the hockey—what's the word I want. That's what they do.

Meredith, herself not a hockey parent, exclaims, “It's the inappropriate behaviour of parents with hockey over the last years, it's like whoa. No thanks.” Steven also sees this. He played hockey growing up in another small town in British Columbia.

It's the hockey culture. It's almost in every hockey rink in North America and Canada anyways, that same culture that exists here. It's everywhere. You can walk over to the rink right now and you'll see . . . I stopped coaching this year because it just started to bug me. The way the board talks to coaches and what goes on in different stands between the parents, fans, and young people. I just said, “Okay, I'm done with coaching.”

What these parents are suggesting is that the values and practices they observe in hockey are no longer the ones they seek as part of their child-rearing practices. Anthony believes that hockey once had the values he sought to promote for his children but that it no longer does. It is no longer “the YMCA” as it was perceived to be in his day growing up in Nelson. What he means is that hockey is no longer a mechanism “to keep young adult males out of trouble.” In fact, he says, “some people believe it's a place where you *don't* create good role models, you create poor role models.” He continues by explaining how hockey has changed since he started working in the sport:

Whether we were an instructor or somebody helping in the background or someone taking the registration, our goal was to make sure that was the best moment in that kid's life up to that point. That was the only goal. It wasn't about him becoming a better hockey player. I mean, obviously, that was all part of what was happening on the ice, but it was also about making sure he was a better person, and we've lost that. We have. I mean coaches are terrible. Some coaches are absolutely the most horrific role models you would ever want. There are some coaches that are fantastic role models. I was lucky, I got lots of good role models. But I saw a lot of bad ones. And I don't know. Hockey is—people are not—there is

not a belief anymore. I hear parents talk about it all the time. They do not believe that hockey is a good place for their young boy or their young girl to be.

Some of the young people, parents, and sport administrators I spoke with are convinced that the behaviour of parents and coaches is reflective of a shift in hockey from a participation model to a competitive one and in many cases, a focus on winning. Having the privilege of being involved in local hockey since the 1960s, Anthony traces this change for me:

When I started, we used to play Saturday and Sunday. Early in the morning. There was only one rink. It had nothing to do with competition, it had nothing to do with playing games with anybody else. It was all self-contained. And, in fact, you know, the teams were—you probably hear this from most people my age and older, there were only two colour sweaters, one was red, one was blue. So, you either had a Montreal jersey without crests or just a stylized jersey, or you were wearing blue and white. Toronto. That's what it was. There were 30 or 40 kids on an ice surface, learning how to skate, learning how to pass, learning how to shoot, with a scrimmage game at the end. And that's one of the reasons I coached all my kids. But what drove me from hockey is a total lack of just letting kids play. And that's what to me is the downfall of hockey today: there is no such thing as introductory hockey anymore. It's completely—it's just completely backwards. You know, and what really drove it home for me was that the dream of being professional has meant a loss of the participation side of being the place to keep young boys out of trouble. . . . Our model is completely, is completely competitive. I mean young people don't come and just have scrimmages for the first time at the Arena anymore.

What Anthony describes is a hockey program which some feel has made winning a priority and which, in the process, may have turned young people and parents away (see Sage & Eitzen, 2016). To close this section, I bring attention to what Patrick describes as his eldest son's experience of this focus on winning:

Terry enjoyed hockey until he got to Rep. I think winning became more important than anything. And he had a couple of coaches that were really into winning, that was the most important thing. Yeah, he's not a really competitive kid. I mean he likes sports and he likes being active, but winning or losing doesn't matter to him at all, and after one particularly bad game, you know, the coach was throwing the garbage can around the dressing room and Terry started laughing, and so he got in trouble, you know, "You just lost an important . . ." I mean he was 11. He says, "Yeah, but just to see a grown man doing this made me laugh," and I mean he had a good point, right? He played two years. And even some of the players he was

playing with, winning meant a lot to them. Yes, oh, yeah, for sure for the most part, especially around Rep, yeah, it's just part of the hockey culture.

For some young people and parents, the history of hockey in the region is not meaningful enough to them to compromise their values as parents. As a result, they do not register. A by-product of this turn to a competitive model is also the commitment now required to participate and for many young people, parents, and administrators, it is simply too much or not worth it. I turn to this next.

### **5.3.5. Commitment: “Hockey Is All-Encompassing, It Consumes You”**

*Hockey is all or nothing. There is a personal cost once you pour a bunch of time into it. (Tammy, Parent and Sport Administrator)*

*Hockey is four to five days a week. Again, whether it's just a legacy thing since the turn of the century, that it is acceptable. I don't know. (Kaitlin, Parent and Multi-Sport Coach)*

Another reason for which hockey has fallen out of favour with some young people, parents, and sport administrators is the commitment and sacrifices required to take part in it. In their book, *Selling the Dream: How Hockey Parents and Their Kids Are Paying the Price for Our National Obsession*, Campbell and Parcels (2013) provide a detailed account of the resources (of time and money) required to pursue the dream of making it to the NHL. As they comically point out,

hockey stories are almost always stories of sacrifice. The long drive through blizzards on prairie highways, the gruelling routine of early-morning practices. The realization that your family is so “hockey-poor” (yes, there's a term for the special kind of poverty that descends on a household that includes hockey players) that you find yourself sharing burgers with a dog. (p. 183)

Like Campbell and Parcels (2013), Castlegar school administrator and multi-sport coach David suspects the lengthening of the hockey season has a lot to do with it. He jokes, “Young people used to go to hockey school in the summer for a week in Nelson. Young people from all over . . . would come, and lots of elite coaches and NHL players too. We'd

all lose our girlfriends for a week or two because all [the] hockey boys would be in town, eh?!” He continues:

But what I see now is a change in the calendar. Hockey used to start sort of in October—you’d start getting ready for hockey. Hockey now starts in September, and around here, and elite teams are rolling before the end of September, you know, like our Rep teams, our good Rep teams. And I mean hockey now ends at the end of March. And then spring hockey starts.

I saw the impact of this season-lengthening when soccer teams would have trouble fielding a squad for tournaments in August because some of their players were at hockey try-outs. But while some young people and parents continue to be involved in hockey, others do not because the conditions for participation are simply too much. In his town, Thomas has seen the impact of this firsthand. “For a long time, our town was doing hockey at all costs, but then the realization started to set in with families that they couldn’t.” He explains:

Economically it’s been a huge hurdle in the last few years for the young people doing hockey. It is expensive here, with the travel. We have young people in grade 4 that go to the Spokane for a weekend tournament. That’s a thousand dollars, you do that three or four times. I’ve noticed there is a huge shift in about grade 7 in the community—lots of families and young people go from community sport to school sport.

Of course, the challenge of travel is related to sport participation in general (as I have explained in Chapter 4). In hockey, this cost is magnified as the commitment becomes even greater with the length of the season. As Campbell and Parcels (2013) note, it is no longer the regular season that matters: it is what players do with their time, and parents do with their money, “during the crucial summer months and what kind of commitment [the player will] make to personal instruction that often makes or breaks a hockey career” (p. 77).

Such a long season not only adds costs but “it also takes away choice,” adds Anthony, “I hear it all the time from parents—‘I don’t want any chance that the kid gets a hockey bug because we don’t want to be married to the rink.’” Parents talked to me about being glad their children did not get the hockey bug. It was evident in their discussion that they did not want to have to put the commitment in. Below I provide two examples:

As a parent, I'm kind of glad that my son isn't involved in hockey, or my daughter for that matter, because it takes so much of your time. Like, it's just all-encompassing. We talk to his friends that are involved in hockey, and it's just—it consumes so much, you know, four times a week to practise is nothing. You know, early Saturday morning. And I grew up in a small town in Alberta, and that was the big thing, too, hockey, and you become hockey mums and hockey families, and that's what you do. (Meghan, Parent and Sport Administrator)

I must say I wasn't a big encouragement [for my girls to play hockey]. Because I heard with hockey, and well, I know with hockey, that you have to do a lot of travelling, and, you know, if it was like it was when we were kids, that you played, you know, here in Trail or something, that would have been ok. But when they say, kids even at a young age, you're travelling all over the place, and doing these tournaments all over the place, you know, when you've got—and I'm talking when maybe my two older ones were at that age, to play, do I really want to be taking Sam now and going, like a baby, and the two others, and hockey, and, my husband, he was working so much overtime, and working weekends, then it was all on me, you know, to do? And I just didn't want to be up for that challenge, in the wintertime, and doing that, and packing three kids, and one that doesn't really want to be there. And one that really doesn't know where she's at because she's a baby, and, you're trying to dress up the kid to play hockey, so for me, not so much! (Sylvie, Parent)

For these parents, the commitment required on the part of the family to play hockey is simply too much or is not desirable. It is not the way they imagine their family spending time. It is not the commitment required to play sport in general that they find to be too much: these parents have children who participate in a number of other sports and activities. It is the type of commitment required from hockey. As Castlegar parent Meredith nicely captures:

I think more families are kind of going away from hockey just because of the different culture. I just see in our circle with family, with young families wanting to choose something like skiing because it's a family activity whereas hockey is not. You sit in a rink and watch your kid play or you take them to practice and they practise with a group, but that's not a family activity anymore. So, I see a big difference in what families are selecting.

To conclude, I highlight a conversation I had with 14-year-old Rory to note that it is not only parents who want something different out of hockey, it is also young people. While he used to play Rep hockey, at the time of the interview he had not made the team for the upcoming year. Instead of being upset, he was relieved. While he may have

previously felt the pressure to play Rep hockey, he seemed to be at a point in his life when he was looking to get something else out of sport participation—something he did not think competitive hockey could provide him with.

Me: You said you used to play Rep hockey?

Rory: Yeah, well, in Peewee, which would have been before Bantam I played Rep. Yeah, and then I didn't make it this year, and I play—I could have played lower divisions in Rep but then I decided to play House, because a lot of my buddies were playing House, so I just play House with them, and that's pretty fun. It was a break from Rep. Because Rep is so much. You've got, like only one day off, pretty much. And practice is all throughout the week, and then games or tournaments, but then since I've been playing out of Trail or Rossland, I had to leave a half an hour early and you had to be there an hour before practice.

Me: Why?

Rory: I don't know.

Me: What did you do in that hour?

Rory: Sit in the dressing room. So sometimes I wouldn't have time to eat dinner or something. I had to go home and then grab a muffin or something and then go.

Me: So, practices were after school, not before?

Rory: Well, I think it was one time a week you'd have it in the morning, you'd have an early practice, and then you'd maybe have a dryland, that day, too, or just no practice. And it gets a little too much.

Me: So, you still tried out this year? You still wanted to play?

Rory: Yeah, I tried out, and I still wanted to, but then I was kind of—I was kind of almost happy that I didn't make it, because I kind of wanted that year off. To try House.

Me: And what do you think you'll do this year?

Rory: I'll probably just—I haven't really decided yet, but I'm thinking I'm just going to—because last year I didn't really try out that much, but if this year, I might give 110% in House so I can still play with my buddies and still have time for school and do other things, instead of just going hard on Rep because I don't have as many buddies on Rep, but it's kind of all the time, you don't have time for school or other things, skiing and all that, so.

Me: So, you mentioned some of your friends who stayed in Rep want to make the NHL. Do you want to make it to the NHL?

Rory: I want to, but I don't want to not have fun going there. Like if maybe playing House is more fun, maybe just play House or something, focus

on school, but whatever is more fun, sort of. Having fun doing it. Like if I feel like I want to do that I might try going but if it's not fun anymore, then just play House with my friends.

The examples I have outlined above certainly point to a hockey landscape that is different from the discourses, narratives, and representations of hockey that are played out in the collective imagination of many Canadians. For many young people, hockey does not fit into their ideal childhood. The same can be said for parents about their child-rearing practices. Still, many young people, parents, and sport administrators, even those who are adamant about the changing role of hockey in these towns, recognize that hockey continues to hold importance in the region and that people do, indeed, register to play. While youth registration numbers seem to be dwindling, and fan attendance diminishing, hockey persists in many ways and this can be attributed to the enduring ideas about its role in the region, and in child-rearing practices.

### **5.3.6. The Ubiquity of Hockey: “It’s In the Air, in the Water Around Here”**

*But I really noticed that once Julian started going to school and meeting friends and then they’re talking about hockey, then he’s, like, “Okay, I kind of want to play hockey.” Where did that come from? We don’t play hockey. It’s, like, it’s in the air, in the water around here. (Andrew, Parent)*

Despite a feeling by many that registration numbers are tanking and rinks are half-full, hockey is certainly still played and supported across the West Kootenays. Nakusp, Kaslo, Rossland, and Fruitvale still maintain rinks, while Castlegar and Nelson maintain two each. Only the smallest villages of Salmo (pop. 1100), New Denver (pop. 500), and Edgewood (pop. under 200) do not have a rink. Hockey registration numbers, while certainly down, are also proportionality much higher in the West Kootenays than in urban and suburban cities in the Lower Mainland. In three of the most successful hockey programs in the province—Coquitlam, Burnaby, and North Vancouver—proportional participation is only 3 percent, 3 percent, and 5 percent respectively. Less than 5 percent of young people aged 5-19 play hockey in these cities. In the West Kootenays, however, the numbers tell a very different story: 19 percent in Castlegar, 16 percent in Greater Trail, 32 percent in Kaslo, 18 percent in Nakusp, and 8 percent in Nelson. When it comes to

elite hockey, the West Kootenays is still considered by some as “a hotbed for Junior B Hockey” (West Kootenay Go and Do, n.d.)<sup>23</sup> with 9 percent of the teams located in the region. There are also regional teams in the Major Midget Leagues.

There is still a sense that “hockey is in the air, in the water” and many people attribute this to perceived community support of the sport. Sabrina, Raven, and Shelly—all of whom were involved in or played hockey—feel that support for hockey in their villages remains strong:

The whole community comes out to watch the games. . . . So we would put a sandwich board out there by the grocery store and the arena would be full to come and see these young people play. And same thing for when we held the play-offs here. The Early-Bird put a sign up saying, “Go Atom play-offs, go Atom play-offs,” so did the restaurants, they had the “hockey burgers” etc. [This town] IS a hockey community, it does have a real sense of wanting to keep the young people involved and playing hockey. (Sabrina)

Our town is really centred on hockey. The whole community comes out to games, like our whole arena will be packed with people who, if they don’t have young people on the team, or grandkids on the team, but everyone knows everyone, anyways, but even if they might not know everyone, they’ll still come out because it’s still hockey, and they come to every hockey game. (Raven)

Even when we were doing Kraft Hockeyville,<sup>24</sup> people who weren’t really into hockey came out to support us. So, it was like our community was coming together, I guess. (Shelly)

While there is no way to measure whether everyone does indeed come out to the games, the importance lies in the fact that these people feel that hockey is still alive and well, even if participation numbers have fallen. There is a sense that “hockey is definitely the big sport in town” (Kimberley), that “people still take hockey more seriously” (15-year-old Terry, who played hockey but quit), that the “best athletes absolutely play hockey” (Philip, Teacher), that “everybody knows where the rinks are” (Andrew, father of three boys who do not play organized hockey), and that “more people think hockey is the number one sport, that it

<sup>23</sup> The following communities maintain Junior B franchises: Beaver Valley/Fruitvale (Junior B), Castlegar (Junior B), and Nelson (Junior B), with nearby teams in Grand Forks (Junior B), Spokane (Junior B), Kimberley (Junior B), Fernier (Junior B), Creston Valley (Junior B), and Columbia Valley (Junior B). Trail (Junior A) and Cranbrook (Major Junior) also maintain Junior franchises.

<sup>24</sup> A nation-wide competition put on by the food giant, Kraft. Small towns across Canada compete to prove that they are *the* hockey town.

should come first before other sports, and that more money should be put into hockey things over other sports” (16-year-old Amy whose father is involved in hockey).

Grant recognizes that even if lots of people do not play or go watch hockey, he is still met with confusion when he admits he does not care for it. He laughs and says, “it’s like, no, we’re not a hockey household, and everyone has this confused look on their face, like, ‘What? You don’t watch hockey? You don’t play hockey? You don’t have a favourite team?’” Laughing, he adds how the assumption that everyone knows about hockey leads to teachers using hockey metaphors in class:

Even in class the teachers will talk about hockey, and you know, what’s the word I’m looking for, educational metaphors pointed towards hockey, like physics, the hockey puck slides down the ice with an index of friction of .25 Newtons, and there’s nothing—there’s no bowling metaphors for learning. There’s lots of hockey put into learning, because they feel like everyone can learn from hockey. It’s mostly through math and physics as you get closer to the senior years, where they use hockey pucks and sticks as references towards locomotion, speed, and accelerate. The two things I think about physics, are cars driving off cliffs and then hockey questions!

It is important to note that this community support is not unilateral across the region. It appears to be strongest in the villages of Kaslo and Nakusp where there are not as many other activities for young people and adults. As Daniel brazenly states, “The only reason hockey works [in those places] is because there is fuck all to do out when there is 20 feet of snow outside your house. So why not go and sit in the arena? You can’t go to the lake—what are you going to do, sit in a frozen house and fish in a frozen pond?” Shelly recognized the difference in support across the region firsthand in her involvement with hockey. Because her village is too small to have elite girls’ hockey, she played on a regional team out of Nelson and Castlegar. But one year, her town hosted a “home game” for the team. “There were a lot of people who came to support me and my teammate, Jess. It was really nice. It was advertised, and everyone came to watch our game,” she recalls. “In Castlegar, there were just the parents who came. [Here], we had more people than when Nelson hosted! It was double because it was all of my friends!” Given that the population of Nelson is more than 10 times that of her hometown, it is understandable why Shelly was impressed.

Even between the largest of the cities in the region, support is not unilateral. Julianna feels that Trail and Nelson are much better at supporting their hockey teams than is Castlegar:

I mean well, let's take the [Castlegar Junior B] Rebels, for example, their hockey team, right? You'll get their followers, but will you get the whole town to go out? Not like you would in Trail; not like you would in Nelson. There's just too many groups of people who do their own thing here. You know, everybody gets along and it's a friendly great place to be, but there's so many groups of different people that do not know what the other group is doing, whereas I believe in Trail and Nelson, you know what the other group is doing because it's been supported by the community, and your event has been supported, and then my event has been supported, and then the next event has been supported because it's looked upon as being important. We don't always—I don't always feel we get that support.

According to Julianna, Trail and Nelson do a better job of supporting hockey because they consider hockey important. While I highly doubt that she has undertaken to measure the number of fans at games or the number of dollars spent on hockey in each town, she nonetheless feels as though hockey is perceived to be more important in certain towns across the region. Before turning to why this might be, I follow with a final marker of the importance of hockey: social divisions and town rivalries.

### **5.3.7. Status and Rivalry: “Everyone Knows Who the Hockey Players Are”**

Young people and parents also mention how social divisions are still somewhat based on hockey participation, even if fewer and fewer young people are playing the sport themselves. The privilege that comes with playing hockey is very real for some people. I illuminate this in the following anecdote by Tanya, school administrator and mother of an excellent multi-sport son who, in grade 11, decided to give up Rep hockey:

That's what we've learned with our son. . . . When you're in the hockey group, your entire career is planned for by high school. And I was alone with [him] one night, my husband was in Italy, and then [my son] looked at me and said, “What if I don't want to play Rep anymore?” It was all this hype, right? And it's a hockey town. The poor kid was in knots. And we took a bit of heat from other parents. And even the coaches were just shocked, “How could he walk away from hockey? I mean it's

hockey.” So, a lot of pressure. And even my parents said they felt it, like people questioned, you know, “What are your kids doing?”

While this story reveals the immediate impact that hockey privilege can have on some people, others find this privilege to be more suffused throughout the region in the ways that young people treat each other. Catherine thinks that “everyone knows who the hockey players are. When they get up to the higher grades, they act like they’re better than everyone a lot, I find.” Similarly, 18-year-old Sasha reflects on her experience in high school stating that “if you weren’t a hockey player, you weren’t in the in-crowd.” Shelby feels the same way about Trail: “It is really centred around hockey,” she says. “It’s almost like everyone’s striving to be that, or be around those people because those are the cool people. . . . All the guys that play hockey and then the girls that want the guys that play hockey, and then it’s just kind of, that’s like the head of the school.” Terry notes that in Trail, “like 90% of kids at school are hockey jocks, and all they do is talk about hockey.” In an email exchange with Gretta, wife of Junior head coach, she writes “hockey somehow makes [the young people who play it] superior and thus anyone not playing is shafted from these inner circles.”

