

**“We can compete and we can be equals”:  
Female experiences of co-gendered soccer**

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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## **Abstract**

Despite many sports leagues for participants over the age of 18 being co-gendered, little research has explored how women experience co-gendered sport. Women are typically underrepresented in these leagues so it is important to understand what attracts them to the sport and their experiences of playing. The current study examined how women experience co-gendered soccer in a Region of Waterloo soccer league. Semi-structured conversational interviews with seven women, who participated in co-gendered soccer for more than one season, were conducted. The findings suggest that upon facing unfavourable stereotypes about women's athletic abilities, women who play co-gendered soccer felt the need to prove their skills to male teammates, thus changing the way they played and experienced soccer. Women also both resisted, by their confidence and skill, and reproduced, by their acceptance of male athletic superiority, dominant gender ideologies that frame co-gendered soccer. Therefore, although co-gendered soccer experiences are gendered and teammate interactions can reinforce dominant gender ideologies, the current research found that co-gendered soccer is also a space for women to resist and challenge what it means to be "feminine." Furthermore, this study suggests that there is need for organizational change based on how women experienced gendered rules and organizational structure in co-gendered leagues. Although co-gendered soccer is experienced positively by some women, there is much work to be done by players, captains, and sport organizations to decrease gendered constraints and create more positive sport experiences for all players.

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### 1.0 The Soccer Player: Prologue

From the age of six, soccer has always been a part of my life. I remember the freedom of running across the field with the wind in my hair, faster than anyone else to defend, or attack, the goal. When I was younger, soccer was something I experienced with little thought to gender, but as I grew older, gender has become very obvious in my soccer experiences. As I went from early elementary school to mid-elementary school, I continued to enjoy the freeing experience of playing soccer and was always viewed as a very fast, and skilled, member of my team. While I continued to be a star player, a major change occurred to my team; there were only girls. While previously I played on a co-gendered team, when I turned 8, the teams split into girls' and boys' teams. At the time, I found nothing odd about that as it was just *the way things were done*.

Soccer continued to be a part of my life all throughout high school, and while I stopped all other forms of physical activity, including physical education (as a class), cross country running, basketball, volleyball, and track and field; I never stopped playing soccer. Looking back, I wonder, what is it that made me give up being a part of other sports? I had always been very athletic and enjoyed being active, but when I went to high school my interest in sports dropped drastically. I regret my decision to decrease my participation in sport and wonder how influential my gender was in changing what I thought I enjoyed and what sports I played. For example, did I stop participating in sport because my female peers viewed sport as “uncool?” Regardless of my reasons to stop participating in sport, I am glad that at least a small part of me overcame what might have been gender expectations and continued to play the one sport I loved; soccer.

In university I found myself wondering how I would continue to play soccer. After my first few weeks in residence, sport team sign up lists came around and I quickly signed up for



outdoor soccer. I was so excited to be a part of the team and was looking forward to playing with my new peers. I found myself worrying about how I would play and if I would be good enough since it would be the first year that I would be playing with guys on my team since I was eight. My first game came, and I found myself fitting in well and enjoying playing with talented teammates. After the game, an older male student approached me and said, “Wow; I’m impressed. You play like a guy.” At the time I was not sure what to say, so I took it as a compliment and replied “Thanks.” This comment was likely made in regards to my level of aggression and strength of play, and was based on the stereotype that this is how men play, but not women. While I took the comment in stride, it upset me to think that there was an automatic assumption that I would be a poor soccer player because I was female. This experience left me feeling like I had to step up my game in order to better represent the female population in sports.