Not only do participants think social groups are divided along hockey lines, so too are towns. In line with what Whitson (2001) argues, many of my participants believe that hockey in the West Kootenays offers “occasions for the dramatization of communal rivalries and for public demonstrations of collective allegiances and animosities” (p. 219). “It’s not so much a disappointment to the family anymore, but more to the area when young people don’t play hockey,” says Daniel. In other words, even if individuals have more freedom to pull away from hockey, towns remain somewhat rooted in it. And some of my participants, like Daniel, believe that this link between town and hockey creates fierce rivalries between West Kootenay residents. “Hockey! Oh myyyy gooddd [Laugh]. You gotta come out and watch a . . . Midget House game or a Pee-Wee game. Oh mmmyyy god. It’s worse than it used to be.” Steven, who grew up in a small town outside of the region, says that when he first moved to the area “that’s the thing that really hit [him] in the face: this animosity almost between the towns that was caused by hockey.” He continues:

It precipitates into business and other parts of life. You almost hate people from Trail or hate people from Castlegar and vice versa. And now that I work in Castlegar and I have customers in Trail and Nelson and Cranbrook and Fernie, that sports thing is always under the surface. . . . That whole culture has been around for a long time, and it's still there.

Jennifer, a mother of three sons, all of whom tried their hand at hockey but only one of whom continued to play until the end of high school, felt this rivalry firsthand when one of her sons was forced to play hockey in a different town. A bit embarrassed, she said,

Playing for the competitor, oh boy. The first time Terry stepped on the ice in the Castlegar jersey, I started to cry. I've always been the, you know, whatever kind of parent. I was just getting over that mind-set. The parents and kids turned out great. But it was tough. There were two teams and some kids in Castlegar said, "I will absolutely not play with a Nelson or Fruitvale or Trail kid on my team," and then there were the ones who didn't care. And thank god, the guy who ended up being Terry's coach said, "If these kids [who have a bad attitude] are on my team, I'm not coaching."

It is not only the young people, parents, and administrators involved in hockey who see this. I was hanging out at a skatepark chatting with some locals about attracting skateboarders from different towns when a fellow in his twenties came up to me and told me why he thought people from Nelson do not necessarily come to skate in Castlegar:

You know, hockey brings that rivalry, people from Trail saying they don't go to Nelson. That comes from hockey. It's just like what started with the younger crowd, their parents will tell their kids, . . . "That hockey team's so gay or whatever. I don't like that whole town. I can't stand all the hockey players." They just kind of spread shit like that. . . . That why I think a lot of people say, "That town sucks," or whatever. It's like the hockey influence.

With a "link" to their parents' childhood experiences, young people take these rivalries to heart, says Daniel. Speaking about a soccer team he coached over a decade ago—primarily made up of boys who had either never played hockey or who played recreational hockey—he says:

My U18 soccer team, when it came to [Trail's] stag night, I said I would cancel the game because they were playing Castlegar on the night of their stag and they said, "if you cancel that game, we will bring you to our stag and tie you to a car and drag

you around. You do *not* cancel that game. We will kick their butts and then we will go to our stag.” Well they all showed up, kicked butt, and then went to stag!

Hockey continues to hold meaning across the region despite decreasing minor hockey registrations, little success on the rink, and recent financial woes of arguably its most recognizable Junior franchise—the Smoke Eaters. So why is this?

### **5.3.8. The 100-Year-Old Hockey Legacy: The Champion Trail Smoke Eaters**

*“So, you said you were here for work?” he asked. I told him that I was doing work on sports in small towns and he said I had come to the right place because this was “BC Sports Town.” He immediately mentioned “Home of Champions” and pointed to the Smokies’ championship flags from the 1940s. (Fieldnotes, February 14, 2015, Trail Memorial Arena)*

According to Kaitlin, one reason for which hockey continues to hold sway in the region is the “100-year-old legacy of hockey in this area.” Atwell (1988) notes that British Columbia’s first covered ice rinks were constructed in the West Kootenays in Sandon and Nelson in 1893 and 1884, respectively. By 1920, 71 percent of the province’s operational ice rinks were in the West Kootenays. Forty years later in 1960, the number remained high at 42 percent. It was not only the presence of rinks that made the region known for hockey; it was also the “unrivaled” success of the West Kootenay hockey teams during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. In his research on hockey in the West Kootenays, Decosse (2015) crunches the numbers: “the Kootenay region won 53% of senior provincial championships, 74% of junior provincial championships, and 71% of minor hockey championships between 1912–1960” (p. 54). Between 1940 and 1979, the region produced 22 percent of all British Columbia-born NHL hockey players—“a remarkable number” considering the region never represented more than 7.5 percent of the province’s population (p. 56). During this same period, the Trail Smoke Eaters also won two World Hockey Championships (1939 and 1961) and according to local historians, it is these victories that “left an indelible mark on the Silver City, one that serves as a source of pride for its residents, and a rich and unforgettable tradition for the Orange and Black” (Bailey, 2016b). It is this history that earned Trail its coveted reputation of being the “Home of Champions” (Bailey, 2016b) that inextricably tied the branding of the Smoke

Eaters to the City of Trail and that gave global recognition to both (Bailey, 2016a). Daniel adds, “those glory days made the town so proud. ‘This little town that had lead in the air and the smoking stacks’ and all that stuff, won a World Championship.”

In the years that followed, the region’s success was less than remarkable. As Decosse (2015) outlines, from 1991–1995, the percent of British Columbian elite hockey players born in the Kootenay region fell from a high of 21.3 in 1955 to 7.2. Between 1992 and 2002, 12.6 percent of players drafted to the Western Hockey League—the highest level of Junior hockey in Canada—were from the Kootenay region, but from 2003–2014 it was only 3.2 percent. James captures this in his retrospective analysis below:

In Trail people think their kids will play in the NHL. That there is some path to follow. Correct? That’s no longer the case. But it was at one time. I think it will happen in certain situations when there is a history. In Nelson, guys that are in their 50s, there were four guys that went to the NHL. But in Trail they had a history that kids went on to the NHL. A few Major League players did the same with baseball. There was a path at one point.

These victories alone do not explain why hockey continues to hold cultural sway some 60 years after the glory years and at least two decades after the last big wave of draftees. After all, “when was the last time Trail actually won anything?” jokes Tamara. So, why does hockey continue to be “perceived by a lot of the parents as the most important thing”?

According to the life course perspective, “the circumstances and experiences of one individual can affect other people to whom they are connected” (Crosnoe & Elder Jr., 2015, p. 83). Mitchell (2006) adds that because lives are linked, “one generation can transmit to the next the ‘reverberations’ of the historical circumstances that shaped its life history” (p. 24). Thomas, who thinks that hockey continues to be recognized because “there’s that passing it down through the generations sort of thing,” highlights this principle. As I outline below, this is only possible when many of the people who lived through this historical moment and are responsible for the 100-year-old legacy of hockey in the region are still around and involved in hockey; there is a spatialized component to the passing down of these “reverberations.”

### 5.3.9. Passing It Down: “They Planted the Seed”

*In our day, hockey was the culture. And I think they still try to keep that going.* (Tamara, Parent)

*There’s more to Trail than just hockey, because there really is. But that’s all there was for so long. There’s Cominco and there’s hockey, right? And that was the mentality or the view of that area, that’s what they were known for.* (Juliana, Parent)

According to Decosse (2015), many players who were brought in by Teck kept their jobs at the local smelter after retiring from hockey and became members of the local towns, contributing to grassroots hockey through coaching, officiating, and volunteering with the local Minor Hockey Association. “They planted the seed,” says a former member of the 1961 World Championship team, “their genetics ran through here” (Decosse, 2015, p. 61). In an interview, Theo elaborates:

When those guys [from the Smokies] had kids, those kids grew up, all they knew was hockey. And who came out of that? You’ve got the NHL players like Steve Tambellini [born in 1958] and [Mike] Zanier [born in 1962] and Pat Price [born in 1955] from Nelson, and [Ray] Ferraro [born in 1964]. And the reason is they were all kids at the time of the Western Hockey League or kids of players who played in it. So, Trail had a real core of hockey talent. But it was really the offspring of the [“Champions”] that all kind of went to the NHL and higher-level hockey. There was a whole bunch of them. But it wasn’t a fluke. . . . They just grew up with it. So, it was a cultural thing.

Even the young people who were born decades after these players recognize this. “It’s been here for so long. All the people that are married and live here now, they used to play hockey here and stuff. I think that’s why they like it so much,” says 16-year-old Amy, whose mother and father both grew up in the area and whose father played hockey and continues to support it. Sasha, herself not a hockey player, recognizes that “hockey is the culture of [this place]; all the dads played hockey. And a lot of hockey young people are related. They’re all cousins. So, it gets passed down.” Shelby “feels like the adults grew up with hockey, and that’s just the way it is kind of thing for them, especially because a lot of people that are in Trail have been there for their whole lives, like for a few generations. They used to watch the Smokies.” As the motto says, “Once a Smoke Eater, Always a

Smoke Eater” (Taylor & Manna, n.d.). Reflecting, Thomas says he “used to be unhappy with how much hockey was promoted around here: like 10 articles to 1. I thought, ‘this is misleading.’” He pauses and says, “but really it comes down to parents promoting what they think is important. And that is what they grew up with.”

These young people and adults recognize that the history of hockey lives on not only through the experiences young people are creating for themselves on the rink, but through the “reverberations” of the experiences of those who remember the glory days firsthand—something only possible when the folks who grew up during or shortly after the peak of hockey success are, for the most part, still living in the area. Steven explains this is in relation to his experience growing up in another small town:

Those people that grew up in that time, they are still here. There’s a large transient population in a lot of other small town areas like in Vernon, I hardly knew anybody that was born there. If you grew up there your entire life, you probably left when you got to 18, like I did. . . . Well, in the Kootenays, it doesn’t change. The people that are born here are still here. The people in Trail that were born there, are still there. So, the Western Hockey League games they watched as young people and those fastball games they watched as young people, they still have that. . . . That has changed a little bit now because our younger generation can’t get jobs here much now. But that’s just recently. A lot of the guys my age, the guys who are in their 40s and 50s, they went to high school here, they’re still here, most of them, and they’re the ones that are coaching now or starting to stop, because their kids are now starting to get older now. So maybe we’ll start to see that change.

A similar situation has arisen in baseball. As I wrote earlier in this chapter, under the guidance of Andy Bileski Trail developed a rich tradition of baseball between the 1960s and 1980s. Just as in hockey, success soon faded once the main driving force (in this case, Andy) was gone. However, many of those boys still live in the area and “talk about those days when they went to Nationals, and they had the all-star teams from Trail and went to Williamsport,” remarks Patrick, who has lived in the region for almost twenty-years but grew up in another small-town region. “Their pictures are in the Hall of Sports in Trail. And they’re the guys that now are keeping it alive and promoting it for their 16 kids.” According to Steven, who has raised his kids in the West Kootenays,

There are a few people who are hanging on to these memories, spearheading the programs here, who believe that that’s the way it’s got to be because that’s the way it’s always been. They were on those

teams with Bileski, they played with Jason Bay, and they are still hanging onto that. A lot of these adults that still hang out in Trail, they look back at those days so fondly.

When people who are born in and played and/or watched hockey (and baseball) in the West Kootenays stay in the West Kootenays, the discourses and narratives of the sport in the region live on. As I have pointed out elsewhere, this support is not unilateral across the region. It is particularly the case in Trail, where they “yell the loudest,” that hockey has been most successfully passed down through the generations. This is well articulated by Marissa:

I think at one time when you talked about sport history, the intention or the inference was the whole area, and then through time and whatever, it became just Trail, and the rest of Castlegar, Nelson and everybody else got dropped off the map of the interpretation of Trail being the sports centre of the Kootenays kind of thing. They talk about their World Championship team, well, those players came from Nelson, Castlegar, Beaver Valley, Rossland. They weren't Trail players, the team happened to be based in Trail. But Trail has taken that on, that image on as just Trail instead of, you know, the whole West Kootenay or this whole part of the West Kootenay.

If I had to choose one town which focused the most on hockey, it would be Trail. In 2005, the *Province* newspaper named Trail “BC's #1 Sports town,” and when residents were asked to make their case to the selection committee, they focused almost exclusively on hockey. To this day, Trail continues to call itself “Home of the Champions,” with memorabilia available across the city. (There is also a rumour that City Hall still answers the phone with that phrase although I did not test that theory myself). “Don't even get me started on that one,” says Greg, “Okay, I'll get going on it. It's whoever yells the loudest. Trail always seems to have the upper hand on yelling the loudest.” He continues, “So they've been riding this 1939–1961 Smoke Eaters for a long time.” Lisa adds that she “used to hate when her kids played against Trail” because of the air that the parents had: “‘We're the City of Champions.’ Well, no, you're just freakin' people playing hockey, all right?” “The Hall of Fame for Sports, 90% of that is hockey players!” says Grant. I saw this myself when touring the museum. As seen in Figures 1–3, the streets of Trail are lined with statues and the walls of buildings are painted with murals commemorating the city's hockey history. It is nearly impossible to ignore these dedications to hockey as they are

front-and-centre as the road leads into town. Finally, while I did not conduct a quantitative content analysis of newspaper content, what I noticed was that the *Trail Daily Times* dedicated an overwhelming amount of space to all things hockey.



**Figure 1.** Trail Memorial Arena Mural, seen as the highway comes into town.



**Figure 2. (Left) Statue called “The Family” presented to the City of Trail on the occasion of the City’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It “proudly represents the strength of our community, both past and present, looking confidently into the future.”**

**Figure 3. (Right) “The Hockey Player,” representing Trail’s hockey history.**

What I have demonstrated in this section is that there are certain groups of people who are keeping hockey alive in the area because it is what they experienced growing up and therefore it is what they think the young people in their towns should also experience. While they may not be the majority, their voices and actions certainly speak volumes. Hockey’s elevated status in the region may not derive from high registration numbers or a recent history of championships. However, the consequences of people’s actions who want to make it real are just that: real. As Daniel says, hockey is not “real, tangible. It’s real in that they make it real.” It is to these consequences that I turn next.

### 5.3.10. Living in the Past: “What Happens Is You Live in Mythology”

*They memorialize everything, their baseball, their hockey. They are so far below they can't see what's around them. They are living in the past.*  
(Fieldnotes, May 22, 2013, Slocan)

According to some of my participants, the energy funnelled towards keeping hockey alive in the region makes it hard to get other projects going for the local young people. There was a strong conviction among a group of participants that roadblocks exist because people in positions of power in the area still think “hockey is culturally something you do not touch,” as Anthony says. “Those decisions are still based on past events, not events that are happening right now. Based on the fact that 40 years ago, the arena used to be full. . . . What happens is you live in mythology. We are living in the past.” The consequence of living in the past is a narrow vision of what residents—both young and old—want or need as children and parents. “Realistically,” says Lindsay, the people who were against the BMX track, it was just kind of like, you know, you have old beliefs, not willing to think that things could be different.” “The people that have the funds, the people that have the connections, the money, are promoting the things they know: hockey,” says Trevor. “If elderly people were into skateboarding, there would be no by-law against it!” Kimberley adds this, “I would like to see the paper isn't full of just old people talking about things that young people don't think are relevant anymore.”

Perhaps the most vivid example of this tension between those who “live in the past” and those who live in the present, so to speak, was found in skateboarding. During my time in the field, I witnessed grassroots efforts to recognize the popularity of skateboarding yet I also recognized the resistance from the top. It was in Nelson and Trail that these two sides collided most visibly. Anthony told me that a narrow vision has made it challenging to get a skatepark built in Nelson. “In 2005, they had a great opportunity but what did they do? They chose to spend all of the money on the ice rink. And they left an aquatics centre that will need to be repaired anyways. So, I guess it comes back to the mythology” (In fact, the roof of the pool collapsed in 2015, leaving Greater Nelson with no swimming facility for over a year). Anthony continues to speak about the “farce” that he calls the funding of local Junior Hockey in Nelson:

All of that public resource going to something for kids who don't grow up here, they do not create businesses here, they don't, they do not. And the only justification is possibly that some locals believe in spectator value. "It gives people something to watch." So, then you've got to say "okay, well, if that's the reason why, why don't we subsidize movie theatres, and everything like that?" And that's the amazing thing about mythology. Imagine this argument: If we don't fund the junior team, we will lose it and you would have no kids playing minor hockey. That's their goal. So, if that was true, if that was logically true, that means we should have more young people playing minor hockey than anything else, because that's the highest level sport we have in town. There's no such team in the soccer side. Yet they have all the young people playing. So, it's the myth of the opportunity. There was only a real opportunity when the team used to be 80% local young people.

In a 2016 editorial written in the *Trail Daily Times*, Dave Mackay expresses his frustration, pointing to the irony in calling Trail the "Home of Champions" if it only supports *certain* champions: "We call ourselves the 'Home of the Champions,' then we should step up to the plate and build [the skatepark] for the kids that reside in our area. Not every kid wishes to participate in hockey/baseball or can afford it" (Mackey, 2016). Dave is not alone in his urging of a broader definition of "champions." As Trevor argues,

Josh [a professional skateboarder who lived and passed away in Castlegar] has to be the most underrated spokesperson for the community. He brought so many people here because of skateboarding but you don't really hear about it. Had he been a hockey player or a track athlete that got this sort of recognition, there would have been a statue for this guy or there would have been something major for this guy. Trail would have painted a mural for him. Or Trail would have claimed him as theirs! (Laugh)

Grant expresses similar frustrations. As a boy who has many interests—not one of which is hockey—he says with desperation:

Trail also has *another* arena. That's the one thing I find the most "off": you can't find just an open gym where you can play volleyball, or tennis inside or badminton. But every city from here to the Coast you'll find a hockey rink. . . . I just find it odd because the year we moved to Fruitvale was the last year for the middle school. It was odd that suddenly there's no government funding for a school, but there's still enough for two arenas within 20 minutes of each other? Now in Trail, it's like the ice is smooth enough but they still fix it. *Nobody's listening*. They'll put the money towards someone polishing the two hockey cups.

Three years after this interview with Grant, it seems that this mythology is weakening, but it has not completely disappeared. In March 2015—ten years after the first proposal for a skatepark—students from the local high school in Trail heard once again that a skatepark would not be considered for the 2015 City budget (Regnier, 2015). Speaking on the youth’s behalf, a retired Principal argued the City of Trail was again ignoring *most* youth. “We remind you to invest in young people and create a community that supports *all* types of families and not just those involved in organized sports and organized clubs,” he said. In July 2016, the City of Trail agreed to grant the Trail Smoke Eaters \$15,298 to cover outstanding debt related to renting the Cominco Arena. As Bailey (2016a) notes, this is “the largest amount ever granted by council for a sports team” (Bailey, 2016a) and the City went out of its way to work something out that would keep the Smoke Eaters in Trail. City councillors quoted in the article say it is the “least they can do” and that it would be “an absolute disaster if the team were not to continue to exist.” One has to ask why it would be such a disaster considering the team only rosters four local players, does not make any money (nor do other teams in the BCHL), is constantly threatened with debt in the range of \$50,000 depending on whether the team makes the playoffs (something they have not done in many years), and the arena itself runs an annual operating deficit of nearly a million dollars every year (Rossi, 2012).

The good news? In May 2016, two local communities received funding from the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT)—a non-governmental organization mandated with using income earned from the *Columbia Basin Trust Act* to deliver benefits to residents of the Columbia Basin—to redo/build skateparks (Regnier, 2015). In December 2016, the City of Trail also finally committed support for an All Wheel Park to be built in 2018 (Regnier, 2016c) provided it is successful in receiving a grant from the CBT. Given that it was only in January 2016 that the CBT added “Recreation” to its funding pillars, power still rests very firmly in the hands of local city councils and boosters. Many residents still feel that their towns are living in a proverbial hockey past.