A few years later, having left residence and finding myself on a work term, I again felt the strong desire to play soccer. I found a co-gendered soccer team with some previous co-workers and showed up to my first game very nervous and worried that the guys on my team would be better than me. After just one game, I realized that my skill level was similar to theirs and I had nothing to worry about. As the season progressed, I noticed a distinct gender divide on our team. Our team captain was male and made all team decisions. As a result, female players could only substitute with each other, and while we had more female than male players; only four players on the field, out of 10, could be female. Furthermore, while describing our team to a friend, our captain said, pointing to our female players, “If they weren’t on our team, we could move up a level.” I was shocked at this outright sexist comment and continued assumption that female players are weaker and less skilled than male soccer players. That season, I continued playing on the team and realized that while my team captain held sexist beliefs, there were other

males on the team who valued me as a skilled player and not as a “lesser-skilled” female player. Overall, my experiences in soccer have left me feeling that more needs to be done to understand what the sport experience is like for women. More specifically, I wonder types of experiences other women have had playing co-gendered sports. Do women internalize how they are perceived by male players, making them feel like less capable players? What is it about sport that encourages women to continue playing despite gendered challenges? Clearly, the co-gendered sport contexts offer an opportunity to study the female sporting experience, which enables new and different questions to be addressed.

## 2.0 Introduction

There is an abundance of research that demonstrates the benefits of physical activity for health and well-being (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010; Penedo & Dahn, 2005; Saxena, Van Ommeren, Tang, & Armstrong, 2005; Strong et al., 2005; Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006). There are also specific benefits associated with sport participation including the development of co-operation, leadership skills, self-confidence, and sportspersonship (Stryer, Tofler, & Lapchick, 1998). Despite these benefits, young women and women have a lower participation rate in physically active leisure and sports than young men and men (Dowda, Ainsworth, Addy, Saunders, & Riner, 2003; Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 1999; Jago, Anderson, Baranowski, & Watson, 2005; Sylvia-Bobiak & Caldwell, 2006). It is important to understand such differences given the popularity of sport for both men and women. In 2005, 7.3 million Canadians over the age of 15 reported they were regularly active in sport—a competitive activity with rules—of which approximately 38% were female (Ifedi, 2005). Based on these numbers and the population size of Canada, Ifedi (2005) concluded that 21% of Canadian females over the age of 15 participate in sport. Also, while physical activity rates of males and females vary across all age groups, between the ages of 10-16, females who become a part of organized sport are more likely to withdraw than males (Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2003). There are many possible reasons for the apparent gender differences in sport and physical activity participation, including gender role expectations, family and peer support, and the availability of sporting opportunities.

Much research, both within and from outside of the recreation and leisure studies field, clearly shows how women's sport participation patterns, motivations, and constraints differ from men's (Fox & Riddoch, 2000; Goodsell & Harris, 2011; Jago et al., 2005; Kilpatrick, Hebert &

Bartholomew, 2005; Vilhjalmsson & Kristjansdottir, 2003; Wiley, Shaw, & Havitz, 2000).

While comparing men and women can help identify certain aspects of the sport experience that differ for two genders, thereby illuminating how leisure experiences can be improved for both, the focus on this dichotomy leaves large gaps in the knowledge of women's experiences in sport. For example, how might sport experiences differ among women and even within an individual? Lenskyj (1990) explains: "it is neither valid nor productive for [sport] research to focus on comparisons between the sexes, unless such research accepts difference and diversity, rather than using the male yardstick to measure all human behaviour" (p. 235). That is, when research focuses on establishing differences *between* genders, *among* gender differences are neglected.

While some scholars have explored women's experiences (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Thomsson, 1999; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011), there remains a need for research aimed at understanding women's lived experiences with all aspects of sport participation. In particular, understanding what aspects of the sport experience may cause females to drop out is an important area of research to reduce attrition rates and help women achieve the same health benefits that men achieve through sports. Moreover, many amateur sports leagues in North America for participants over the age of 18 are co-gendered, but have difficulty recruiting enough female players (Evenson et al., 2002; Henry & Comeaux, 1999). Therefore, it is important to understand whether co-gendered, having both male and female members, teams influence the level of female sports participation that occurs over the age of 18. Greater understanding of the differences and similarities among women in sport is an important area of research as it can bring greater understanding to different aspects of the leisure experience, including motivations, constraints and leisure preferences.