### 5.3.11. The Game of Whose Childhood? Gendered Hockey Discourses

*Can you be “BC’s Number 1 Sports Town” if it’s only one sport? And if it’s only boys? (Grade 11 boy, Trail)*

In this chapter, I have described the ways some residents promote hockey at all costs: they do so because they believe that hockey is a fundamental part of growing up and raising children in the West Kootenays. This vision of growing up, however, is decidedly based on raising boys (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). In her work entitled, *The Game of Whose Lives? Gender, Race, and Entitlement in Canada’s “National” Game*, Adams (2006) argues that hockey has always been about (raising) white boys. Speaking of her own experiences, Sylvie says, “When I was a kid, you just got all the neighbourhood kids together, and then they’re all out; the boys, that was what they did, they played hockey, hockey, hockey. There was no girls’ hockey. I would have played. I love sports.”

This near erasure of girls from participation in hockey is not entirely surprising given it is well established that ice hockey is a primary site of socialization for boys and men in Canada (Macdonald, 2014). What I found particularly interesting is that not a single adult I interviewed, even those who had girls in hockey or who wished they had been granted the opportunities to play hockey themselves, problematized the exclusionary nature of discourses on child rearing through hockey. As a matter of fact, one mother seemed to think that things were too good for girls now at the expense of boys:

There is so much opportunity for females to play hockey. I have a son who plays hockey and at times it’s irritating how much more there is for the girls than for the boys. Girls can play for two teams but boys can’t. If we are putting all of our attention on the girls playing hockey, on encouraging the girls to play, then what about the boys? They just assume the boys want to play. But I know my son would have loved to play on a Kaslo and a Nelson team. At the West Kootenay meeting, it’s taboo to bring up anything against the girls, but it’s like, “Why can’t it just be the same?” Why do we have to make the girls like this and the boys stay here but we propel girls a bit farther?

One has to wonder if the 35 girls in Castlegar, 53 in Trail, four in Kaslo, 11 in Nakusp, and 16 in Nelson feel there is too much opportunity for them. One must wonder if they feel they have a stake in their “hockey town” given that there are not enough of them in any single

town and age group to form an entire team. Interestingly, and perhaps representing a loosening or increased awareness of gender norms among young people (Cichy, Lefkowitz, & Fingerman, 2007; Fitzpatrick Bettencourt, Vacha-Haase, & Byrne, 2011), it was the young people in this project who were most aware that hockey was a boys' thing and that this might not be a great thing. Raven tells me this:

I mean hockey is a boys' thing. And so just recently there's just been a couple of girls that play hockey and now in the really younger age groups, there's half the team is girls, half the team is guys. So, I don't know how that's going to change things. As I was growing up, it was still that hockey was a guys' thing. A couple of girls played but I thought, the guys feel like "Oh you play hockey, you're awesome" but it was more like "No!" They didn't like that the girls played along with them. They were more like, "This is a guy's sport, this is for us, why are you, you shouldn't be playing," you know, that kind of attitude.

The season before this interview, there were indeed six girls who played hockey in the same age group. Otherwise, the others were spread out on various teams. This lack of girls' participation made Sasha question whether hockey was, indeed, a big thing in her town and among young people. While earlier in our conversation she had insisted that the town revolved around hockey, when I asked her directly why that was, she reflected: "Well, there's so many people involved with it, like, I'm not involved with it and I don't know many girls involved. So, I actually don't know why it's huge!?" It was not only girls who questioned this narrative. Members of the Seniors Boys Basketball team that I travelled with shared their thoughts:

Me: Do you think this is a hockey town?

Boy 1: I don't know if it is, really. That much more than any other small Canadian town really? I mean, not too many girls play hockey.

Boy 2: I know a couple of girls that do, but mostly it's a guy thing.

Boy 3: Can you be "BC's Number 1 Sports Town" if it's only one sport? And if it's only boys?

What these findings reveal is that although girls are involved in hockey in the West Kootenays, regional culture (and child rearing for some parents) remains particularly centred around their boys' hockey. The fact that girls' participation numbers remain incredibly low (and that some towns have *no* girls registered in Minor Hockey) suggests that many parents and young people (both boys and girls) may not consider hockey as a

site of socialization for girls. The fact that hockey registration numbers for boys have also dwindled suggests that many parents do not view hockey as the primary site of socialization for boys either. As illustrated throughout Chapters 4 and 5, these parents and children may opt for enrolment in other activities or sports. Their actions reveal that hockey, and the associations of small-town identity that surround it, “may have less appeal than other sports for those who have been marginal in the stories that an older, whiter . . . Canada has told about itself (Abdel-Shehid, 1999)” (Whitson, 2001, p. 232). An “unfailingly positive” acceptance of socialization through hockey silences others who do not fit in or who may experience their community differently based on what they draw upon for their “identity, feelings of belonging, and general wellbeing” (Oncescu & Giles, 2014, p. 311). It also silences research which has consistently demonstrated that hockey “promulgate[s] masculine character traits to the extent that they become problematic (Adams, 2006; Allain, 2008, 2010; Atkinson, 2010; Robidoux, 2001, 2002). Hockey is not necessarily a good place for boys either, and for that reason, many West Kootenay parents may be withdrawing in ways not seen when their own parents were raising them in the region.

## 5.4. Conclusion

What I have established in this chapter is that the material and structural conditions in the West Kootenays do not alone shape experiences of organized youth sport. People’s ideas about rurality—that is, what they *imagine* or *represent* rural places to be and feel like—are equally important. Additionally, there are always multiple representations of the rural in operation in the same place, and these become visible in the choices people make about sport participation. For some people, organized youth sport is entirely incompatible with what they imagine the West Kootenays/rural living to be and therefore opt out entirely or create alternative opportunities for themselves/their children. Others have an entirely different idea of the West Kootenays/rural living, one that they believe *is* entirely compatible with organized youth sport, particularly hockey and baseball. One discourse of rural living and child rearing never completely overwhelms the other. By examining the everyday lives of those involved in organized youth sport, it is evident that competing ideas

of rural living are at play in the West Kootenays and that they play out in a variety of material ways in the child-rearing practices of adults. I discuss these practices in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6.

### The West Kootenays: “A Good Place to Grow Up”?

In this chapter, I relate the ethnographic material in Chapters 4 and 5 to practices of childhood and parenthood in the West Kootenays. I discuss how the material, structural, and ideological conditions presented in Chapters 4 and 5 complicate the pursuit of ideal childhoods and parenthoods through organized youth sport. Drawing on a place-based, life course perspective which stresses the spatialized interaction between structure and human agency, I highlight the diversity of approaches to parenting and childhood that stem from the negotiation of the conditions presented in Chapters 4 and 5. While I group these approaches to parenting and childhood into four categories—“Pursuing the Dream,” “Making it Work,” “Opting Out,” and “Being Pushed Out”—I do not suggest that practices of parenthood or childhood in the West Kootenays are static or that they fall neatly into a typology. That would dismiss the fluid nature of parenting and childhood. Rather, I show how their parenting and childhood practices in the community of organized youth sport result in “observable differences in how people act [which] can be meaningfully and fruitfully grouped into categories, without violating the complexity of daily life” (Lareau, 2011, p. 236).

#### 6.1. Pursuing the Dream

*Kids dream. That’s just part of growing up. And if you’re growing up in Canada, chances are good you’ll go to sleep at night dreaming about hockey. It could be ballet, or lacrosse, or classical music, but chances are, it’s hockey. And those dreams are also what get kids out of bed in the morning. Dreams motivate us and make us better. Childhood without those dreams would be a dreary, awful thing. But when as kids we dream—and when we dream on our kids’ behalf, what exactly is it that we want?* (Campbell & Parcels, 2013, p. 5)

*His parents think that he’s great. He doesn’t think he’s great.* (Branden, 16 years old)

Campbell and Parcels (2013) note that across Canada, young people and their parents spend a considerable amount of money and time pursuing the dream of playing professional sports (particularly hockey). Childhood and parenthood have become intimately connected to the dream of making the headlines:

But as the dream progresses, it gets more serious and there is more at stake. Even before the player enters his teens, the pursuit of the dream becomes more methodical and things are done specifically with the dream in mind. As more and more players [and their families] fall by the wayside, the dream becomes more narrowly defined[.] At this point, participation becomes an “investment” for those [parents] looking to gain some sort of payback for the countless bills, early mornings, and family sacrifices. (Campbell and Parcels, 2013, p. 7)

A small segment of parents in the rural and small towns of the West Kootenays seem to stop at nothing to provide their children with the opportunities necessary to pursue the dream of athletic success. From a place-based, life course perspective, these are parents who use their agency to tirelessly “resist the shifting geographies” of elite organized youth sport which have made it nearly impossible to achieve sporting success from one’s rural and small town (Decosse, 2015). These are parents for whom the structural conditions presented by living in rural and small-town British Columbia (i.e., small population, distance to population, economic instability, and geographic isolation) are considered nuisances that can be worked around in the pursuit of providing for their children. As “innovators” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 8), these parents rewrite the deficit narrative that is entrenched in literature on rural and small-town young people’s access to leisure (Kowalski & Lankford, 2011; Sharp et al., 2015; Walia & Liepert, 2012). Owing to the costs of travel, it can take a tremendous amount of money to pursue the dream when one’s home base is the West Kootenays. As “innovative” as some parents want to be, they must still work within the material resources available to them. Many possess the time and money to dedicate to organized youth sport participation. While they may not necessarily lead lavish lives, they direct significant resources to their children’s pursuit of the dream (Campbell & Parcels, 2013).

Looking at parents’ travel patterns provides a good example of this type of child rearing. Over the course of the research, I heard on a number of occasions how parents would repeatedly drive long distances to practice and games, and not always in the best

of conditions. Steven worries: “I mean just the risk of all that travelling. You’re getting tired and, well, I think it’s crazy. We have young people that play in Nelson Minor Hockey that are from New Denver and Nakusp, they come here twice a week for practice. Two-and-a-half hours. And the weather’s horrible.” The problem is that if the participants do not travel, they will either have nowhere to play or will jeopardize their position on the team. Under such circumstances, “some of those parents will drive no matter what. They will jump into that SUV, and they will drive. Just because they have to be there because otherwise little Jimmy’s getting benched on the weekend.” These parents are worried that if they do not put all of their effort in, their child’s athletic future will be negatively impacted.

As I described in Chapter 4, the logistics of pursuing sporting success from a home base of the West Kootenays may intensify the commitment required of all sport parents (i.e., to spend money, travel, and move the family). Likewise, children may lead busier, more overscheduled, and more tiring lives than their peers who are pursuing the dream from their urban and suburban homes. Because rural and small towns in the West Kootenays do not provide the elite training and competition opportunities that urban and suburban centres do, young people looking to “make it big” may need to move away from home at a very young age. Below I profile three professional athletes who were born in rural and small towns across Canada and who moved away at a young age.

The first example is Jordin Tootoo. In 2002, Jordin Tootoo became the first Inuk to play professional hockey and in 2003, he became “the first Inuk player and the first player to grow up in Nunavut to participate in an NHL game” (Wikipedia, 2017). According to his official website, “On the western shore of Hudson Bay is Jordin’s hometown of Rankin Inlet, or Kangiqliniq (“deep inlet”). Jordin grew up playing hockey on frozen lakes, camping and learning to hunt and fish with his dad. This town is so remote that it cannot be reached by car” (“Jordin 22 Tootoo,” n.d.). But did Jordin really “grow up” in Nunavut? Did he hone his elite hockey skills in Nunavut? No. Jordin Tootoo left his hometown at the age of 14 to play in Alberta and has not played hockey out of Rankin Inlet since.

Carey Price serves as the second example. He is well known for being the NHL goalie that grew up in the tiny, remote indigenous community of Anahim Lake, British

Columbia (pop. 360). According to his official website, “At the age of 2 Carey learned to skate on the river next to his home and spent countless hours over the next few years playing outdoors with his dad and friends” (“Carey Price,” n.d.). But the “countless hours” playing outside are not why he made it to the NHL:

Although he spent lots of time on the ice, there was no indoor arena or hockey program in Anahim Lake. He began playing organized hockey at the age of 9 at the nearest arena located in Williams Lake, BC. The commute to Williams Lake for games and practices required a 640-km round-trip three times per week. Fortunately, Carey’s dad had a pilot’s license and they were able to fly back and forth when the weather was good, but most of the time they had to drive.

As soon as Carey wanted to play competitive organized hockey, he was required to travel out of the region, relying on the support of his family. At the age of 15, Carey moved to “nearby” Quesnel (900 kilometres round-trip from Anahim Lake) and eventually to Washington State.

Third, and more recently, is the story of Mitchell Jacobson. On October 30, 2016, the CBC published an article entitled, “Tuktoyaktuk goalie takes the net for Ontario junior ‘A’ hockey team” (Mandeville, 2016). On the surface, this would seem like an astonishing accomplishment: An 18-year-old Inuvialuit child from a Northwest Territories hamlet of 850 located on the Arctic ocean makes it big in hockey. This surely demonstrates what children from isolated communities can accomplish. But does it? Yes, Mitchell started playing “minor hockey in Tuktoyaktuk when he was five years old,” but “as his interest in the sport progressed, he eventually moved away from his home community and family,” writes Mandeville. At the age of 13, the young player moved to suburban British Columbia to attend an elite hockey school and has not lived back home since.

I should note that moving away from home for sporting excellence is not exclusively a rural or small town phenomenon. Young people growing up in urban and suburban centres may also move away from home to pursue elite opportunities. Canadian NHL player Sydney Crosby spent much of his childhood in Coal Harbour, a suburb of Halifax, Nova Scotia (pop. 332,518 in 1996) (Province of Nova Scotia, 1998). At the age of 15, he moved to Minnesota to attend a highly regarded preparatory school that was known for producing NHL players (Stewart, 2017). Working-class or poor youths who want

to “get out of their neighbourhood” may also move away from home. This is because, note Sage and Eitzen (2016), “more than any other cultural practice, the sports world has been one of the most influential contributors to shaping the belief about widespread social mobility . . . through sport” (p. 121). Popularized in the documentary *Hoop Dreams* (1994) and books like Darcy Frey’s *The Last Shot* (1994) and H. G. Bissinger’s *Friday Night Lights* (1990), there is a belief that youth from poor urban areas can “skyrocket to fame and fortune through success in professional sports” (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 121). However, this last narrative is a racialized one (Brooks, 2011; Cole & King, 1998; Giardina & McCarthy, 2008; Sage & Eitzen, 2016; Smith, 1995). For urban, African American young men, sport (particularly basketball) has long been considered the only socially accepted avenue of success (Giardina & McCarthy, 2008, p. 48) in the face of the “failed black family” (Cole & King, 1998, p. 55) and limited opportunities for middle-class success (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 127). Finally, young athletes who play a peripheral sport or who are members of national programs that are centralized in one or two locations across the country may also have to make the move.

What is distinctive about young people’s experience of organized youth sport in rural and small-town British Columbia, however, is that a move away from home may come at a much earlier or less significant (i.e., competitive) stage in their athletic career. In Chapter 4, I presented accounts of a few young people who were not necessarily exceptional athletes, but whose parents were nonetheless considering moving them to the Lower Mainland or who had themselves moved so their children could pursue more competitive opportunities. Even though these young people were enrolled in several organized youth sports and at the highest level possible in the region, this did not present them with enough of an avenue to pursue their dream. In the end, a move was necessary, if not imminent.

For a variety of reasons (e.g., parents’ employment, desire to continue living in a small town) some children do not move away. However, this does not mean they are not, in their own way, in pursuit of the dream. They may choose to play on a team out of town or region because it presents a better chance to reach the dream than does their local team. As emphasized by Decosse (2015), chasing the dream is nearly impossible from

rural and small towns. When parents and young people are set on doing so, they must take their efforts on the road. What is noteworthy is that in the process, their actions may have significant consequences on the programs that are trying to survive in their own hometowns. As was nicely captured in a Facebook post by a rural resident on January 23, 2016 in response to an interview with Trail resident and former NHL player Ray Ferraro,

Very sad. My boys can't play in our hometown because many of the kids their age are "chasing the dream" in bigger city leagues. Not enough young people to make a team here. While I can't or shouldn't blame them for wanting bigger and better, it's just the sad reality for us parents that just want to see our young people play in our own little rink. Also, with spud league<sup>25</sup> going to the wayside, many towns here are now joining the Central League where you have to drive 2 or 3 hours to a game, while passing several other little towns along the way . . . most people just don't have the time or money for this . . . minor hockey is just not what it used to be and has killed the "dream" for young people who just want to play.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, organizations in the West Kootenays often rely on "every warm body" to make teams. With an aging population and rural restructuring already not in their favour, the organizations have a tough time fielding teams; when parents and children are in pursuit of the dream, they compound the problem for these local, rural and small-town sport organizations (and the parents who pursue child rearing through organized youth sport, albeit locally). With some families taking their efforts out of town, local programs shut down or amalgamate. In some cases, there are no longer enough teams to make local leagues, and teams must play games many hours away. These actions can hamper the efforts of parents who want to provide their own children with local opportunities in organized youth sport. In his recollection of dealings with these "types of parents and kids" over the years, Daniel says this:

We have parents who think their kid should be able to become Beckham<sup>26</sup> and do it here. So, we are going to make our program such that it only caters to the select player that is at that level? And everybody else should step up to the plate or else

<sup>25</sup> The Spud League refers to the Southern Alberta Little Spud League. It represents the Minor Hockey interests of rural and small towns in southern Alberta.

<sup>26</sup> David Beckham is a professional soccer player from England who played between the years of 1990 and 2013. For much of his career, he was arguably the most well-known overseas soccer player to many North American youth.

we don't have a team? And your kid is going where exactly? And then your kid quits but then you have no local program to register them in anymore!

The lives of these families are a far cry from the rural idyll of slowness, tranquility, frugality, and what Wuthnow (2013) calls “rootedness.” After all, the families who pursue this dream spend a considerable amount of time away from their hometowns (Campbell & Parcels, 2013). This means that it is nearly impossible for these parents or young people to contribute to the “stuff” of rural and small towns (e.g., civic activities, school sports) as depicted in hegemonic representations of rural living (Bissinger, 1990; Foley, 1990; Oriard, 2013; Wuthnow, 2013). These parents, for whom “the social and cultural potency of organized youth sport” (Dyck, 2003, p. 70) overwhelms the social and cultural potency of rurality, violate the ideals of rural childhood. For them, organized youth sport offers a means of fulfilling expectations around contemporary parenting in ways that ideals of rural living and parenting do not.

What these behaviours may also reveal are the ways some parents (and their children) worry about their prospects as “rural people” and may consider their children’s—particularly their son’s—participation in organized youth sport as a way to obtain respect (Messner, 1992). As has been documented by sociologists of sport, “the more limited a boy’s options appear to be, and the more insecure his family situation, the more likely he is to make an early commitment to an athletic career” (Messner, 1992, p. 40). Within the context of the West Kootenays, one might consider how these parents and their sons commit to pursuing the dream of athletic success in order to mitigate the “risk” of being rural (Looker & Naylor, 2009) in many of the same ways some social groups (i.e., the poor, working-class, urban, racialized) use sport to mitigate the risks of being disenfranchised (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Cole & King, 1998). In his work on “football towns” in the United States, Oriard (2013) argues that football matters so much in rural and small towns because they often have so little else to offer to the children. Young boys, he argues, “bear the hopes of the community,” sons of millworkers desperate to escape their fathers’ fate through football scholarships (p. 73). While I have presented evidence which suggests there *is* a lot for young people to do in the West Kootenays and that the economy is more varied and robust than in many of the archetypal “football towns” Oriard (2013) and others

describe, it is reasonable to suggest that families who pursue the dream may feel restricted (even if not desperate) in the West Kootenays.