With these gaps in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore women's experiences playing co-gendered soccer. The focus of the proposed research was on examining the experiences of women, so as to gain more in-depth knowledge about the sporting experience for women when they play sports with men. Greater understanding of what participation on a co-gendered sports team is like for women is important to illuminate aspects of sport that may constrain or encourage women to participate, and reveal gender-based inequalities that remain a problem in sports programming. Sport is an excellent leisure context in which to study gender because as Messner (1988) suggests, sport is a "dynamic social space where dominant (class, ethnic, etc.) ideologies are perpetuated as well as challenged and contested" (p. 198). Enhanced understanding about how women experience sport can improve planning for sport opportunities for women (e.g., at league, provincial, or municipal levels). This may include re-examining policy concerning the separation and integration of males and females in sport. It may also include considering the rules and regulations and organizational culture of co-gendered sports leagues that may undermine the physical abilities and capabilities of women. As females often do not acknowledge constraints to their leisure, especially in relation to gender (James, 2001; Varpalotai, 1995), bringing awareness to how sport, and therefore leisure, choices may be influenced by factors beyond the immediate control of participants' can also reveal the need for continued societal change in power structures.

Results of this research may also be used to design co-gendered sport opportunities for women that provide optimal benefits and minimal harm to participants. By understanding which aspects of co-gendered sport may cause women distress or create a negative sport experience, changes can be made to improve these experiences. There are also benefits to the participants of having their voice heard as part of the research process and being able to express their lived

experiences. Finally, by understanding how women experience sport, steps can be taken to improve participation levels of younger females so that all citizens, regardless of gender, can equally benefit from participation and enjoyment of sport and leisure.

### 3.0 Literature Review

There is a large and growing body of literature that explores the links between gender and sport (Knoppers & McDonald, 2010). In this section, I review literature on gender, physical activity, and sport. I begin by defining sport and then gender. Next, I review the gender and sport body of literature under the following subheadings: the masculinist underpinnings of sport, the gendered nature of sport participation, the gendered nature of sport constraints, outcomes and motivations of sport participation, and co-gendered sport. Lastly, I review research related to organizational culture and gender. This review is meant to provide the context for my study.

#### 3.1 Defining Sport and Gender

Sport has been defined in various ways over the years and is not always clearly distinguished from physical activity. Caspersen, Powell, and Chistenson (1985) note that physical activity is “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure” (p. 126). Using this definition, they categorize sports as a type of physical activity. Fox and Riddoch (2000) define sport as “structured, competitive situations governed by rules” (p. 498) while Merriam-Webster says that sport is “physical activity engaged in for pleasure; a particular activity (as an athletic game) to engage in” (n.d.). Pulling elements of various definitions together, Coakley and Donnelly (2009) define sports as “institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by internal and external rewards” (p. 4). Sport is also a form of leisure, using an objective definition of leisure as free time or activity (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). For the case of this research, sport will be defined as a leisure activity that is organized, competitive, and requires skill and physical exertion.

To understand the link between sport and gender, it is helpful to understand the meaning of gender. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (as cited in Butler, 2006, p. 1). Gender differs from biological sex. Whereas sex is biologically based, gender is socially influenced. While many scholars acknowledge that there are structural elements in society that emphasize gender differences, gender is by and large socially constructed (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Andersen and Taylor (2006) define gender as “the socially learned expectations and behaviours associated with being male or female” (p. 676). Individuals are socialized through various societal activities and norms, which teach us what gendered behaviour should be like in a given situation (Mennesson, 2012).

The social construction of gender also refers to the reproduction of essentialist feminine and masculine characteristics (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). With this in mind, social constructions of femininity include physical attractiveness (thin, toned), being emotional or sensitive, heterosexual, visually different than male, and being inferior to men (Lorber, 1994). In contrast, social constructions of masculinity include strength (physical and emotional), heterosexuality, privilege, knowledge, and dominance (Lorber, 1994). Thus, the social construction of gender refers to how gender is full of meanings that social groups ascribe, and that gender inherently does not have its own characteristics; it is situated in social context (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). Social constructions of gender are dynamic as they change over time. For example, the social construction of fatherhood has changed dramatically over the past three to four decades moving towards men being more actively involved in caring for children (Lorber, 1994). Leisure is a common context for gender roles to be learned and reinforced, especially in sport, where there are clear expectations about what sports are “appropriate” for men versus women (Henderson, 1994).



Since many consider gender to be socially constructed, there is an opportunity for it to be “undone” (Deutsch, 2007). That is, individuals can “do” gender by participating in “behaviour that reinforces dominant ideologies” (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008, p. 83), but there is also an opportunity for resistance by challenging dominant ideas about what is appropriate behaviour, activities, and choices for men and women. Thus, the way that individuals interact with each other on a daily basis, and the attributions made regarding behaviour being male or female, can reproduce or resist gender (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). For example, hockey is often constructed as a male sport due its focus on speed, aggression, physical contact, and competition, which are traits socially constructed as “masculine” (Lorber, 1994; Wiley et al., 2000). Women, however, have challenged that conceptualization of hockey and make up significant proportions of players today (Theberge, 2000). While this shows that the social construction of femininity changes, research shows that female hockey players still view male hockey as more physical and aggressive perpetuating that “real” aggression is a male trait (Theberge, 2003). Clearly, sport offers a space for women to resist the social construction of gender, which can result in a redefinition or conceptualization of womanhood.

For the case of my research, I will be using the term “co-gendered” to refer to sports that have both male and female participants. While typically the term “co-ed” has been used to describe these sports, as the word “co-ed”, when used as a noun, has roots in the identification of differences between men and women in academic institutions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), I have chosen not to use this word. While the term “co-ed” may be present in the following discussion of existing literature on women and sport, for the purpose of my own research findings, the word “co-gendered” will be used.

### 3.2 The Masculinist Underpinnings of Sport

Gender has an influential role on sport participation behaviours and experiences, especially for women (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). As sport is an area that has typically been dominated by men, women often exhibit behaviours and attitudes about sport participation that reflect a masculinist structure. The masculinist underpinnings of sport are reflected in the following definition of sport as: “tests of physical strength and endurance, rather than tests of kinesthetic ability, flexibility, coordination, or other physical attributes... therefore men can maintain the illusion of athletic superiority by naming these attributes as bona fide requirements of the ideal athlete” (Lenskyj, 1990, p. 237-238). The continued belief that sports that emphasize traditionally masculine traits, such as strength and endurance, are “real” sports, while other sports with similar characteristics, like gymnastics or figure skating, are “less” of a sport, reveal the masculine roots of sport (Lenskyj, 1990). This further emphasizes the binary between the athletic capabilities of males and females and continues the assumption that “real sport” is a male domain.

Krauchek and Ranson (1999) identify three options for women when they participate in the elite sporting world. These ways of participating in sport were described throughout 32 interviews with Canadian female athletes who participated in soccer, swimming, or track and field at the varsity level. Firstly, female athletes can adopt the male model of sport, which means women accept that sport is aggressive and that “no pain, no gain” is the way sport should operate (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). Secondly, women can accept a second-class sport status, which refers to believing that as a female, you will never be as capable as men in sports. This approach is reflected in language such as referring to female team members as “girls” and making comments about how the female team members will never be as good as the male team members

(Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). Thirdly, females can change the rules of sport by not accepting the notion that men are naturally better athletes, and by creating their own “counter culture” of women who play sports and are seen to capable athletes (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). Within the first two options, women are likely to continue to see sport within a male realm and less likely to challenge negative experiences, such as harassment (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). Resisters however, will challenge the male rules of sport and views that women athletes are less able than men, and participate as they see fit. Theberge (2000) sees the increase of female participation in hockey, which was traditionally viewed as masculine due to the competitive nature and toughness associated with the sport, as a sign that females are challenging the belief that the sporting world is mostly masculine.