How young people themselves interpret the discourse of rural risk and how this translates into experiences of rural childhoods is also important to consider. As captured in 16-year-old Neil's conversation with me, some young people have a real fear of being left behind. He says one of his "biggest fears is, like, to stay here and do nothing. Yeah, I would hate to do that. It's just depressing." His hope was to get a soccer scholarship and he did. In many ways, his actions, and the action of others in this group, are like the countless other marginalized groups—particularly boys—who latch onto the promise of social mobility through sport (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 121; Spaaij, 2009a, 2013). For young people who desperately want to make it out of the West Kootenays, the pursuit of the dream may indeed be beneficial. It may also instil a sense of pride upon the family and town when the child does this. Across Canada and the United States there are thousands of rural and small towns which boast about being the "hometown" of some professional athlete. In many ways, these rural and small towns rely on these young people-as-future-professional-athletes to keep their town spirit alive. In Chapter 5, I spent a considerable amount of time writing about how Trail continues to leverage the accomplishments of former Trail residents and NHL players and many people argue it does so to distract from the fragile economic situation across the region (Bissinger, 1990; Foley, 1990; Oriard, 2013). For some young people growing up in the West Kootenays, the prospects may be grim and it may be important to have a dream beyond "you grow up there, you live there, you work at the mill, and you work like at this grocery store, you never leave," says 14-year-old Catherine.

These discourses of sport as a way out are not without consequence. As Campbell and Parcels (2013) note, even in best-case scenarios, parenting towards the dream is something of a cautionary tale: "No parent dreams of the heartbreak of sending a kid to a far-off town to play hockey. No kid longs for the homesickness or bewilderment" (p. 6). For young people who move around for their sport, forging lasting friendships can also be challenging. Given that the dream must be pursued in urban and suburban centres, it is equally reasonable to wonder if some of these young people may ever move back to their

communities once their sport careers are finished. In other words, how might the pursuit of this dream compound the out-migration of youth from rural and small towns?

These discourses are also firmly rooted in gender and social class relations (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Oriard, 2013; Sage & Eitzen, 2016) meaning they are not available to all families in the West Kootenays. For example, given the sheer cost of pursuing the dream and the precarious economic conditions across the West Kootenays, it is highly unlikely that those who could benefit from sport “as a way out” (i.e., those most at risk of being rural) can take advantage of it as such. As Coakley and Donnelly (2009) note, while social factors create the social conditions in which disenfranchised youth “may have more at stake when it comes to sport participation, the development of sport skills often requires material resources that do not exist in these [families] or [regions]” (p. 314). Unless equipment and training are provided [locally], young people from these social groups “stand little chance of [truly] competing against upper-income [and (sub)urban peers], who are able to buy equipment and training if they want to develop skills” (p. 314).

Finally, as Foley (1990), Gruneau and Whitson (1993), and Oriard (2013) have noted, and as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the landscape of youth sport participation in many rural and small towns has historically been gendered. It has been boys’ athletic pursuits which have formed the collective pathology (Oriard, 2013, p. 74) of rural and small towns as implicitly supportive of organized youth sport. My data shows that many girls participate in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays, sometimes in larger numbers than boys. High school student Amber (along with other school administrators) observed that “there aren’t as many boys’ teams as there are girls’ teams.” The year we spoke was the first year the school had not fielded a volleyball team. While she suspected some of the boys may have dropped out of sport altogether, sport administrators and teachers reasoned that it was because many of the boys were pursuing elite sports and as such, had no time for school sport. Nonetheless, girls’ prospects to play their sport beyond the boundaries of their region remain limited (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009, p. 322; Sage & Eitzen, 2016, pp. 127–128) and may make girls who seek to pursue the dream additionally burdened by living in a rural area or small town. (I outlined a few examples of this in Chapter 4). Many families with daughters may also end up child rearing with a different

end in sight, even if it is not their first choice. It should also be noted that the chances of the dream coming true are extremely slim for most boys, especially those who live in rural and small-town regions like the West Kootenays (Decosse, 2015). For that reason, many parents of boys may also child rear in other ways.

## 6.2. Making It Work

*[I]t is undoubtedly the Canadian dream to play hockey, but are parents who refuse to spend thousands of dollars on pursuing a dream that is so unlikely actually taking something away from their child? (Campbell & Parcels, 2013, p. 99)*

*It has everything here. So, for a family, it's a great place, right? It's a great place to grow up. (Karen, Parent, Teacher, and Sport Administrator)*

Many parents across the West Kootenays recognize that the scale of their towns establishes a kind of symbolic boundary around their child-rearing aspirations. It says, “realistically, this is what I can achieve in terms of child rearing. Although I worry for my children, I will be content with whatever happens because other sources of satisfaction are present as well. While my child may not make the provincial team, they may nonetheless be enrolled in a long list of organized youth sport activities. Or, they may learn how to farm, how to hunt, how to hike.” This is how these parents understand “contemporary parenting” or “contemporary childhood.” To borrow from Wuthnow (2013), these are parents who think it may be nice to imagine that anyone can pursue the dream “but [who] know that where one lives, as well as time, health, other values, and financial constraints, establish the parameters of success” (p. 151). In line with the place-based life course perspective, these parents adapt dominant child-rearing practices to their unique historical, socioeconomic, and geographic location (Mitchell, 2006, p. 7).

Parents in this category certainly value organized youth sport and make considerable effort to ensure their children participate. However, a key difference between these parents and those in the first category is that rather than leaving town (or the region) to pursue the dream, they (and their children) pursue organized youth sport within the West Kootenays in ways that represent the limitations and opportunities of living in rural

and small-town British Columbia. They acknowledge that the barriers—either personal or structural—to pursuing full-fledged child rearing through organized youth sport in the West Kootenays can only be overcome to a certain degree. These differences are revealed in an exchange between two parents at a Castlegar Minor Soccer AGM in 2013.

Parent 1: We haven't really developed the kids though.

Parent 2: But what are you trying to do? We are trying to give them an avenue to go out and have fun, to kick a ball around, to develop good sportsmanlike behaviour. I mean isn't that what we do?

Parent 1: But I am talking about developing good soccer players.

Parent 2: But I am talking about developing a good human being, with good fitness ability that can sense teamwork, leadership, and something. We aren't trying to raise any pros here I think. I mean it would be nice, sure, but there aren't many parents that can go seven days a week like you—having your kid play sports every day. I don't see another option, but I see the numbers. Not that long ago, we had numbers over 600 young people just in this town. Now we are barely scratching 400. That is only six to seven years ago.

The first parent was upset because he felt the association was not doing a good enough job for young people seeking competitive, elite opportunities. He was pushing for indoor training time in the winter, more tournaments, and a more robust focus on the Rep program. This parent had a singular purpose for enrolling his child in soccer—to raise a pro—and he felt the local organization was not meeting his goals. Parent 2 felt that the association existed to build better people and he reminded Parent 1 that there are certain material and ideological conditions that prevent or dissuade many parents in the West Kootenays from pursuing the dream of athletic success.

It is not that these parents have given up the pursuit of child rearing through organized youth sport. These are parents who often coach, volunteer, and administer sport in their communities, going to great lengths to make it work. (I should note that parents in the first category are often absent from organized youth sport organizations in their own towns because they spend their free time with their children on the road). The difference is that they do so understanding that there is a limit to what they, and their children, can accomplish in the West Kootenays given the/their structural context. While hitting the road to pursue dreams of organized youth sport success is not possible or

desirable for these families, providing organized youth sport opportunities for their children within the context of the West Kootenays certainly is.

Within this category, there are parents who willingly avoid unilaterally devoting their family resources to their children's organized youth sport because it is not something they aspire to do in the first place. These are people who enjoy living in the West Kootenays, who enjoy taking their summers off and going camping with the family, going to the lake and so on. They are not entirely prepared to sacrifice what they consider the bounties of rural life for organized youth sport. These are the parents who do not necessarily accompany their children to every tournament, who do not necessarily schedule their children in summer camps. Nonetheless, they write the cheque and buy the equipment.

Andrew and Veronica are a good example of this type of family. Their children participate in a variety of sports. They both volunteer for several sport organizations and spend a considerable amount of time supporting their children's activities, but they are not willing to sacrifice what brought them here in the first place. She grew up in a large city and he grew up in a small town. Having grown up in a small town, "he knew what that was all about" and "knew pretty strongly" that he wanted to come back to BC and be in the mountains, near river, near hiking." Veronica admits that it was not her choice to move here—it was Andrew's job at the mill. Andrew and Veronica enjoy the cities but the things "that matter" to them like skiing, hiking, swimming in the lake happen in rural and small towns. As Veronica says, despite having grown up in [a large city], she never pictured herself in a city even if she did not know what it was like to live in a small town. She just "had no patience for the city, the noise, how long it takes to do everything, the people." She thinks it is just a lot easier to raise children in a small town, the fact that everybody knows everybody.

While Andrew and Veronica seem to have found a good balance between what they want out of living in the West Kootenays and what they want to provide for their children, not every parent has. Some parents struggle to reconcile their desire to live and raise children in the West Kootenays with their desire to provide their children with similar organized youth sport opportunities as those found in urban and suburban centres. Like

many middle-class parents described in Lareau (2011) and Levey Friedman's (2013) work, they have (deep) insecurities about raising their children—only for these parents the insecurities are rooted in place-based identity (i.e., living in a rural and small town) rather than in social class per se. From a place-based, life course perspective, these parents are attempting to reconcile the material, structural, and ideological context of the West Kootenays with the material, structural, and ideological expectations embedded in dominant discourses of modern parenting.

Often these parents feel that by living in rural and small-town British Columbia, they are not providing adequate opportunities for their children; that somehow, they are doing their children a disservice or putting their kids at risk of falling behind their “generational peers” (Crosnoe & Elder Jr. 2015; Elder Jr., 1998; Mitchell, 2006). This guilt is often fleeting as these parents reflect on why they live in a rural and small town. In the end, these parents make considerable effort to put their children first (Bianchi et al., 2006; Shaw, 2008, 2010), but they do not do so at the expense of the lifestyle they want from living in rural and small town British Columbia. In subtle ways, they recognize that one goal (i.e., child rearing through sport) is no more important than another (i.e., child rearing through rural living); that the material and structural conditions that may present themselves as barriers for child rearing through organized youth sport may equally be avenues towards achieving idyllic rural and small-town child rearing. Below, I profile four families who struggle to balance these ideals.

The first family consists of Lindsay, Craig, and their two children. They live in an unincorporated area of the region but were both raised a medium-sized city in Alberta. They both work seasonal jobs and their house sits on a country plot of land. They call it a typical “Kootenay house”—always under construction, with patches of siding, construction equipment and old tractors overgrown with weeds. They love raising their children on the outskirts of town because of the nature. “In a way,” says Craig, “you don’t even actually have to have that much for them because—I mean especially where we live here, there’s lots of space and our kids are capable of entertaining themselves in the forest so that’s different than growing up in the city.” Lindsay adds that it may seem there is a lot more to do in the city but this takes money “and there’s a ton of people, and it does not seem as

liberating.” Despite their love of living a country life, they have reservations about raising their children in this lifestyle entirely.

Lindsay: But then, you know, we’re trying to make it so there are things to do as well, because we’re not going to be little country bumpkins, too. Yeah, like, the natural thing, like, the first toy of a kid down here is to learn how to start a fire, how to split wood.

Craig: Learn how to make a shelter and a lean to. Our son was really into survival stuff, and really into hunting, and they’re allowed to shoot the pellet gun and things that you can’t do in the city really without there being a problem, right?

Lindsay: Yeah, and our children, too, would like to be able to ride their bike to the store, to their friends’ and we have friends they can ride to, but it’s like a gravel road and it’s a little different. I think it kind of creates a good foundation for them, but eventually they want to have a bit of the city experience, too, they want to skateboard on sidewalks. They want to loiter, they want to go to the store and buy junk food.

Craig: I don’t think our kids are necessarily dying to move to the city when they become adults. I don’t know what they’re going to do or what sort of education path they’re going to do. I mean they may want to because they’re pursuing something there, but I think a lot of young people realize that this is a good area to live, if you can make it here, if you can stay here, if you can survive here, this is where you want to spend your days.

While Lindsay and Craig live a life that approximates the rural idyll (Valentine, 1999; Woods, 2011), they nonetheless think about the impact this may have on their children—children who are growing up in a very different historical time than that popularized in discourses on rural childhoods. In their pursuit of the rural idyll, these parents worry they are taking away their children’s ability to grow beyond “country bumpkins.” The ideas they have about raising children in rural and small towns are not necessarily compatible with the ideas they have about raising children to be successful in hegemonic (i.e., (sub)urban) society.

Eva is another good example of this type of parent. In our interview, we talked about what brought Eva to the West Kootenays from the big city. She, her husband, and his family had been talking for a long time about starting an organic farm, to “downgrade [their] lifestyle to something more rural for a long time, to go back to the earth.” When his family came into an inheritance, they bought a 13-acre organic certified property in an

unincorporated part of the region. Her brother and sister-in-law moved and became full-time organic farmers. Eva and her husband soon followed once they had their daughter (age five at the time of the interview) and she finished her graduate work. She said it was “a choice to step away from the city and see how different it is.” Both from a major city in British Columbia, they wanted to see if they “could make it” on their own. When it came to thinking about their daughter, “small supportive communities” were places they wanted to raise their children. They were “drawn” to the area, “whether it’s the outdoors or, living in a secluded place, or the mountains.” They were drawn by the “different frame of mind for raising kids. The strength of very community-oriented places. Where everyone knows everyone.” After a few years in the region, and in her involvement in local youth sport, Eva started to question whether she could continue to raise her daughter here. She certainly had not changed her tune about the bounties that living in a rural and small town provides, but she questioned whether the area would be able to present her daughter with what *she* needed:

If she wants to do diving, we really can’t stay. At a certain point in teenage years, we may move away to give her the opportunity that just isn’t offered here, but we are trying our best to make it, you know. There’s a rink right down the road. There’s a lot we can do here. It’s just not in a facility—in a facility kind of—the way we think of it, like, in a complex kind of thing. It’s a mountain, or it’s the lake itself kind of thing. So, we are going to try our best to remain kind of creative until there’s something that really pulls us in a different direction. In which case, we would still want to come back for ourselves. It’s just that making sure that we have those opportunities for our kids is super important, and if the area can’t offer it, we may have to buckle at that point.

It is evident that Eva is pulled in different directions: on the one hand, she and her husband want to pursue their dream of living in rural and small-town British Columbia; on the other hand, it is very important for them to provide opportunities for their daughter to pursue her own dreams. For the moment, they will stay put and try and make it work but at a certain point they will have to decide.

Unlike Eva, Sabrina and her husband were both raised in small towns. Her parents have lived in her hometown for forty years as organic farmers. She left for 10 years to go to university and then to ski town out of province to become a “ski bum in the winters.” That is where she met her husband. They then moved to the East Kootenays. Sick of the

transient nature and inflated house prices in ski-towns, they came back to her hometown. Both of their children are involved in organized youth sport. They devote an enormous amount of time and energy to their son's hockey. They are on the road most weekends during hockey season and even play out of region in the spring. However, through our interactions, I come to learn that Sarah loves living in her town and I suspect that is why her family has not taken that extra step of moving or consistently playing out-of-region. What they love about their small-town life is that their 8 and 12-year-old children can "ride their bike up and down the street until 10 at night." They feel it is a safe place to raise children—bears are the thing to worry about the most, she laughs. But when our conversation turns to raising her children she interrupts herself and says,

I mean I know it's everywhere but it's like you just think "are we doing our children a disservice by having them somewhere that is so removed from all the competition that is out there. Are they going to fall behind?" Being raised here myself, I didn't; we played sports in schools. My brothers played hockey but I didn't play. They didn't let girls play hockey. They are like, do you want to figure skate? No thanks! I'm good. [Laugh]. I did soccer with the school. And it was great. But we only went to our little schools. Creston, New Denver, Nakusp.

What Sabrina recognizes is that while her childhood was satisfactory, expectations around childhood have changed. Times have changed and dominant child-rearing ideologies do not match up to the conditions found in her town. While there are certainly more opportunities now than there were in her day, she does not feel they are the *right* opportunities. "That is one of the challenges of living in a small town. If you have a child that wants to excel or do better even if you want to push them a bit, you don't have the opportunities." She says the culture of her town frowns upon pushing your children. "Parents are just happy saying, 'you are happy on your Xbox, go ahead.'" While she likes this because it provides a relaxed day-to-day environment, it can be prohibitive when it comes to what she considers appropriate child rearing.

Finally, Juliana, Brett, and their two children live in one of the larger towns in the region. They both grew up in the area. She says she loves living here because there is a lot to offer recreationally: "it's a great place to retire," and "it's a great place to raise your children." When I probe her, she says she likes that her children can ride their bikes down the street and she feels safe about it. She likes that she can drop her children off at the

recreation complex and go back and pick them up an hour after their class is over. She says that on the Coast (Lower Mainland), “you would have driven for 40 minutes to get them there, you won’t dare drop them off without walking them in because there are so many people and so many strangers!” Whereas in her small town, she believes she can say “to Sally’s mom, ‘Hey, can you pick up our three and your two and off you go, take them all to soccer?’” She loves how it is very “close-knit.” Just like Eva and Sabrina, Juliana reflects on whether her efforts to enrol her children in organized youth sport take away from what she and her husband like about living in rural and small-town British Columbia:

You think okay, well, I’m here because it’s a more relaxed environment than say, living in Langley. But is it really now? I don’t think it is anymore, right? We do end up, we schedule our kids, and then we end up scheduling ourselves. You’re overwhelmed as a parent, and your child’s overwhelmed, but oh, your friends are doing this and this and this. And it’s, like, you roll a dice on what combination you’re going to go with right now because there are so many things to do. And you guess at the end of the day that’s something that I think I’m happy about: our kids are in swimming, but we can be there with them, and we can participate and we can help run the club or whatever. We’re not the parents that do the, “Okay, another way to get our child baby-sat.” It takes super planning as far as how you integrate that busyness into being family life and worthy of the whole family benefitting from it, right? Yeah, it’s a different ball of wax.

While she and her husband conclude that the benefits of organized youth sport outweigh the drawbacks, they nonetheless wonder what consequences this sort of behaviour will have on their children now and when they raise their own children:

So now as much as we’d like to see our kids be really active, do they get to the point where they’re so active that they don’t have any down time? You know, are they allowed to be kids, are they allowed just to sit and, you know, do things? So, like I think [when these kids grow up], they’re either going to be a generation of people where their own kids will do nothing—“I’m not putting you in that. I was in so much stuff when I was a kid. You’re not doing anything.” Like you know, that attitude or they’re going to, “Oh, I could do it also, so you can handle it, too.” So, they’ll be scheduled 24/7, who knows.

This concern is not unlike those of parents elsewhere; but it seems out of place in narratives of rural childhoods in which young people and parents lead relaxed, unstructured lives. What Juliana is also realizing is that the current child-rearing practices

of parents in the West Kootenays are not only reshaping what it looks and feels like to grow up there now but also what child-rearing practices in the West Kootenays may look like in the future. She recognizes the “chain reactions” (Mitchell, 2006) of her child-rearing practices.

I next turn to examples of the ways these parents work within the system of organized youth sport in their towns or region to overcome as many personal and structural barriers as possible all the while recognizing that there are some things they and their children will not be able to accomplish in the West Kootenays. These examples serve to illustrate how, for many parents in the West Kootenays, “it is not so much a matter of setting one’s sights low but rather of being realistic” (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 151). They also serve to illustrate how the actions of parents who pursue these child-rearing strategies have real consequences on the shape of organized youth sport in the West Kootenays.

The first example is parents’ recognition that they cannot provide *everything* to *everyone* in the same way that large urban and suburban centres might be able to. Instead of replicating what young people in the city have, these parents try to leverage the strengths which already exist in their towns. As Anthony notes,

maybe the reality for the Slocan Valley is this: they are not going to have a soccer program. It’s not appropriate. It’s not what they want. It’s never going to happen. They don’t have enough young people. So, let’s make sure they have a great trail network because they like to ride bikes or whatever it is. (Fieldnotes, September 9, 2012)

According to these parents, it is about being realistic, not pessimistic. “Is it about providing services in each community? Or is it about providing closer access to services?” says Anthony at a recreation Town Hall Meeting in September 2015. “We’ll never be big enough to provide a swim club here or in each community, but we should be able to provide a swim club closer than 800 kilometres away in Kelowna!” (Fieldnotes, September 29, 2015, New Denver). Another way of making it work for the kids and parents in the West Kootenays is by establishing relationships with teams, schools, or programs in the same “conundrum.” “We all have to go fairly far to find competition, to find other teams to

compete with. So, when we all get together, we can share that, and try and put something together,” says Kyle.

Within specific sports, most organizations field teams across age-groups, rather than in each distinct age group. While this often ensures the formation of a team, it can also mean 12-year-olds playing on a team in a U16 division—especially in smaller towns across the region. Some sport organizations may also create regional teams, casting the net as wide as possible to draw in a larger number of participants and volunteers. Unfortunately, as noted in Chapter 5, the travel required for this type of team can be prohibitive for those young people, parents, and adults living in more out-of-the-way places. Thus, while this strategy might be good on paper and for those living in the larger centres in the region, it may not always be possible to make it work.

Another strategy sport organizations use is limiting the breakdown of divisions in a single sport. Whereas soccer in the Lower Mainland is tiered into six levels, it is tiered into only two in the West Kootenays: House (Recreational) or Rep (Competitive). However, low numbers mean it is common practice for organizations to require their Rep players to also play in the House division—something not seen in cities and suburbs. Ironically, this solution leads to the overscheduling these parents try to avoid and can result in the retreat of young people who play other sports at the same time. As one parent at a Minor Soccer AGM said, “this eliminates the hockey players and the players whose parents can’t commit to having their kids there five days a week.”

Sport administrators also find ways to make the travel work for those parents and young people who want to participate in organized youth sport out of their home town associations. One way is by playing “out of tier” during the season. As Dylan explains about club lacrosse, “we play at a higher level all season because those are the closest teams around and then in Provincials we get to drop down a level.” Of course, there are positive consequences to this:

It’s good practice for the kids. For a little small town, middle of nowhere, only get to practise twice a week type of thing. Because in the Lower Mainland, they play year-round. And we just don’t have the option here. We don’t have an outdoor box,

we don't have any place indoor where we can play in the wintertime because they're all filled with ice.

By being given the option to play up during the season and down for Provincials, the team not only travels less, it also gains experience playing harder teams—not unlike those they will face in the Provincials.

Sport administrators also look to make travel work by holding practices centrally or rotating them between towns (either on a weekly or yearly basis). Dylan explains how important this is for players interested in lacrosse. Given that there is only one program in the entire region, they must take players from Nelson, Trail, Castlegar, Rossland, Fruitvale, and Grand Forks. He continues:

We just don't have the numbers here . . . and so we'll practise in Castlegar because it's central. So, the players that are coming from Grand Forks and Nelson and Trail, they just travel a bit. . . . If it was in Trail or Nelson, some of the kids would have to travel a bit farther. We have a parent who travels from Grand Forks four nights per week because he's got a kid in three age groups, he's got three kids in it. So, it's important to be centrally located.

This only works when everyone is willing to travel—not only those living in the more rural and remote parts of the region. According to Marissa, the regional district has invested in local fields suitable for Pee-Wee sports in outlying villages and unincorporated areas with the idea that those who live in the city will share the travel with those who live in the outlying areas. Practices will be held around the region as opposed to only at the field complex in town. This is supposed to be a “made-for Nelson” solution. The problem? “People living urbanly would not make that effort to go. They wouldn't do it, wouldn't go for it,” recalls Marissa. As a result, people living on the outskirts participate in smaller numbers. According to Sabrina, the same thing happens in hockey when it comes to hosting regional championships. Despite the best effort to rotate who hosts the championships, there is still resistance:

So, for a perfect example, the banner for the West Kootenay playoffs is voted on every year. We always have ice because we only have three teams. So, we have lots of available ice to host. So, we will always offer but the President will look around the table and say, “Nelson isn't here, so let's table that until next year.” And

we say, “[we] will” and then Trail will say, “We aren’t going to [there].” Meanwhile, we drive to Midway and we don’t complain. We drive to Trail and we don’t complain. You guys have to come [here] one weekend a year and you complain that there is nowhere to stay, that the rink is cold. So, they are whiners. Yet these are the same parents who are commuting to the mill in Castlegar. It’s frustrating.

In the spring and summer, one of the ways some families seek to cut the costs associated with travel is by camping or bringing along an R.V. I remember the first tournament I attended in Nelson. I saw the coach open the door to his family R.V. and walk 20 metres to the fields. Although he only lived 70 kilometres away in Fruitvale, he did not want to be commuting back and forth each day. So, he and his family bunked in the parking lot for a few days. Shortly after, I was greeted in the parking lot of the Creston and District Community Complex by row upon row of R.V.s and tents. I remember thinking to myself, “you just wouldn’t see this in the city.” A few years later, I was invited to a campsite in Nelson to socialize with the parents and young people from one of the out-of-town teams. It was amazing to see over a dozen families camping together for the duration of the tournament. What was a cost-saving measure doubled as a way for the families and the players to get to know each other. Speaking of a different occasion, 14-year-old Avery explains why she enjoys camping at tournaments:

It was so fun to travel with them because we went—we camped and there was this, we all stayed in this huge tent. And, not all of us, but most of us, we stayed in the tent and we just talked and we really bonded because it was also, it was like grade 6 and 7 and I know all the people in my grade, but I didn’t really know the people in my sister’s grade. So, we got to, talk to them and figure out if I actually like soccer and stuff. So, it was really, it was a really good experience.

What I have presented above reveals how parents balance their desire to live in rural and small-town British Columbia with their desire to participate in/or provide opportunities for participation in organized youth sport. They are not necessarily ready to “throw in the towel” on rural and small towns altogether because they do not offer the opportunities provided to young people (and their parents) in suburban and urban centres. Rural and small towns *are* still “good places to grow up,” “good places to raise children”—but in different terms than literature on rural childhoods and parenting suggests. The West Kootenays are not a good place to raise children because they provide open spaces for

the children to run around unaccompanied; they are a good place to raise children because they offer a good balance between hegemonic and rural ideals. Given that lives are “linked,” one has to wonder how these parents’ efforts trickle down to their children’s experiences. As Fredrick Rye (2006) notes, it is possible that what adults love about raising kids in rural and small towns may be what young people find problematic about rural childhoods. Youths and adults might relate to rural living differently.

When I asked children who participated in organized youth sport what they liked about growing up in the West Kootenays, many said they like growing up here because of the very things their parents claim to be trying to provide them with (i.e., the rural idyll). For Sasha, she loves living in her small town because the outdoors is so accessible:

I feel like a lot of people think we just sit around and do nothing. People think we have nothing to do. We have lots to do. We can go four-wheeling, or dirt biking, and the people in the city, can’t do that, at all. And just hiking. We have mountains and stuff. Trails. When people come here, they’re like, “Wow, it’s so beautiful” and I’m like, “yup!” The waterfront is nice. I think we’ve got lots to do. We might not be able to the movies often because they come here a month late, but if we really want to see it bad, we can travel to Castlegar or Nelson.

Shelby says she does want to explore other places but that she wants to come back at some point because she likes it here. When I ask her what she likes about it, she says she likes that “it seems like a nice place to grow up. People here are down-to-earth, it’s kind of accepting and it’s really beautiful here too. It’s really nice for being outdoors.” Sasha is insistent that she will live in a rural town when she is done university. “I am not living in a city. I feel sick every time I go on the bus, I’m coughing all the time. I’ve never been sick in my life and I have been sick the entire time I’ve been here in Vancouver. So yeah, I want to live in a more rural place, I love rural communities.”

Nathaniel likes the small scale of rural places: “it’s not too busy, less stuff going on, less crowded.” Jaimie likes that “it’s small. Not so busy. Not many people. I like being with my friends when I don’t have hockey.” Neil likes that they “have everything and it’s close.” So does Raven: “The majority of people are right in town, so I would walk to school or walk to the rink, walk places so I wasn’t always dependent on a ride!” Others focus on the safety of rural places: “I like that there’s not a lot of people there, so you can walk

around the streets and not get mugged or raped. You can't really do that in a big city. You can just walk around anywhere [here], there's not a lot of people" says 13-year-old Nick. Stephanie, also 13 years old, feels safer in her town. She explains: "my mom just brings me up to hang out with my friends but in a city, that probably would never happen. It would be very protective because of the big city. Like everybody knows everybody here, so it's pretty much everybody's watching you at all times."

Some young people focus on the friendliness of rural places. Avery likes that her friends are only "a 15-minute walk away. In a big city, you couldn't really do that because there's so many people." She likes that she knows "lots of the people and they're all really nice, even people you don't know, all super nice." Similarly, Alexandra thinks living in her hometown is "really nice and quiet and stuff, and everyone's kind of friendlier." She has not lived in Vancouver, but here, "you know everyone and you don't have to walk that far to get to your friend's house. You just come over." Others, like 15-year-old Ian, think rural towns are just more relaxed: "I just like it here because it's like chilling and relaxed, you know where everything is, you know everyone. It's not too busy. I really like going to big cities for vacations, but I don't know if I would want to live there all the time. It would be really busy."

Parents are doing a good job at making sure their children experience rural life. Many of their children insist they "want to live here their whole life" and "like growing up here" (Avery, 13 years old). As I pointed out in Chapters 4 and 5, however, not all parts of the rural idyll benefit those involved in organized youth sport. For this reason many young people are conflicted about whether they enjoy living in a rural and small town, and specifically, the West Kootenays. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, the lack of access to quality organized youth sport programs has turned some young people off from living in rural and small towns in the future or raising their own children there. One can only wonder: If these young people did not participate in organized youth sport, would their perspectives on their towns be more positive? In Chapter 5, I also brought up the fact that the rural idyll of the hockey town negatively impacts some children who want to pursue other sports. In the pursuit of hockey, some parents may think they are providing their children with an ideal rural upbringing—a perfect combination of rural nostalgia and contemporary organized

youth sport participation. In the process, they may be (unintentionally) preventing other parents and children from pursuing their own version of the rural idyll (i.e., playing alternative sports and activities). This style of parenting is not without consequence and it would be naïve to paint these parents as having found the magical balance between the hectic lives of (sub)urban parents and the static lives of rural parents.

Parenting, even in the West Kootenays, places intense labour demands on busy parents and exhausts children in many of the same ways it does for urban and suburban families. As I highlighted in Chapter 4, the amount of time and effort required to “make it work” in the West Kootenays (even if not in the pursuit of the dream of athletic success) is in many ways more considerable for West Kootenays parents than their (sub)urban counterparts. Young people in this category lead lives that are a far cry from the rural childhoods described in scholarly literature (e.g., Valentine, 2001). This is not necessarily a bad thing. Participation in organized youth sport provides something for these young people to do in places that are often characterized by a lack of “things to do” (Dupuy, Francine, & Morissette, 2000; Glendinning et al., 2003; Fredrick Rye, 2006). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4 and 5, many young people derive rich, positive experiences through their participation in organized youth sport and community support they receive. Many young people and parents believe that the travel they do as part of organized youth sport exposes them to new ideas, cultures, and perspectives. These young people and parents, however, do not lead the relaxed lives associated with rural childhoods. Two examples serve to illustrate this point. In the first, Rory tells me how his life changed when he went from playing Rep hockey and other sports to simply House hockey:

When I was playing Rep, when I got home from school, I would relax because I was so tired and eat dinner and all that. So, I find I come home, relax, go to hockey, then come home. Now that I just play recreational hockey and that's it. I come home and maybe go for a bike-ride or something with my friends, and go to hockey or something. With Rep, I would have to pack my bag and go. Now, if I don't have hockey, I have some of the buddies on my street, and someone that lives there, so we might go down to school, and there's that big hill, so we'll sled down there, or sometimes we build a fort down there. If there's no snow, we usually go—in the summer we go for bike rides, yeah, or anything. We have a fort down there and we go down there.

It was only when Rory decreased his involvement in elite hockey that he started to have time to be a “rural kid.”

While the parents in this group may feel they are “doing good by their children” by raising them in rural and small-town British Columbia *and* providing them with organized youth sport opportunities, the benefits attributed to living and parenting in a rural and small town can easily be suppressed by the demands of organized youth sport. It can just as easily be said that the drawbacks of living in rural and small towns cannot entirely be overcome by participating in organized youth sport. Participation in organized youth sport cannot be considered as an antidote to “no shopping, no Starbucks, and no games stores,” as one boy in grade 12 tells me. It also cannot change the fact that “If you mess up one time, everyone knows,” says another. Or, as Raven says, “that there are no opportunities for a job or school here.”

Even though these young people all participate in many activities, many still feel that “there is not much to do,” like Natasha. Despite being involved in organized youth sport, Amber says, “what are you going to do on a Saturday night? You’re not going to go to the mall, you’re not going to go to the, I don’t know. You’re not going to go—you’re going to go to a bush party.” Interestingly, Branden likes that “it’s quiet. There’s not many people.” Still, he does not like that “there’s not enough to do.” When I point out that he is very busy with organized youth sport, he says, “Yeah, but in the summer, I notice it. That’s pretty much the only time I’m here, when I’m not playing hockey.” Even though he has “lots to do during the year,” his summers are still the social doldrums that scholarly literature paints as typical in rural and small towns. These young people also point out some of the general pitfalls of living in rural and small towns beyond not having much to do. Shelby echoes what many people say is the biggest problem of living somewhere with so few people:

I feel like rumours are so bad in small towns. Like a rumour mill is just spitting out every day, and people get preconceived impressions of people just because of what they hear about them, and then you don’t really know about them at all. But you feel like you know them, so you judge them. But you don’t know anything about them.

One might ask in what ways participation in organized youth sport makes young people realize that their towns do not have what cities have. For some young people, going to tournaments in bigger cities makes them realize their towns do not have much. For other young people, going to tournaments in bigger cities makes them realize they like living in rural and small towns, even if there are certainly things they like about the city. Rory loves living in his town but participating in sport has made him realize just how little sports equipment he can get in town: “I like going to bigger cities because you can get new clothes and new shoes or something, I like hockey sticks or, like, soccer shoes or something, so you have to go somewhere else to get that stuff. But that’s pretty much it in terms of what I don’t like.” Alexandra says she loves living in her town because she is near everyone. She also thinks “there’s always something to do here.” She likes “hanging out with friends, playing soccer, chilling out at home, going out and going to sleepovers and going downtown with friends.” But she realizes there “isn’t a whole lot of shopping here. We might go somewhere just to Trail, in their mall. Here we go the gas station and corner store. Get a Slurpee or something. So, I guess there isn’t a whole lot to do, place you can go.” As our conversation continues, she notes that every year they go to soccer tournament in Kelowna—a city of over 100,000 people roughly five hours away. She loves “the big aquatic centre and how there’s so much to do there. Lots of shopping. Game stuff.” Being exposed to cities makes her reflect on the merits of living in the West Kootenays: “That’s the thing, when we go there, there is so much to do but we only have a week or so. Here, there’s not a whole lot to do, but you have all the time here.”

Neil also reflects on the merits of living in a rural and small town. He describes himself as a city person, somebody who likes being around other people and socializing. His “biggest fear,” is to “stay here and do nothing. I would hate to do that. It’s just depressing.” It is no wonder he was close to moving to the Lower Mainland to pursue elite soccer opportunities. Given his exposure to urban centres, he questions, but does not entirely dismiss, the merits of living in rural and small towns: “It’s mostly hard to, like, pick which one is worse to have: do you want it to be quiet and just enjoy it, or do you want to do something, and be with more people?”

It is apparent that in their efforts to recreate the hegemonic conditions of organized youth sport, some West Kootenay parents create a life for themselves and their children which is far from the idyllic rural life they purport to be seeking. Others find the balance. And others simply opt out of child rearing through organized youth sport. It is to this group of parents that I turn to next.

### **6.3. Opting Out**

Lareau (2011) and Levey Friedman (2013) argue that the failure of many working-class and poor parents to try and pursue dominant parenting practices goes beyond (but is certainly still related to) differential material resources—it is the result of a different way of seeing the world. The same can be said for this group of parents in the West Kootenays, even if their class positions are more heterogeneous than those presented in literature on modern parenting. These parents eschew hegemonic, middle-class expectations of “good parenting” and “ideal childhoods.” They have chosen to live in rural and small-town British Columbia because of their values and aspirations; and these, do not necessarily line up with middle-class hegemonic discourses on modern parenting and organized youth sport. These folks believe there is something inherently incompatible with their way of life and the way of life demanded by organized youth sport. As reflected in Rodgers’ (2014) work *Welcome to Resisterville: American Dissidents in British Columbia*, some of the ideological reasons for which people move to and remain in the West Kootenays are accompanied by a disregard for structured time, money, and regimentation, and this way of life is not necessarily compatible with that required to participate in organized youth sport. Similar to the working-class parents in Lareau’s (2011) research, these parents may not think they are settling for this type of child rearing; rather they pursue it deliberately because they believe it has inherent benefits.

Many of their children do not participate in anything structured or organized; if they do, it is on their terms. As I described in Chapter 5, these terms can be at odds with the hegemonic culture of organized youth sport taken up by some youth sport organizations in the West Kootenays. Sport administrators described these parents as those who insist

on paying cash, often do not meet registration deadlines, and come with mason jars for water bottles. These are the parents who prefer to choose activities that are more in line with their family values, says Anthony, “an activity in which [they] can spend time together as a family, not just watching one [child] participate.”

David believes that some of these parents avoid organized youth sport because they did not participate in anything themselves as children. Patrick agrees that some of them “just don’t think about team sports because they never did it, they do not see the value in it.” He says that he has talked to a couple of parents whose children are “really good athletes” and asked them why they do not play hockey. The parents’ response is: “It’s a waste of money. He’s never going to make the NHL anyways, so why bother?” On the one hand, these parents recognize the social and cultural capital of having a child-as-future-professional-athlete. But on the other hand, they recognize this is not the sort of capital that is relevant or desirable to them. Patrick spoke to another mother who said, “Are you kidding? I have to get up at 7:00 on a Saturday morning. I’m not doing that for anybody.” He points out that for these parents, “it’s just not part of their culture, or their thought process.” Some children whose parents child rear in this way do end up participating in organized activities but it is often without the involvement of their parents. One example illustrates this point:

My husband and I have totally different upbringings. My parents insisted, if you wanted to do something, they would take you. His parents, they had to work in their work schedules. They were good parents but just different. If John wanted to play high school basketball, he would hitchhike. Whereas my parents made sure I had a ride. The social thing was not big for his parents, regarding sport. It was just a very different upbringing. You’re on your own, you have to find a ride. (Lisa, parent, Salmo)

Both Lisa and her husband grew up in very rural areas of the region, albeit 30 kilometres from each other, but had very different upbringings and opportunities owing to their parents’ divergent approaches to child rearing.

Randall, Ronald, and Trudy exemplify the types of parents who do not necessarily have anything against organized youth sports per se but just have other priorities for child rearing. None of their children participated in organized youth sport even if, in later life,

these parents became involved in organized youth sport through their work as teachers or volunteers in the community. As a matter of fact, Randall, Ronald, and Trudy all have a deep personal passion for the sports of soccer and baseball, something they owe to the upbringing in United States and England, respectively. Despite this passion, all three made the choice to child rear in ways that did not include organized youth sport. In our interview, Trudy recounts how she and her husband ended up in living in a commune on the outskirts of the region. What is evident in her account is that organized youth sport was not on the list of priorities.

Throw away your television, throw away your newspapers, move to the country, build a cabin, grow a garden, have children, feed them on peaches. That's what we did. We lived that lifestyle. 12 years we did that. It was a goal and we achieved it.

It was only when they moved into "town" that she and her husband started volunteering in organized youth sport. In her memoir entitled *Pillowbook Stories*, their daughter writes about growing up on the commune. As is evident in her writing, her childhood could certainly be considered "idyllic":

When I am small, we wash however we can. It's not such a big deal in the summer, when we are all swimming in the lake, or the slough, or the Pond on an almost daily basis. The winter, however, offers more challenges. When you don't have hot running water, let alone an interior bathtub, washing is a lot of work. Water is heated in galvanized buckets on the stove for all purposes, and it takes a lot of buckets to fill a bath. My mother washes my hair in the kitchen sink, with me lying stretched on the counter, but sometimes you just need full immersion. Often, we will shower at my aunt's house in [town] but, when that isn't an option, we bring up the galvanized tub that acts as the corral's water trough, fill it with buckets of water and bathe (cleanest first) in front of the wood stove for extra warmth.