In their study on the effects of gender socialization on younger females in Australia, Slater and Tiggemann (2010) determined that adolescent females view sport as masculine, making it uncool for them to participate. This helped explain why adolescent females withdrew from sport participation. Sport is also viewed to be competitive, which is seen to be a male trait, making women less likely to get involved (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). The view of competition and risk as male-appropriate traits may also prevent women from being a part of tournaments, which are known to be competitive by nature, and participation is risky as you may win or lose (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). The risk involved in possibly failing, or not winning, may be something women do not take on, perhaps worrying about how they are already viewed by male and/or female athletes.

Beliefs about the physical and biological capabilities of women can also prevent women from participating in sport fully. Some research has identified women as less physically capable in sport than men (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). These physical and biological “truths” in turn, lead

men and women to believe that women are less capable in sport. These traditional views of men and women's sporting abilities are grounded in sport's masculinist underpinnings, hold great strength, and are maintained even when women display contradictory evidence, such as women displaying great skill in softball (Wachs, 2005). Lorber (1993) explains how society seeks information to *confirm* gender differences in order to legitimize the dichotomous way our society is set up. Metheny (1955) identifies that while *on average* men are more physically capable in sports than women *on average*, comparing averages is not a valid way of understanding the capabilities of women. Further, Metheny (1955) argued that studying average behaviour does not explain the full experience of male and female sporting abilities and that the general statement that men are athletically "better" than women can limit females in their beliefs about their own abilities.

Many sports teams and leagues have a majority of male leadership, and females often fail to acknowledge this male-domination or challenge its implications. Overall there is an overrepresentation of men in leadership positions on sport teams and organizations (Acosta & Carpenter, 2000; Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). Varpalotai (1995) studied ringette, a sport played by women but often coached and led by men, by interviewing Canadian adolescents who play ringette. She noticed that very few athletes were critical of the male leadership of their teams or saw the need for change in the prominence of male leaders in sport. This lack of critique seems to point out that even in a sport in which women are dominant, there is little thought given to men still being in positions of power and leadership. Also, on teams with both male and female coaches, the roles that women take on should be carefully considered. As Landers and Fine (1996) found, often coaching is a gendered activity with female coaches being responsible for more passive coaching tasks, like sideline coaching or

administration, while male coaches are more responsible for active coaching tasks, like completing drills, throwing, and batting. The male position of power in female sport is not always perceived by participants as problematic, though feminist scholars would strongly suggest it is (Varpalotai, 1995). As Coakley and Donnelly (2009) state:

Unless girls and young women see women in decision-making positions in their programmes, and perhaps even in men's programmes, they will be reluctant to define sports and sport participation as important in their future. If women are not visible leaders in sport programmes, some people conclude that women's abilities and contributions in sports are less valued than men's. This conclusion certainly limits progress towards gender equity in sports. (p. 227)

### **3.3 The Gendered Nature of Sport Participation**

There have been a number of theoretical perspectives brought to the study of sport and the gendered nature of sport participation. Perhaps one of the most prevalent theories is social role theory. This theory has been used to explain the learning of gender, and how behavioural sex differences come from the different roles that men and women play (Eagly, Wood, & Dickman, 2000). These roles are often prescribed by a society based on the social construction of masculinity and femininity. That is, men are expected to be physically large (resulting in speed and strength) and be the breadwinner of a family (involved in the public sphere). In contrast, women's roles have traditionally been at home (private sphere) raising children (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). While individuals often learn these roles by looking to others of the same sex to see what is expected of them, people may also look to others of the opposite sex, like spouses, to understand what they should be like (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Such gender roles are also

reflected in media representation of male and females athletes (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). That is, women are largely underrepresented in sports media, suggesting that female athletes are undeserving of media attention or it is outside the norm. When women are represented in sports media, they are often portrayed in passive poses with the emphasis on their appearance, but not their athleticism (Koivula, 1999).