We swim, all summer, us "horsy girls," in the slough that divides the lower . . . road from the grassy expanse of the Flats. There is an old cattle crossing there, with gentle entry to the water through the reeds. This is important, because it is the horses that do the swimming. We cling to wet backs and stringy manes, occasionally being towed along behind, gripping the tail for all we are worth. The horses seem to like it, snorting splashes out their noses, lips curled above the water. It gets them out of the flies and later, when it's cooler, we lie on their backs and let them graze over the prairie while we dry. We were constantly having tourists take pictures of us, sometimes even movies. It's a little disconcerting, now, to think of being in so many anonymous photo albums. Caption: "wild children and horses."

On the surface, this group of parents seems to utilize parenting strategies similar to Accomplishment of Natural Growth described by Lareau (2011), but they are not so much steeped in working-class conditions as they are in rural ideals of parenting and childhood. This is a key way in which these parents differ from those described in research on child-rearing practices and their relationship with organized youth sport. The literature does not take into consideration how place-based discourses of parenthood and childhood might figure just as prominently in child-rearing practices as might access to resources. Some of these parents may indeed have limited resources but that is not their primary reason for holding out. For other families, a lack of economic resources may be the reason why their children do not participate in organized youth sport.

## 6.4. Being Pushed Out

*When it comes to sport participation, the socioeconomic status of the family you were born into has never been more important—participation is a family affair and is driven by family resources. (Coakley, 2009, p. 318)*

It is well documented that with the escalating cost of sport (i.e., equipment, travel, registration fees) and the privatization of the sport system (Beamish, 2015), access to financial resources is directly related to participation in organized youth sport (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Hyman, 2012; Sage & Eitzen, 2016; Washington & Karen, 2001; Wilson, 2002). The Canadian Heritage (2013) report demonstrates the impact of household income on children's involvement in sport: "The lower the household income, the less likely it is that children will participate in sport and the higher the household income the more likely it is that children will participate in sport" (p. 38). Beamish (2015) reports that:

In 2010, only 7% of individuals living in families with household incomes below \$20,000 per year participated in sport. In the \$20,000–\$29,999 range, only 15% of Canadians are involved in sport. Under one in five Canadians living in household with incomes of \$30,000–\$49,999 take part in sport, rising to one in four families with household incomes of \$50,000–\$79,999. One-third of individuals in households with incomes higher than \$80,000 engage regularly in sport. (p. 82)

These figures are particularly revealing within the context of the West Kootenays. According to Powell and Reynolds (2017), 34.8 percent of households in Slocan, 32.1 percent in Winlaw, 23.3 percent in Silverton, 20.4 percent in New Denver and Kaslo residents, and 16.7 percent in Nelson are low income.<sup>27</sup> Rossland reports an average household income of \$94,045 while Winlaw, Slocan, and Silverton report much lower numbers (\$43,342, \$44,671, and \$46,324, respectively). Partridge and Rickman (2007) argue that “small places” like the rural and small towns of the West Kootenays can be traps for persistent poverty owing to their dependence on resource extraction. The challenges and disadvantages they face “increase the likelihood of sudden job losses and limit long-run opportunities for those with limited skills or education. The result is that unemployment is likely to last longer as people search for jobs elsewhere or wait for the local economy to recover” (Ryser & Halseth, 2017). In her work on one Canadian rural town, Oncescu (2015) demonstrates the way rural restructuring (in the form of a pulp and paper mill closure) can challenge “the economic and social conditions of communities, thereby impacting community recreation activities” (p. 1). When the mill shut down, families and communities had to make tough choices about the provision of recreational activities—sometimes resulting in a retreat from these activities. Given these numbers, some children in the West Kootenays do not participate in organized youth sport. As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, economic conditions coupled with the costs of running quality “sport systems” (Beamish, 2015, p. 83) in the West Kootenays directly impact the ability of some families to provide organized youth sport opportunities for their children. While some families can endure these conditions and costs, others cannot and withdraw—sometimes temporarily, but often permanently.

Only one parent (a single father) cited financial constraints as the reason for which his daughter did not register for Rep soccer until grade 10.<sup>28</sup> Despite her talents, she remained on the team for only two seasons because of the cost and her requirement to work. Other young people also experienced uneven participation histories (e.g., they

<sup>27</sup> That is, they earn 50 percent of the median adjusted household income.

<sup>28</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter 3, it proved difficult to speak with families who opted out of organized youth sport; because of this, my research is based on a considerable number of detailed ethnographic interviews with and cases of parents and children who were participating in organized youth sport during my time in the West Kootenays.

joined a team, left the team, joined again) and some because they needed to work to support themselves. However, participation in other sports, school obligations, vacations, and volunteer opportunities were cited more frequently as reasons for (temporary) withdrawal. Nonetheless, young people, teachers, police officers, and school and sport administrators were keenly aware of the existence of families for whom organized youth sport was out of reach because of a lack of family resources. Those directly working with sport-subsidy programs (e.g., KidSport, Canadian Tire Jump Start) were particularly aware of the struggles some families face. In his years in public service, Dylan has seen many young people who “don’t play sports because they can’t afford it. They’re the young people that are on their skateboards or riding their own bike or sometimes just hanging out with their friends. They don’t play sports. A lot of them want to, but they just can’t.”

Sabrina tells me about two families. The first is a family from a very rural town about 40 kilometres from the nearby settlement. The Minor Hockey Association, along with the school counsellors, have tried to get this child to play hockey “to get him out of the house.” What Sabrina has found is that the child plays until mid-season until which point his parents do not let him come anymore. “They said it was too expensive,” she remarks. To make it easier for the child to play, the Minor Hockey Association “linked up with a parent from the same area to bring the child down to all of his activities and he loved it.” She adds, “the look on this face. It was the best thing for him socially, to be involved in something. Every year when soccer would start, he would say, ‘Sabrina, did you phone my mom to see if I can play soccer?’” Sabrina was often met with “I hate soccer” from the mother. “We would say, ‘it’s not you playing, it’s your son’ and she would say she couldn’t find cleats. We would find cleats but then she would be offended. So, he has never played, his brother has never played. The oldest sister got taken away from the family.”

The other family lives in town. Sabrina says they have no phone, credit card, or Internet. Every year, the organization had to figure out who would “take this girl on.” “The girl would go to a tournament with no money. We all work hard for our money so it’s tough for us to take that on. And there was no thanks. It became expected. And her mom never came to the games but it’s sad.” Sabrina recalls having to drive to the house to ask if the child was coming to the tournament or to the game. “We had 10 kids plus this girl so we

needed her to have two lines. And she is a fantastic player. And her brother is a fantastic runner. He won all of his races.”

David thinks that poverty is an issue. But he also suggests that some parents are simply “not committed to their children.” He understands this is “harsh to say but not all these young people are born out of want. Some of them are born out of risk-taking and parents get resentful. Young people are seen as a burden.” Thomas proposes that the “young people who are left out” have parents who work a lot, are into illegal activities like growing drugs, or have socioeconomic issues. Sasha believes that the young people who do not play sports are the ones who “come to school drunk, drink with their parents. Smoke a lot of weed.” She says “that’s the Kootenays. It’s common.” This is similar to the concerns raised by a parent at the Castlegar Minor Soccer AGM. “If the kid loves the game, if the parent loves their kid, they are going to do whatever is possible to get their kid there,” he suggests. He continues by suggesting that not enrolling a kid in organized youth sport is evidence of “parents who don’t really care for the kid. We see that all around the community. It’s the same parents who are supporting their kids and the same ones who don’t.”

Social class influences our views of ourselves and others, our social relationships, and our everyday lives (Perruci & Wyson, 2003). The social relations and interactions between families of different social classes is illustrated in the class-based judgment of child-rearing practices (Lareau, 2011) which underlie the comments made by the aforementioned parents, young people, and sport administrators. Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (2014) call this the poverty-shame nexus whereby others are persistently evaluated against dominant norms and expectations. The manner in which some of my participants talk about “other” families (i.e., working-class and low-income) privileges forms of child rearing that reflect and maintain their own values and interests such as parental involvement in organized youth sport (Coakley, 2009, p. 301).

Rather than recognizing the complex personal and structural reasons for which families may be pushed out of sport (Beamish, 2015), these respondents blame working-class and low-income parents for their children’s withdrawal. For example, Sabrina does

not seem to recognize that “when people spend much of their time and energy coping with the challenges of everyday life, they have few resources left to develop sport participation as part of their lifestyles” (Coakley, 2009, p. 311). Sabrina presents the child rearing of working-class and poor parents as akin to neglect or failure rather than a different parenting philosophy or withdrawal due to circumstance. In doing so, she fails to acknowledge the shame that can come with having to admit poverty (Chase & Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2014). As these authors remind us, participation in society as a full and recognized citizen is largely contingent on having the material resources deemed normal for that society. When such means are not available, the common response is to feel inadequate and to save face by withdrawing to varying degrees from society. This behaviour is similar to that of the “poor parents” described by Sabrina.

The effects of class relations are felt when it comes down to fielding teams. Because many sports require multiple participants, the lack of resources among some families affects others (Coakley, 2009, p. 313). In a rural and small-town region in which youth sport associations rely on every child to participate for programs to run, withdrawal from organized youth sport can ignite contentious class relations. Working-class or poor parents who do not “make enough of an effort” to put their children in organized youth sport are presented as, quite literally, sabotaging the efforts of others like Sabrina who are trying to run sustainable organized youth sport programs in the West Kootenays. What is interesting is that the efforts of (often middle- and upper-class) parents whose children are “pursuing the dream” may also lead to the weakening of local programs. In addition, many West Kootenay families are gravitating towards unstructured and alternative activities and as a result, some young people are withdrawing from traditional sports. While all three of these child-rearing strategies weaken local organized youth sport associations, they are not all treated as problematic. Efforts to “pursue the dream” and provide “alternative activities” are frustrating to local sport association but they are still interpreted as the result of parents’ focus on their children’s futures. Withdrawing altogether from any structured or organized activities is regarded as neglect.

These findings reveal that in the West Kootenays, the middle-class, hegemonic discourse of modern parenting dominates within institutions like organized youth sport,

even if it may not be dominant in all homes across the region. To paraphrase Coakley (2009), people in the middle and upper class of the West Kootenays have the resources to organize and promote organized youth sport in ways that support their ideas about parenting and childhood (p. 303). This is evident in the ways the child-rearing practices of working-class and poor families are not given equal value or are deliberately erased (Lareau, 2011, p. 237). The erasure is evident in Denise's response to my question about what young people do if they do not play sport:

To be honest, I don't really know what young people are doing if they don't play sports. I had a class, and I'd ask them every Monday, "What did you do all weekend?" And, you know, there's a lot of people involved in outdoor stuff, there's tons of hunting and there's lots of hiking, and there's the whole cross-country skiing, but there is a lot of young people that sit around in their house and play video games, 48 hours, and then go back to school, and whether they do it with friends or they don't. But if you don't play organized sport, what do you do?

Many people like Denise recognize that organized youth sport is not the only way to spend one's time; yet, they still insinuate it is the *best* way to spend time. This point is important to consider. While some parents may deliberately pursue child-rearing practices which do not include organized youth sport, others have no choice and their children may feel an emerging sense of constraint as they realize the way they were raised does not match up with contemporary expectations (Lareau, 2011). As Shelby says of her childhood:

It can be really isolating, I guess, for young people who didn't play sports. I didn't really have many friends because I went to an independent school and I was heavy. When I moved to the big high school and joined sport, it changed. . . . So, life kind of sucked before that. Life definitely got a lot better when I started playing sports, that's for sure.

Despite some parents' satisfaction with raising children in rural and small towns, some youth may frame their rural West Kootenay upbringing as a failure. In the words of Looker and Naylor (2009), the child-rearing practices of some parents may lead their children to see themselves as at "risk" of being rural. One mother-daughter conversation illustrates this well:

Me:            If you weren't playing soccer, what would you do?

- Child: I don't know, there's nothing else to do.
- Parent: There's lots to do!
- Child: No. In a small town, you play sports or you play sports. You do nothing or you work.
- Parent: I was just thinking. In my day, everybody if they didn't play sports, you worked or just did nothing. Hung out. Went for TC, town cruise, whoever had a car went cruising all the time.

While this mother has good memories of her rural childhood and believes that she has made the right choice raising her daughter in the West Kootenays, her daughter believes otherwise. I should not, however, end this section on a pessimistic note. There were certainly children in this project who had no problem not playing organized youth sport. As Grant says about himself,

It's always good to see friends and have something to do. Even though I am not in sports, I have something scheduled, I've been out every night of the week, just because friends to see, girlfriend to see, gym to go to. It was mostly just being at home, doing nothing. I was pretty content doing nothing. It's not like I look back and it's like, "Man, I really wish I went to whatever class" or "I wish I had gone to 'blank'" community centre for a lesson. I was just happy to be at home and have time to myself.

Grant may have not been completely ostracized because his brother was, by all accounts, an all-star athlete and his mother was a well-known volunteer and supporter of organized youth sport. Nonetheless, what this dissertation reveals is that young people do not entirely dismiss their childhood as "flawed" because of the material and ideological conditions preventing them from replicating ideal childhoods—whether those be modern or rural. They draw on other sources of satisfaction to frame their childhood as enjoyable or the West Kootenays as a good place to grow up.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

Findings presented in this discussion support the idea that there is no "monolithic structure" which can be termed rural childhood or rural parenting (Matthews et al., 2000, p. 143), just as there is no monolithic structure that can be termed "organized youth sport." Through a combination of geographic, historical, and generational contexts, access to

material resources, and agency, parents pursue varied child-rearing strategies—each with a distinct impact on the shape of organized youth sport. While some strategies are intimately tied to the pursuit of child rearing through athletic success, others are not. I call these “Pursuing the Dream,” “Making it Work,” “Opting Out,” and “Being Pushed Out.” What parents’ actions also reveal is the complexity of the “rural.” As Woods (2011) suggests, “rural” life is never singularly about geography or demographics; it is also about the ideas people hold and the everyday practices of people living in these very places.

## **Chapter 7.**

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provide a summary of key findings that emerged from this research project and how these relate to knowledge on organized youth sport in rural and small towns, as well as in Canada more broadly. I first draw attention to the usefulness of a place-based, life course inquiry into organized youth sport. I then outline the implications, importance, and limitations of this research. Possible avenues for future research are also discussed.

#### **7.1. Summary of Key Findings**

##### **7.1.1. A Place-based, Life Course Ethnographic Inquiry Into Organized Youth Sport in the West Kootenays**

Utilizing a place-based, life course perspective to interpret the ethnographic material in this dissertation reveals that place is a key factor influencing individual and social behaviour (Daniels, Baldacchino, & Vodden, 2015). For the young people, parents, and adults involved in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays, place is at the centre of their practices and meanings (Vodden, Baldacchino, et al., 2015) of childhood, parenthood, and organized youth sport. My research also makes visible the ways in which people are connected to ideas, practices, and processes that exist beyond their spatial location. Many of the young people, parents, and sport administrators who took part in this project draw on dominant ideologies of parenthood and childhood. They also navigate expectations embedded in the dominant youth sport system. What I have also demonstrated is that even ideas, practices, and processes which seem placeless must eventually “touch down” (Daniels et al., 2015). When they do, they are recreated, reinterpreted, and reinvented within spatialized contexts like the West Kootenays.

By combining a place-based perspective with principles from the life course perspective, I have demonstrated that living in the West Kootenays exposes young people and parents to, and roots them in, alternative practices and ideologies of parenthood and childhood—those linked with parenting in the countryside (Bonner, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Valentine, 1997; Wuthnow, 2013). While the contemporary historical moment is encoded with dominant practices of childhood and parenthood, this saturation is never complete. The same can be said about practices and meanings of organized youth sport. My research provides evidence that the latter and former are always constructed and contested (Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Crossman & Scherer, 2015; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). Where I extend this argument is by highlighting the ways in which this construction and contestation is spatialized. Spatialized processes (which themselves are historical, temporal, and material) led my participants to constantly negotiate between dominant ideologies and structures, and those that are rooted in “peripheral places” (Vodden, Gibson, et al., 2015).

My use of a life course perspective grounded in place has also demonstrated that people’s actions, practices, and experiences are grounded not only in the present conditions in which they live, but also in the conditions into which they were born. As I have revealed, the parents and sport administrators who took part in this project were born between the 1940s and 1970s. This was a time at which the West Kootenays (and local organized youth sport) were thriving and hockey was *the* sport for boys. It was also a time when fertility rates were high, schools were being built at a rapid pace, and wages were decent. This historical context influenced parents’ child-rearing practices, particularly their interpretation of the value of organized youth sport and the suitability of rural places as good places to raise their children. Some parents who grew up in a thriving West Kootenays lamented that there are now fewer teams and fewer kids. Many were saddened that they could not recreate the glory days they experienced as players (primarily in the case of men) or as fans/supporters. Some who grew up at a time in which hockey was the dominant leisure activity for young people (i.e., boys) continued to insist on the centrality of hockey in the region, and by extension, the leisure practices of their children. Those who were excluded from what Whitson (2001) refers to as the old, white, male world of hockey, were thrilled to see more sport options for their children—both boys and girls.

Others whose childhood was woven together by memories of back-to-the-land migration into the West Kootenays were happy to live in a place that allows for child-rearing strategies outside of organized youth sport.

The historical moment into which young people who took part in this study were born is also significant. All were born after the late 1990s, a period during which the expansion and diversification of organized youth sport across North America was in full swing (Sage & Eitzen, 2016). Across Canada, private academies, clubs, and associations began investing unprecedented sums of money into the system of youth sport. At the same time, the privatization of the sport sector meant parents were now having to shoulder the increasingly rising (and high) cost of participation (Beamish, 2015; Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Hyman, 2012). Coupled with an “emphasis . . . on specialised athletes and an increased willingness to use the body as a primary strategy of accumulation” (Decosse, 2015, p. 3), these processes “have spawned a billion-dollar industry centred on the production of elite [youth] athletes” (p. 3). What is important to note is how these conditions for participating and succeeding in organized youth sport have become unattainable for most young people, especially those living outside of major urban centres. Few young people in this project have been afforded the opportunities to participate in a well-funded, professionalized system of organized youth sport so often presented to young people living in Canada’s metropolises.

The young people born and living in the West Kootenays in the past 20 years have witnessed a stagnating economy and a steady decline in school-aged children. With parents often doing the “Kootenay Shuffle,” working out of town, or struggling to make ends meet, participation in organized youth sport is difficult. The production of elite athletes is nearly impossible. These conditions also make running programs more difficult. Characterized by low or inconsistent enrolment and struggle for sustainability, these programs are a far cry from the “glory days” spoken about by adults who grew up in the region. At the same time, these young people have witnessed a steady increase in the number of local, alternative leisure activities. It can be argued, therefore, that while this period has certainly pushed athletes from rural and small-town regions out of the dominant model of organized youth sport participation, it has also made room for alternative models

to emerge locally. Given this finding, we need to be cautious in assuming that all parents have the same hopes and expectations for their kids (or, that all kids have the same hopes and expectations for themselves). We also need to be reminded that not all parents or children have the same resources to work with. As Bianchi et al. (2007) note, the ideal of good parenting (i.e., providing your child access to, and keeping up with the increasing demands of, organized youth sport) is far more achievable in the middle and upper classes than in working and poor communities, especially those in rural areas.

Informed by the life course perspective's principle on linked lives, I have also demonstrated the connections between the lives of young people and parents/adults living in the West Kootenays. Family resources, parents' ideologies on childhood and parenting, and parents' own experiences with organized youth sport were all shown to influence young people's participation in, and experiences of, organized youth sport. For example, some parents were concerned about their reputation if they did not provide their children with opportunities to participate in organized youth sport – a concern that is driven by dominant ideologies on “modern parenting” (Dyck, 2012). For this reason, they worked tirelessly to “make it work” for their kids or to help them pursue their dreams. Others had a different idea of what constitutes “good parenting” (Lareau, 2011) and opted-out of organized youth sport altogether. Some parents intentionally withdrew their children from sports with deep regional roots (e.g., hockey and baseball) because of their own negative experiences in these very same sports. These examples are not to suggest, however, that young people's lives are entirely subsumed within the family (Holt, 2011, p.3). The results in this study point to individual agency on the part of young people. This can be seen in the diversity of experiences within the same historical time and geographic setting. As Mitchell (2006) notes, being born in the same year does not necessarily lead to a sharing of perspectives or life experiences.

As I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, there is evidence of heterogeneity in the lives of young people and adults based on where they live in the region, their access to resources, and their choice of leisure activities. The investment that people who live in the more remote, isolated, and rural areas of the region must make to rear children in conjunction with organized youth sport is considerable compared to what is required of

those who live in the larger towns in the region. For that reason, many opt out of organized youth sport altogether. Others simply lack the time and money to fund their children's participation. Some who participate in sports with little local infrastructure or with no local leagues (e.g., lacrosse) may find the conditions for participation prohibitive. Lengthy travel to access facilities and competition translates into unusually high expenses. There are also those who do possess the necessary resources to funnel towards supporting their children's participation. Others may play sports that are very well-supported and have a more robust local system (e.g., hockey and soccer). For these people, child rearing in conjunction with organized youth sport may be more easily accomplished.

What a place-based, life course inquiry into organized youth sport in the West Kootenays illuminates is that it is a mistake to accept, *carte blanche*, dominant discourses regarding how children should be and are raised (Lareau, 2011). Parenting and childhood must always be considered at both the macro (historical, structural) level and at the micro (individual) level. It is also a mistake to assume that organized youth sport takes on the same meanings, and is practiced in consistent ways, across time and space. What I have documented is that people living in the West Kootenays do not all experience rurality in the same way (Woods, 2011); for this reason, it would be naïve to think they experience organized youth sport, childhood, and parenthood in the same way.

### **7.1.2. Parenting and Childhood Through Organized Youth Sport in the West Kootenays**

The research presented in this dissertation reveals that the lives of young people, their parents, and sport administrators in the West Kootenays are not entirely different from those described in general literature on organized youth sport. These similarities are certainly due in part to the fact that many of the policies driving organized youth sport at the local level derive from federal or provincial mandates. The standardization of sport administration and coaching through national and provincial sport organizations (e.g., BC Soccer, Canadian Soccer Association, BC High School Sports) as well as national and provincial coaching bodies (e.g., viaSport, the Coaching Association of Canada, the National Coaching Certification Program) mean that local practices are somewhat

consistent with those elsewhere. The similarities extend well beyond playing fields and coaching certifications to the daily decisions made and practices engaged in by parents, young people, and sport administrators without whom organized youth sport would not exist.

As has been established in this dissertation, people across Canada are exposed to, and expected to take up, the same master narratives about the instrumental purposes of organized youth sport (Shaw, 2008, 2010). As Dyck (2012) lays out in *Fields of Play*, these master narratives position organized sport as “what young people across Canada need” because it will, among other things, help them achieve in school, make them healthier, help them get out of poverty and avoid violence, and teach them Canadian values in ways that other social institutions are no longer equipped to do. These purposes are explicitly laid out in federal and provincial documents such as the *Canadian Sport Policy (2012)* and *BC’s Policy on Sport and Physical Activity (2004)*.

Implicit and explicit in these policies is that parents are responsible for making sure their children participate in organized youth sport and that municipalities (and increasingly private clubs) provide the infrastructure and organization. In their book, *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life*, Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2006) argue that contemporary parents are all exposed to the same “culturally dominant ideals” of parenthood and childhood—even if they do not all hear or act on these statements of ideals in the same manner. These middle-class ideals, proposes Dyck (2012), tell us “what children ‘need’ and what conscientious parents should do [about it]” (p. 53). In the North American context, children need organized youth sport and “good parents” are expected to make considerable effort to enable their children to participate (Coakley, 2006; Dyck, 2003, 2012; Lareau, 2011; Levey Friedman, 2013; Messner, 2009; Thomson, 1999; Trussell & Shaw, 2012; Wheeler & Green, 2012). To not do so would be akin to sanctioning your child to a lesser future. Under these conditions, organized youth sport has been decidedly “incorporated . . . within the child-rearing strategies of many Canadian families” (Dyck, 2003, p. 58)—including those in the West Kootenays.

What the ethnographic material in this dissertation demonstrates is that it would be naïve to think young people, parents, and sport administrators across Canada lead the *same* lives. It is very apparent through ethnographic research in the West Kootenays that at every step along the way, people living in the West Kootenays are confronted with the fact that they do, indeed, live in rural and small towns (Wuthnow, 2013) and that this impacts their everyday decisions around, and practices in, organized youth sport.

Many West Kootenay parents are caught between discourses of modern parenting and those which link rurality with negative cultural capital (Thomas et al., 2011), risk (Looker & Naylor, 2009), and decline (Wuthnow, 2013). These parents fear being perceived as “bad parents” and accused of “leaving their kids behind” if they do not provide them with appropriate socialization through activities such as organized youth sport. They may use participation in organized youth sport to mitigate the risks associated with growing up and parenting in a rural area or small town. It is therefore not surprising that many parents in this project sought to replicate hegemonic conditions of parenthood and childhood, and by extension, organized youth sport—albeit with varying degrees of success.

As I demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5, some families make significant investment to ensure their children are not left behind. In many ways, the day-to-day lives of these young people and parents start to approximate, although never entirely resemble, the day-to-day lives of their (sub)urban counterparts described by Levey Friedman (2013) and Lareau (2011). A close ethnographic inspection of the everyday lives of these parents and young people provides evidence of a life which is no less hectic or anxiety-ridden than that of their (sub)urban counterparts. The conditions found in rural and small towns do not necessarily make parenting any less overwhelming or more relaxed. In fact, I have shown that for parents and young people in the West Kootenays, life can be more complicated, involved, and more hands-on than originally thought.

There are also many parents without access to the resources required to “pursue the dream” or “make it work” and who may feel as though they have let their children down by living in a rural and small town. Young girls may also feel the additional burden of

growing up in a rural and small town given they have fewer opportunities to “use sport as a way out” (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, pp. 127–128). Under these conditions, some young people “wish they had never grown up in a rural town” because the dominant norms of childhood and athletic success are simply out of reach. It is therefore imperative not to overestimate the agency that young people have on their own lives or to “underpla[y] the role of ‘structures’ which constrain and facilitate young people’s experiences” (Holt, 2011, p. 3). It is equally important to recognize that people can be “innovators” (Mitchell, 2006, p. 8) within these very structures.

I have provided evidence of parents in the West Kootenays who know it is unlikely they will ever be able to provide organized youth sport opportunities to their children in the way that (sub)urban middle-class parents can. This is fine because the West Kootenays offer other opportunities for child rearing. Some young people also know that they will most likely never be able to pursue elite sports, to make Provincial Teams, or “go pro” straight from their towns. This is “ok” with them because of what else their rural and small town offers. For some onlookers, choosing to remain in the West Kootenays or deciding to move to the region is tantamount to a parent saying that some other goal in life is valued more highly than “being a good parent” and “raising a good kid.” For others, however, choosing to remain in a rural and small town or to move to one is precisely a choice to “be a good parent” and “raise a good kid.” It is simply a matter of perspective on what constitutes “good parenting” and what leads to “good kids” that differs. Instead of pursuing all possible opportunities for their children to participate in organized youth sport, some parents happily make other choices.

While my research supports the arguments made by scholars that principles of modern parenting are now part of the dominant cultural narrative, it also shows that not all parents in rural and small towns practise what is designated as “modern” parenting. The same can be said for dominant cultural narratives around youth and “modern childhoods.” It is equally worth acknowledging that not all parents in cities are on the same page with respect to what constitutes modern parenting (Lareau, 2011). What this research highlights is that people living in rural and small towns are not simply “passive recipients” of dominant discourses (Shucksmith, 2016, p. 1). Some parents move to or remain in rural

and small towns because they believe they can pursue a different kind of parenting in these places. They believe that the conditions in rural and small town places like the West Kootenays are compatible with their own (perhaps non-hegemonic) views on parenting and childhood. These may be parents who actively buy into the idea of unstructured play and freedom to roam described by Wuthnow (2013) and other scholars on rural childhoods. Alongside these parents are also those who, due to a lack of resources, cannot pursue modern ideals of parenthood and childhood even if they want to. In some ways, these parents may feel safer in rural and small towns because they afford ideological and material alternatives to modern parenting and childhood.

While actions and experiences may not be solely constrained, limited, or defined by living in a particular place, they are nonetheless “perceived through the lens” of living in this place (Wuthnow, 2013, p. 15). This is because as individuals, cultures, and societies, we “invest in the myth, the concept, the idea, [the] ideal, and [the] lived materiality” of place (Douglas, 2011, p. xv). The young people, parents, and sport administrators that took part in this study acknowledge that living in the West Kootenays comes to bear on the decisions they make about, and the subsequent experiences they develop of, socialization and child rearing alongside organized youth sport. While they may “share many of the habits and values” of people who live elsewhere (Wuthnow, 2013, p. xvi), the fact of living in the West Kootenays “becomes part of how they make sense” of their experiences of parenting, childhood, and organized youth sport.

Finally, the ethnographic material presented in this dissertation also highlights how “places are created, interpreted, and reinvented by those who are a part of them” (Vodden et al., 2015, p. 12). Harvey (1996) extends this idea by suggesting that

places acquire much of their permanence as well as their distinctive character from the collective activities of people who dwell there, who shape the land through their activities, and who build institutions and social relationships within a bounded domain. (p. 310)

The everyday actions of young people, parents, and sport administrators shape what it means and looks like to be parents or children in the West Kootenays, but they also shape what it means and looks like “be rural” or “small-town.” How West Kootenay residents

understand “childhood,” “parenthood,” and “organized youth sport” shapes rural and small-town places like the West Kootenays (Holloway & Valentine, 2000). There is strong evidence to suggest that their actions may be chipping away at, although not entirely dismantling, the permanence and distinctive character of the West Kootenays. The physical landscape has changed with the abandoning of curling rinks, the building of skateparks and turf fields, and the installation of lights on baseball diamonds. Dark, quiet neighbourhoods are now awoken by the soft buzzing of industrial-grade lights.

The actions of young people, parents, and sport administrators also shape the ideas, representations, and meanings of rurality (Woods, 2011). The way many “children play” and parents “parent” through structured, organized youth activities in the West Kootenays is a far cry from idyllic representations of the rural. Few parents and children involved in organized youth sport spend their leisure time at home, in the garden, or in the woods. Instead, they pack their hockey or soccer bags, hit the road, and rush to their next game. Rather than eating fresh from the farm, these children are fuelled by protein bars and sport drinks. While I have provided examples of parents and children who seem to be holding on to the distinctive character of rural and small-town parenting and childhoods, I have also provided evidence of those who are not. Their actions may be an indication of the reconceptualization of the West Kootenays from within. The “collective actions of people” involved in specific social institutions like organized youth sport are having very real, material and ideological consequences on the West Kootenays. Given the variety of organized youth sport activities in the region, one must consider how the child-rearing strategies of parents I have presented in this dissertation signal a change in rural and small-town places. They should not, however, be assumed to stand for the urbanization of rural places or people. There are very real structural conditions which will make it nearly impossible to ever replicate the conditions found in cities. Coopes (2008) also reminds us that “places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense, are never finished but constantly being performed” (p. 30). Only time will tell how, and under what conditions, future parents, young people, and sport administrators in the West Kootenays will choose to live their lives.

### **7.1.3. A Final Note**

Ethnographers cannot try to communicate everything from our fieldwork. We must decide “on a story to tell, a thesis to present, or an argument to make” (Berg, 2004 as cited in O’Reilly, 2012, p. 209). For this project, I have focused on place and social class as an interpretive lens through which to view experiences. This does not equate, however, to an assertion on the absence of other sociological categories like gender in the everyday lives of West Kootenay residents involved in organized youth sport. My fieldwork unearthed that organized youth sport in the West Kootenays is gendered, albeit perhaps not in predictable or stereotypical ways. My attempts to find research participants did not reveal what some have described as male-dominated sport spaces in rural and small towns (Bissinger, 1990; Campbell, Mayerfeld Bell, & Finney, 2006; Foley, 1990; Kenway et al., 2006; Little, 2006). I suspect this is due to three main factors: the role of women, particularly mothers, in organized youth sport; the types of jobs held by men in the West Kootenays; and the increased push by parents for their daughters’ involvement in sport.

As many sociologists of sport and the family have demonstrated, gender also continues to shape the nature of adult involvement in organized youth sport. Specifically, women continue to play supporting or behind-the-scenes roles when it comes to their children’s participation (Coakley, 2006; Messner, 2009; Shaw, 2008, 2010; Thomson, 1999). Had I wanted to talk to parents about what goes on “at the field/rink/court” I may have been referred to the father. However, because I was interested in how parents negotiated their children’s participation in organized youth sport, I was often referred to the mothers. At other times, it was the mothers who asked to speak with me. It was also more often, although certainly not always, the case that mothers could express the challenges of child rearing in rural and small towns. I also found that some fathers were unavailable for interviews because they were out of town for work, sometimes commuting to the oil rigs far from the West Kootenays for weeks at a time. It meant they were less likely to commit to coaching a team or serving as volunteers on Boards or committees. I also found it easy to track down girls because there were so many of them involved in organized youth sport. This may be a result of child-rearing practices which acknowledge that socialization through organized youth sport is no longer only for boys (see Coakley &

Donnelly, 2009; Dyck, 2012; Messner & Musto, 2016; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). I should note that I did not have difficulty tracking down boys. Rather, it was simply that both girls and boys took part in the local organized youth sport system. Had I done my research in a different historical period (Mitchell, 2006), I am not sure this would have been the case. This was made clear to me in discussions I had with mothers who had grown up in the region and who had been provided with very few opportunities to participate in organized youth sport.

As I note in Chapters 4 and 5, there is also evidence of changing norms of masculinity. Many rural and small-town boys are taking non-traditional sporting paths. They are not following in the footsteps of what Whitson (2001) and Adams (2006) call the older, whiter, male (rural) Canada. A lot of “real men (or boys)” in the West Kootenays no longer feel compelled to play, register their sons in, or coach the sport (i.e., hockey) that was once presented as the quintessential indicator of masculinity there, as elsewhere in Canada. The declining popularity, accessibility, and salience of hockey in the region demonstrates that many parents do not view hockey as the primary site of socialization for their boys.

Where organized youth sport was most gendered was in positions of sport administration, identification of “local sport historians,” talk of the “glory days,” and everyday chatter on the sidelines. Men still dominate in administrative roles in sport organizations (Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 174). In this project, many of the men I spoke with held positions on Boards or were coaches. That being said, both Regional Sports Councils were headed by women and there were a number of women who also held positions on Boards. Nonetheless, most positions were held by men. Retired sport administrators and those who some called “local sport historians” (i.e., those who maintained the local sports museums, or who were referred to me because of their history of involvement in sport in the region) were also men. It will be interesting to see if this changes with time as more women and mothers take on leadership roles in the area.

I also noticed that those who spoke to me about “the glory days” of sport in the region (or in rural areas and small towns across the province or country) were men. They

had firsthand experience of these glory days as players or as coaches. Given the period captured by the glory days (1940s–1980s), it is reasonable to conclude that girls and women were quite literally on the sidelines during these events (see Sage & Eitzen, 2016, p. 196). Finally, throughout my time in the field I periodically heard comments such as “Do we *have* to watch the girls’ team?” or “Girls’ soccer is so boring compared to boys’ soccer.” These comments were made by boys or by parents with boys, suggesting that gender ideology which codes sport spaces as “male” spaces is alive and well in the West Kootenays. A fuller discussion of the dynamics of gender in organized youth sport in the West Kootenays will be developed further in subsequent publications arising out of this research.

A final comment pertains to gender non-conforming youths and members of the LGBTQ community. As Travers (2016) outlines, the gender segregation of organized youth sport makes it incredibly difficult for gender non-conforming youths to feel comfortable within this space. From registration forms asking participants to declare a gender to segregated locker rooms, sport spaces can be hostile environments for young people who do not conform to gender norms. As a result, these youths are often absent from organized youth sport spaces. Young people and parents who do not conform to heteronormative sporting culture also find it challenging to enjoy themselves in organized youth sport spaces and withdraw in high numbers (Hargie, Mitchell, & Somerville, 2017; O’Connor & Kieffer, 2016; Trussell et al., 2017). Future research on organized youth sport in rural and small towns would benefit from a focus on gender and sexuality.

## **7.2. Implications**

The main advantage of ethnographic work is its potential capacity to aid in discovering something “previously unknown” (Small, 2009, p. 24). It is the possibility of “truly emergent knowledge” (p. 24). My aim in this dissertation has been to demonstrate how organized youth sport is experienced on the periphery (Vodden, Gibson, et al., 2015). It has been to make the “unknown” social world of organized youth sport in one British Columbian rural and small town region “known.” In the process, I have addressed the

urban, middle-class cultural hegemony (Fredrik Rye, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011) that has come to characterize the scholarly literature on child rearing and socialization through organized youth sport. This is the same cultural hegemony that all too often drives action imposed on rural and small towns by urban bureaucrats and practitioners (Shucksmith, 2016). In doing so, I have offered a timely and important proviso concerning the blanket applicability of this view.

By privileging the perspectives and experiences of rural and small-town residents (including those of young people and adults), I have showcased the agency of rural residents, and have drawn attention to the futility of representing rural places and people as “passive recipients” of urban culture (Shucksmith, 2016, pp. 1-2). I have also drawn attention to the importance of “hearing” rather than simply “seeing” young people (Jeanes, 2010). As Fredrik Rye (2006) argues, young people express nuanced views on living in rural and small towns—views that are often not compatible with those expressed by their parents or adults. What parents and adults hope to get out of living in a rural and small town, and what they hope to provide their children with, is often at odds with what young people want and experience. We are best positioned to make rural and small towns meaningful places for young people if we actually listen to what they have to say.

By arguing that place is significant to, but not definitive of, child-rearing practices and experiences of organized youth sport, I am optimistic that coaches, recreation programs, sport policy writers, and funders will continue to see merit in a place-based approach to policy, programming, and delivery. Drawing on the work of Reimer and Markey (2008) and Vodden, Gibson, et al. (2015), I encourage them to continue acknowledging that different places should receive different levels/types of services, resources, and programming. Rather than simply tailoring programs or policies to local conditions, the goal should be to continue recognizing the influence of local conditions (geographic, historical, material, ideological, cultural, demographic) on the nature of services and programs offered. It should also be to deliberately and consciously identify and harness local assets (people, culture, environment) for the benefit of durable and sustainable programming.

The *Framework for Recreation in Canada (2015)* is a good example of a place-based approach currently in use. It calls on recreation stakeholders to acknowledge the challenges of providing recreation services in places with a small and decreasing population, lack of funds for infrastructure, pressure on volunteers, and transportation and distance—characteristic features of the rural and small towns across Canada. It encourages those working in the sector to focus on community needs and resources when delivering programming. It also encourages local community leadership in decision-making regarding provision of and access to appropriate spaces and places, opportunities and experiences. In British Columbia, however, guiding policy documents, initiatives, or funding streams fall short of a place-based approach. They are sensitive to place, but not based in place. They are aware that where programs are delivered will have a bearing on “what works.” However, their mandate is to implement normative programming across the province and their efforts are often directed towards bringing peripheral regions into their fold.

Let us briefly consider two examples. Funded by the provincial government, viaSport is the agency responsible for the delivery of sport services across British Columbia. This includes the adjudication of grants, one of which is the *BC Sport Participation Program*. One target group of this funding program is “underserved groups” including Canadians living in rural, remote, and isolate regions (viaSport, 2017). On the surface, this program seems to recognize the significance of place. Yet, a closer look at its goals reveals they are not based in place. One of the goals of the fund is

to support the expansion of existing sport participation programs or development of new programs that align with Canadian Sport for Life Fundamental, Learn to Train, and Active for Life stages, as well as the Awareness or First Contact stages.