Feminist sport scholars play a key role in challenging these representations of female athletes and the gendered nature of sport participation. Although feminism is broad, most feminists acknowledge there is a difference in power between men and women and that inequality is created as a result of patriarchy—male-dominated society (Herridge, Shaw, & Mannell, 2003). Feminist research seeks to bring attention to differences in power and make visible the struggle of women (Herridge et al., 2003). In the area of gender and sport, most feminists seek to expose sport as a structure that reproduces male hegemony—the cultural norm of male dominance (Fink, 2008). Gill (1994) suggests that by employing a feminist perspective to sport psychology, we can start to understand motivations and values of sport participation.

As gender is largely socially constructed, it can influence why certain sports are viewed as more “appropriate” for males or females, and can help account for participation differences in certain sports (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). For example, generally sports deemed gender-appropriate for women are those that emphasize appearance and aesthetics like gymnastics, figure skating, and synchronized swimming (Riemer & Visio, 2003). One of the biggest challenges women face in participating in sports is stereotypes about what men and women are skilled at in athletics. As early as grade one, these beliefs about male and female sporting abilities are apparent, affecting the way young girls view their sport preferences and abilities (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Girls are less likely than boys to believe they are good at

sports and also less likely to say that they enjoy sports (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). The gender socialization behind this research occurs at a young age and suggests that young girls believe they are not supposed to be a part of sports, thereby effectively altering their leisure, possibly for years to come.

In order to clearly delineate what aspects of sport make it appropriate for one gender over another, Metheny (1965) explored men's and women's sport participation in the United States. She created a model that represented appropriate sports for girls and women. Metheny's (1965) model suggests that the gender-appropriateness of a sport for women centers on the level of competition and physical contact required by the sport; appropriate sports for females do not involve bodily contact amongst participants or utilizing bodily force. For example, boxing would involve being in contact with an opponent, face-to-face, which would not be considered feminine (Riemer & Visio, 2003). Similarly, Koivula (2001) found that the gender appropriateness of sports often depended on perceptions of the sports' speed, risk, and aesthetics. Sports, however, that have a barrier between opponents, like volleyball, are considered a female-appropriate form of face-to-face sport (Riemer & Visio, 2003). Kane and Snyder (1989) conducted research that supported Metheny's classification, further suggesting that the gender-appropriateness of the sport relies on the physicality of the sport and aspects like toughness, aggression, competition and physical contact.

A more updated take on Metheny's research is a study conducted by Riemer and Visio (2003) in the United States. These scholars asked students in Grades 7 through 12 the most appropriate sport for boy to participate in and for a girl. Some students responded by stating there was 'no best sport' for boys or girls. This was similar to Koivula's (2001) research in Sweden in which men and women classified some sports as gender-neutral, such as tennis and

swimming. For those who did comment on gender appropriate sports, their answers reflected stereotypical gender roles for men and women. Riemer and Visio (2003) concluded that football and wrestling are still seen to be male-appropriate sports, while aerobics and gymnastics are seen to be female-appropriate sports. Koivula (2001) concluded that soccer was viewed as masculine in Sweden while more recent research from Hardin and Greer (2009) has indicated that in the United States, soccer is viewed as gender-neutral. In studying adolescent sport and physical activity involvement in the United States, Aaron et al. (2002) similarly concluded that certain sports have clearly gendered participation. For example, female adolescents were more likely to participate in aerobics and softball, while male adolescents were more likely to participate in baseball, basketball, football, street hockey, and weight lifting (Aaron et al., 2002). Furthermore, from 1990 to 1993 there was also a shift from apparent sex differences present to not present in participation rates in the sports of bowling, soccer, tennis, and roller-skating (Aaron et al., 2002). This suggests that notions of gender appropriate sports and physical activities are not static, and are changing with time. The results of Riemer and Visio's (2003) and Aaron et al.'s (2002) research suggest that while there has been some movement in sports being viewed as more appropriate for both genders, there are still clear suggestions that certain sports are more appropriate for men or women.