In addition, only provincial sport organizations (PSOs), provincial disability sport organizations (PDSOs), and multi-regional delivery agencies (MRDAs) can apply for this fund. I do not know of a single PSO, PDSO, or MRDA which is solely based out of a rural or small town.

The *Community Gaming Grant Program* offers a considerable amount of funding towards sport in British Columbia. This funding is applied for every year and there is no

limit on the number of years an organization can receive it. Local organizations can apply for up to \$100,000 while regional organizations can apply for up to \$250,000. This is a large sum, especially for rural and small town organizations. For the past six years, I have secured these funds for a Lower Mainland soccer club for which I sit on the Board of Directors. It takes months of advanced planning and a team of dedicated professionals to ensure all the paperwork is completed and our reporting is compliant. The requirements to receive funding can be prohibitive for rural and small-town organizations which may lack local legal, financial, and accounting expertise to wade through the nearly one-hundred-page application document. It is also unlikely that many rural and small-town organizations meet the eligibility criteria. These include, but are not limited to, composition of the Board of Directors, regular meeting schedule with published minutes, and regular financial statements. Eligible costs may also be problematic for these organizations. Grant funds cannot be used for “travel that is social, recreational, or invitational in nature” (Columbia, n.d., p. 1). As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, travel and its associated costs is one of the most significant challenges facing these organizations. In addition, travel is often invitational in nature as few sports have local leagues to play in.

Future research could benefit from a critical policy analysis and program evaluation since that task is beyond the scope of this research. It would certainly be useful to consider where a place-based approach is already in use and what impact it has had on the quality and sustainability of sport programming in rural and small towns. This includes examining how place-based policies and programs have been emphasized, designed, and implemented in other fields such as social gerontology (see Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011), Indigenous/Aboriginal Education (Scully, 2012) and First Nations initiatives generally (see Sheperd & Persad, 2011). It would also be worthwhile to ask funding agencies like viaSport and BC Community Gaming Grants why they do not already take a place-based approach. At this point in time many stakeholders recognize that their practices and modes of delivery may need to change in place but they rarely change their expectations or their deliverables. They fail to recognize that in light of resources and priorities, young people in rural and small towns will rarely be able to compete with their urban peers. Having a system that expects them to do so is doomed from the start. They also fail to recognize that ‘type of rurality’ matters (e.g., the characteristics of specific

places in relation to infrastructure and distance to urban centres). A place-based approach will require these stakeholders to think about what can reasonably be achieved in specific places.

I close this section with recommendations for those working with or in organized youth sport programs in rural and small towns in British Columbia. They represent themes that emerged from conversations and observations in the field. There is evidence to suggest that some stakeholders recognize the importance of place and are working towards ensuring young people in rural and small towns do not miss out on meaningful and relevant sport experiences. For those not already using a place-based approach, it is my hope that the tips I provide below are used as guides in creating meaningful and relevant sporting opportunities in these communities. I caution against using these recommendations to overstate the centrality of organized youth sport in the lives of young people in rural and small towns. While there is certainly evidence to suggest that young people and adults experience sport positively, and that young people and parents in rural and small towns are eager to have more services and programs, there is also evidence which points to a retreat of young people and adults from organized youth sport in favour of other activities. There is also considerable evidence to suggest that structural barriers persist at both the community and individual level for those living in rural and small towns. No magical program or intervention will eliminate these barriers; however, I hope I have shown it is possible to acknowledge these barriers and provide programs which minimize their impact. Or better yet, turn perceived barriers into assets.

My first recommendation for those working with or in organized youth sport programs in rural and small towns in British Columbia is to be realistic about the organized youth sport activities that can be successfully and sustainably run in rural and small towns. Acknowledge the geographic and spatial limitations. When developing programs, consider the distance participants must travel, and the conditions in which this travel occurs. Acknowledge the economic conditions that are characteristics of these areas. Recognize that rural and small towns frequently go through boom and bust cycles and that these may have a direct impact on the number of players and volunteers available. They may also have a direct impact on the money parents are willing and able to spend on their children.

Precarious employment means that parents may need to save in good times and may therefore not have the disposable income to pay for organized youth sport. Finally, avoid rural/urban comparisons as this leads to a deficit orientation, which in turn leads to a silencing of strengths within the communities. Instead of trying to replicate what is offered in cities, try to find out what is best suited given the local conditions.

My second recommendation is to prioritize sustainability (i.e., quality of programming over quantity of programming). Consider the small population of rural and small towns. How many programs can be sustainably run? In an effort to acknowledge the heterogeneity of rural populations (which, to be sure, is a good thing!), practitioners may find they send their small population in too many directions. As a result, programs may not be well attended. Consider how current programs can be improved rather than offering new programs.

Third, find out what activities have historical roots in the region. If working in Indigenous communities, what are the traditional territorial games? Is there a desire by locals to provide these games to their youth? Find out what draws people to and keeps people in the region. Are people drawn to the outdoors and in search of safe areas to recreate as a family? Or are people primarily there for work (e.g., Fort McMurray)? Being aware of the area's history should help explain why there might be simultaneous resistance and insistence to change. In a region with deep connections to hockey, there may be resistance in trying to funnel funds into skateboarding. However, there may also be support for providing something more relevant.

Fourth, identify local experts and draw on their experiences and perspectives. It is important to recognize that in rural and small towns, expertise may lay outside of specific job titles (very few people are employed directly in the youth sport sector). School administrators, youth workers, civil servants, and of course, local business leaders may all have a pulse on the community. They may identify local factors that influence uptake in certain sport programming and not others. Fifth, and in a related matter, recognize that most sport administrators will be volunteers. While there is little money to hire paid staff in youth sport generally, this is particularly the case in rural and small towns. Trying to bring

professionalized youth sport delivery systems to these areas may seem like a good idea, but it is likely to be stifled by a lack of funds to permanently employ somebody. Finally, and sixth, spend time in the town or region before delivering programming. Listen, do not simply evaluate. Do not imagine what these places may need or want; understand them from the ground up.

I close by acknowledging how indebted I am to my participants for providing the basis on which these recommendations are founded. The conversations I had with participants, observations I made in the field, and meetings I attended drew my attention to key issues facing this region. I hope that my participants understand the role they have each played in making sure their rural peers are provided with meaningful and relevant physical activity and sport opportunities.

### **7.3. Limitations**

Although the results of this research project make an important contribution to the field, several limitations of this work can be identified. Notably, a major weakness of this study is that I did not capture the lived experiences of young people and parents who opt out of organized youth sport; I was only able to capture their existence through the second-hand stories of young people, parents, and sport administrators participating in organized youth sport. It is reasonable to wonder how capturing their experiences would have influenced my findings on what growing up and raising young people in rural and small towns looks and feels like. Another limitation related to participant selection is my background in soccer. This made it much easier for me to slide into conversations and interactions with soccer players and their parents than those involved in other sports. While I certainly reached out and participated in the lives of those who were not involved in soccer, I spent most of my time around those who were. It is likely that my observations were, at the very least, informed by what it takes to participate in organized youth soccer more than other sports. However, that is where ethnographic research is useful. While I undertook a considerable amount of participant observation within the soccer community,

I also interviewed and engaged in go-alongs with folks from other sport communities in the regions.

Timing was also a factor. Weather and personal and professional commitments prevented frequent visits to the West Kootenays between November and April, prime hockey and ski season. Unfortunately, I was not able to connect with members of the Red Mountain Racers<sup>29</sup> out of Rossland or the Whitewater Ski Team out of Nelson. Not being in town during the hockey season meant that I had to rely primarily on interviews rather than participant observation for much of the data presented on hockey in Chapter 5. While these interviews and limited moments of participant observation certainly yielded rich data, I wonder what else I might have found had I spent a season shadowing hockey teams and skiers in the same way I shadowed soccer teams.

For logistical purposes, this study was conducted in one region. While I did research in various villages and towns across the region, I did not compare my research with other rural and small-town regions. What might I have found if I had also done my research in a region characterized by great distances between towns? While there are certainly great distances between some towns in the West Kootenays, there are also towns that are only 20–40 kilometres apart. In many parts of British Columbia, towns are separated by hundreds of kilometres, making participation in organized youth sport all that much more challenging. As one of my participants who moved from such a region said about the West Kootenays, “I’m not used to having so many towns around and everything, and having so many sport opportunities and everything!”

Also, what if I had done my research in a region which did not have a history of hockey success? Or in a region with an arena but not much else? What about in a region with few, if any, economic opportunities for young people? While the West Kootenays is certainly experiencing many of the same effects of rural restructuring as other regions, it

<sup>29</sup> The Red Mountain Racers are a ski club that operates out of Red Mountain in Rossland. A long list of athletes from the Club have won Olympic, World Championship, and Jr. World Championship medals. Perhaps the most well-known athlete to come out of the program is Nancy Greene Reine who, in 1999, was named Canada’s female athlete of the year (“Nancy Greene,” n.d.).

is nonetheless home to major employers. “I think some small towns are more desolate in some small areas. Like, you know, up North. People need to get out and move to get a job. I think that the West Kootenays is a quality area in that way. Whereas if we were in northern Alberta, they’re just dying to get out,” said one of my participants. What if I had gone up North? Would I have found parents as willing and able to provide their children with diverse organized sport opportunities?

The location of the West Kootenays was also unique for another reason: the lack of visible minorities, especially Indigenous peoples. I believe this led my participants to entirely neglect race in their discussions of organized youth sport. While race was not the focus of my analysis, sociological inquiries are always attuned to the ways in which it (just like gender, sexuality, and age) influences experiences of organized sport. Critical race theory, for example, draws our attention to the “everyday ways in which people who are not[/or do] not consider themselves direct perpetrators of racism nevertheless benefit from racial hierarchies” (Harris, 2001). By focusing on privilege rather than discrimination, critical race theory can help uncover the ways in which white privilege is maintained through sport, even in the absence of racialized ‘others’. This insight is important when considering how the Canadian sport system, and especially hockey, is decidedly white stream (Adams, 2006; Paraschak, 2012). Paraschak and Tirone (2015) define whitestream sport as that which has been “primarily shaped by individuals of white European heritage in ways that privilege their traditions, practices, meanings, and sport structures” (p. 104). I can only assume that, had my study been undertaken in towns off the Highway of Tears (Highway 16) in northern British Columbia, race relations would have factored into experience. The highway is dotted by working-class settler towns and First Nations Reserves or towns almost entirely inhabited by Indigenous peoples. How might town rivalries be perceived in this case? How might race relations and the history of colonization come to factor into the experiences of participants?

Finally, I did not collect quantitative data on historical and current registration numbers for existing sport organizations. This would have helped provide the context for what many young people, parents, and sport administrators expressed as “changing times.” It would also have been useful to know how many organized activities exist for

young people and how many of these were focused on sport. While my ethnographic research provided evidence that there are many alternative activities in these rural and small towns, I did not know exactly what these were and how many existed.

## **7.4. Avenues for Future Research**

The most obvious avenue for future research is the need to include more remote and geographically isolated places. These places may be only “fly-in, fly-out,” may only have seasonal road access (i.e., winter roads), or may be hundreds of kilometres from the closest service provider. They may rely on satellite Internet service, may not have amenities such as restaurants or hotels or schools. Many of the children may be homeschooled or engaged in mixed-method schooling (i.e., some online, some correspondence with a community liaison) (Government of Canada, 2015). This is a very different context from rural and small towns in the West Kootenays which find themselves far from urban centres but still on main highways and clustered together to form integrated regions. The lives of people living in “peripheral places” (Vodden, Gibson, et al., 2015) may differ significantly from those of their counterparts in the West Kootenays. They may not have the choice to “make it work” in their towns: they may have to move away if they or their children want to pursue organized youth sport in any form.

Many remote and isolated places are populated almost entirely by Indigenous peoples and this would also provide a rich avenue for future research, especially if framed using post-colonial theory (Fanon, 1961, 1967; Said, 1993). This lens would facilitate a focus on interrogating eurocentrism, universality, and cultural homogeneity that characterises research on organized youth sport. Work already being undertaken in the post-colonial and/or decolonizing tradition has “decentre[d] the traditional (European) perspective,” “open[ed] space for where the Empire [can] ‘write back’” and “challenge[d] the imperial centre” (Niblett, 2007).

For example, it has been shown that Indigenous perspectives on place-based identity (Bowers, 2010) parenting and childhood (Ross, 2006), health, the body and physical activity (Lavalee & Levesque, 2012), and the role of organized sport in individual

and community lives (Schinke, Peltier, & Yungblut, 2012) differ significantly from Euro-centric perspectives. Research also illustrates that Indigenous communities continue to experience the consequences of colonization, which impact funding streams, resource bases, and family formation. Halas, McRae, and Carpenter (2012) highlight three reasons why many Aboriginal children have a hard time accessing quality Physical Education programs in their communities. First, the systematic underfunding of Aboriginal education in Canada leads to poor quality of equipment, facilities, and instruction. Second, the sociohistorical context of education for Aboriginal peoples (education being used as an instrument of oppression and assimilation of Aboriginal children) means that many find education to be an oppressive context. Finally, including gyms in the construction of schools is not always an infrastructure priority or when it is, the gyms are not always open to the public (or big enough to house the public). This severely restricts the ability of sports to be used as a community gathering—something which is important in (a) Aboriginal communities and (b) small and remote communities where gathering places can be disparate.

In a separate study, Taylor (2013) found that many Indigenous students opt out of organized sport in their communities—especially when they are provided through the school system—because they cannot identify with what is currently offered and defined as sport opportunities in their communities (p. 28). The sports being offered are not culturally relevant. Other research demonstrates that organized sport in residential schools and “Indian Days” festivals was used as a tool to assimilate, oppress, and subjugate Indigenous peoples (Downey & Neylan, 2015; Forsyth, 2012; Habkirk & Forsyth, 2016). At the same time, research reveals that contemporary Indigenous peoples are using organized sport to empower their nations and break away from stereotypes; they are decolonising sport in exciting ways (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 2012; Paraschak & Thompson, 2014; Robidoux, 2012).

In his book *Stickhandling Through the Margins* (2012), Michael Robidoux argues that Indigenous peoples are taking up sports like hockey and supplanting their own traditions, practices, meanings, and sport structured onto them. He argues that “Aboriginal cultural values are being proactively expressed through hockey in First Nations settings

under Aboriginal control, rather than merely reproducing Euro Canadian understandings of the sport” (Paraschak & Tirone, 2015, p.105). Preliminary research I have conducted in isolated and remote Indigenous communities on British Columbia’s coastline demonstrates this. It reveals that organized youth sports like basketball, hockey, and soccer provide an opportunity for the coming together of extended families, the sharing of stories, and the holding of a potlatch or community feast. It also shows that children and adults coexist in the same sporting spaces, rather than being separated on opposite sides of the field, court, or rink. Many Indigenous communities are using sport to empower their nations and to work towards reconciliation. In the words of Robidoux (2012), these First Nations are using organized youth sport as a “key site for cultural enunciation, not cultural capitulation” (p. 9).

A final avenue for future research could be a longitudinal study that follows young people from rural and small towns as they transition into adulthood. A comparison between the pathways taken by those not involved in organized youth sport and those who are could yield interesting results. This is because research has consistently demonstrated that rural youth take a number of different pathways into adulthood and that these depend on attachment to place, career aspirations, access to a social support network, and material resources (Cooke, Mann, & Burns, 2015). Research has also noted that adulthood for many young people from rural and small towns is coupled with a move away from their hometown, even if temporarily (Jamieson, 2000; Jones, 1999; R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd, 2002; Thomson & Taylor, 2005). What has not been explored thoroughly, however, is the role that participation in organized youth sport might play in young rural people’s pathways into adulthood. Despite claims about sport playing a central role in the social and cultural life of many rural communities (Atherley, 2006; Mair, 2009; Spaaij, 2009b; Tonts & Atherley, 2010), we know very little about the impact participation in sport can have on young people’s pathways into adulthood and their likelihood of moving away to pursue their goals. What role might participation in organized youth sport play in developing a sense of place (Fullerton, 2015, p. 181), and with that, a likelihood of wanting to settle down in that place as an adult?

What I have demonstrated in this study is that many parents in the West Kootenays use organized youth sport to better their children's future prospects in the face of rural restructuring. Rather than "rooting" these young people in the social and cultural life of their communities (Fullerton, 2015), organized youth sport is used to equip young people with the skills required to succeed in the world beyond their hometown. In the process, parents may be sending the message (and their children may be internalizing the message) that living in their rural and small town should only be enjoyed temporarily, and that opportunities for enrichment and success lay elsewhere. Under such conditions, young people who participate in organized youth sport may develop negative perspectives of their hometowns and may be likely to move away once they graduate from high school. Whether they return is unknown. Those with exceptional athletic talent are even more likely to set their sights on a metropolitan life owing to the urban location of nearly all post-secondary institutions and sport franchises. In addition, those who want to make a career in sport and recreation administration or coaching are unlikely to see their dreams materialize in rural and small towns. These possibilities point to a need to consider the role that sport plays in youth pathways into adulthood.

While this project has focused on young people who participate in organized youth sport, it has also drawn attention to the fact that some young people actively avoid or are pushed out of organized youth sport in their rural and small towns. It would be worthwhile to consider how these young people develop a sense of place outside of organized youth sport and how their pathways into adulthood many differ from their peers'. In a recent study exploring the impact of arts and culture initiatives on community economic development in rural Saskatchewan, Fullerton (2015) notes that many young people are itching to be provided with an avenue outside of organized sport to experience something which builds community spirit and pride. His research highlights the efforts of adults to work alongside young people interested in playing an active role in the cultural and artistic enrichment of their community. The hope is that these young people will contribute to developing a "place of quality" and, as a result, will want to plant roots in town. It would certainly be fruitful to investigate the result of divergent childhoods on young people's attachment to place, their career aspirations, and as a result, their likelihood of returning

home to raise their own family. This is particularly important for those interested in the future of Canada's rural and small towns.

Finally, more work could be done to elucidate class-based and racialized inequalities in the context of historical time and place and sport participation (or barriers to participation). Future research looking at young people's pathways into adulthood should consider how the latter are shaped by the intersectional effects of place, race, gender, sexuality, and social class. Scholars have noted the heteronormative and androcentric characteristics of rural and small towns across Canada (Campbell, Mayerfeld Bell, & Finney, 2006; Kenway et al., 2006; Little, 2006), especially within the context of organized youth sport (Bissinger, 1990; Foley, 1990; Robinson, 1998). It is worth considering how these factors may influence parents' and children's decisions to participate in organized youth sport in their hometowns, and subsequently young people's transitions into adulthood. How might heteronormative and androcentric experiences of organized youth sport in rural and small towns such as those described by Robinson (1998), make some young people reconsider living in their communities beyond high school?

As this dissertation comes to a close, I consider an argument I made at the outset of this dissertation: that the world of organized youth sport in British Columbian rural and small towns remains unexplored and unexplained. It is my hope that the descriptive and interpretive material contained in this ethnography helps remedy this. I also hope I have demonstrated that living in a peripheral place does not equate to languishing in a peripheral existence. The young people, parents, and sport administrators whose lives are showcased in this work live rich lives. Many young people with whom I spoke enjoy living in the West Kootenays and cherish the uniqueness of growing up in such a place. Against considerable odds, the parents and adults work tirelessly to provide for the young people in their communities. Some are guided by dominant norms of modern parenting, while others are guided by a West Kootenay Culture. No matter what approach these parents and adults take to child rearing, their children will be ready to take on the world—whether in the West Kootenays or beyond its boundaries. In closing, I consider the words of Baldacchino, Vodden, & Gibson (2015): "it is clear that matters of place are matters of

deep significance” (p. 315). It is my hope that by showcasing the everyday lives of these West Kootenay residents, I have contributed to the significance of rural people and places. In line with Sanford (2008), I am optimistic that I have encouraged others to notice and appreciate these places and people; to let the world of rural and small-town people invade their world as it has mine.

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