Even within the realm of participating in sports, physical education teachers, the ones responsible for teaching the skills to be physically active, clearly identified sports that they view as female appropriate (gymnastics, volleyball, swimming, and tennis) and male appropriate (football, basketball, taekwondo, karate, wrestling and weight-lifting) (Koca, 2009). This view of "gender appropriate" sport means that females may not be learning the necessary skills to participate in sports of all types, decreasing their ability and knowledge of sport. By not learning



the skills needed to be a sport participant, when women do participate in sports, they risk feeling incompetent as they may need to learn the skills for the sport.

Since certain sports are considered more gender appropriate than others (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Wiley et al., 2000), it is helpful to understand the effect of gender appropriateness on sport participation. Riemer and Visio (2003) note that throughout time stereotypes about feminine and masculine sports have persisted and often gymnastics and aerobics are considered feminine while football and wrestling are viewed as masculine. To begin, women have identified higher confidence in playing sports considered “female appropriate” than sports seen as “male appropriate” (Koca, 2009). It is also interesting to note that women who participate in “feminine” sports feel more restricted by their athletics than women who participate in “non-feminine” sports. Bar-Eli, Shirom, Nir, and Pines (2004) speculate this is due to more rigorous training regimes for feminine sports that start at a younger age and require a higher level of training. While De Pero et al. (2009) hypothesized that older Italian women will feel less freedom to participate in sport, with it being a stereotypically male domain; the conclusion is that both Italian men and women feel in control of their decision to participate in sports at an older age. While this belief does suggest that gender appropriateness does not affect all aspects of sport participation, like motivation, this lack of awareness of gendered sport constraints can also be seen as a sense of false consciousness (De Pero et al., 2009).

As for continued participation in sports, research suggests women are more likely than men to withdraw from sports, especially team sports (Lunn, 2010; Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). In addition to withdrawing from sports, adolescent females are also overall less likely to participate in sports than men (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). Through the adolescent years, females are more likely to take up participation in individual physical activities, like aerobics and

weight lifting, instead of team sports, like soccer and baseball (Aaron et al., 2002). In an attempt to understand why this withdrawal may happen, Moreno-Black and Vallianatos (2005) conducted qualitative interviews with first-year female university students in the United States to see if their perceptions of their bodies impacted their participation. They concluded female athletes felt very conscious of their bodies, specifically worrying about menstruation affecting their sport participation. In addition, female athletes felt subjected to the “public gaze” of spectators (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). Sport participation linked to reproductive health has a long history, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were viewed as fragile and told by doctors not to participate in sport as it could affect their reproductive organs (Hargreaves, 1985; Vertinsky, 1994). The emphasis placed on maintaining reproductive health situated women who participated in sport as going against cultural norms of caring for children and family (Vertinsky, 1994). In addition to the historical context of menstruation and reproductive health affecting experiences of sport, it seems that menstruation continues to be an important aspect of the female sport experience to examine (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005).

While ideas about men and women’s physical capabilities often effect how a female feels about her abilities, it can also affect how a woman performs in sport. On the whole, women and men carry their bodies and move differently as a result of views about the space women should occupy and what it means to be feminine and masculine (Young, 1980). This holds relevance in the sporting world, as it influences how women participate in sport; their bodies are trained to throw differently than men, making their participation in sport different (Young, 1980). While women are physically capable of throwing in the same style as men, Straus notes that girls often “do not bring their whole bodies into the motion as much as boys” (as cited in Young, 1980, p. 142). In agreement, Coakley and Donnelly (2009) concluded that boys are more likely to view

themselves as skilled athletes and have greater confidence in their abilities, increasing their willingness to fully test and use their active bodies. Similarly, girls who play co-gendered sports are more likely to feel that boys are physically superior, especially when this idea is reinforced by parents, coaches, and players (Landers & Fine, 1996). Also, high levels of self-objectification—equating worth with looks and not abilities—is more a predictor of poor throwing abilities than age or prior throwing experience, as reflected in a study on female students in the United States (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005). This influence on throwing ability may be the case as girls hold more value in how they look throwing the ball than in their actual ability to throw the ball (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005). This practiced constraint of the body and self-objectification heavily influences how women play sports as it can affect their ability, performance, and situated experience.

Women may also feel dissonance between the different roles that they hold. This dissonance often comes from holding the roles of woman and athlete, and it can be stressful for women to try and negotiate the different, stereotypically opposite, roles (Varpalotai, 1987). Varpalotai (1987) says role tension is particularly present for women who play sport at a high level, as the role of athlete is even stronger. There may also be some tension between women believing that the proper role for women in sports is facilitator of sport for men and children while also wanting to be a sport participant (Wachs, 2002). This tension arises from the ideology that women should place the needs of their children and families before their own needs (Shaw, 2001). Women also feel pressure to fill different, often conflicting, body ideals such as that of an athlete and that of someone who is attractive based on media ideals (Cox & Thompson, 2000). Overall, the different roles that women occupy can create problems for them in understanding

who they are, which can act as a constraint to them participating in sports or fully experiencing the role of athlete.

### **3.4 The Gendered Nature of Sport Constraints**

Early research on gender and constraints identifies that women's constraints to leisure are often structural and include family obligations, limited financial resources, and lack of available time; however in the area of gender and sport, women have many more complex constraints to negotiate (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). Often times, the constraints women face in participating in sport involve intrapersonal constraints (within the person), and interpersonal constraints (between people), which are often harder to identify and move beyond than structural constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). An example of this is how women often look within themselves to explain why they do not participate in sport, sometimes even explaining that they lack the "willpower" to participate (Thomsson, 1999). Speaking to the complexity of female constraints, women also may not perceive constraints to their leisure. Shaw (1994) suggests that women with constraints to their leisure, like lack of time, money or access, may accept their situation and adjust their expectations accordingly, thus preventing them from perceiving constraints to their leisure. For example, if lacking the time to participate in sports, a woman may tell herself she has no desire to participate in sports anyway, thus not feeling constrained. Specifically regarding constraints within a sports context, Alexandris and Carroll (1997) concluded Greek women face more constraints than men, especially intrapersonal constraints (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997). In contrast, Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006) found young girls in the United States have more freedom to choose less "gender appropriate" sport than boys, who face more stigmas in choosing "feminine" sports. Schmalz, Kerstetter, and Anderson (2008) further confirmed the

finding that there is more acceptance of girls participating in “masculine” activities than boys participating in “feminine” activities. In fact, young girls may be praised for participation in “masculine” sports while young boys are penalized for participation in “feminine” sports and ridiculed for a lack of ability in “masculine” sports (Schmalz, 2013). Taken together, these studies demonstrate women face constraints, but they may have more freedom to choose less gender-appropriate sports.

Culture and ethnic identity can also play an important role in creating or decreasing constraints to sport participation. In understanding what attitudes and beliefs may constrain individuals, Little (2002) discovered that in Australia, participation in adventure recreation, a generally male-dominated set of activities, involves women going against socio-cultural beliefs about what gender roles are appropriate for women to fulfil. Going against cultural norms can be very difficult, especially for Muslim women. Walseth (2006) realized that participation in sport and physical activity can challenge an individual’s ethnic identity, as it may go against what is culturally expected of females. Walseth conducted her research in Norway and interviewed Muslim women between the ages of 16 and 25 years. She found that for females who hold their ethnic identity as very important, they often do not participate in sports for fear of stepping over the boundaries of what is acceptable female behaviour (Walseth, 2006). For those women who do participate in sport, they often face harassment or other sanctions as a result of their participation. Negative cultural views of sport and physical activity are difficult for women to negotiate as there are also religious (Muslim) beliefs that physical activity is important (Walseth, 2006). In the case of the Muslim culture, women face great, sometimes contradicting, pressures to participating or not participating in sport.

For Muslim women, there can also be constraints to participating in sports related to religious requirements stating women should not be seen by men (Palmer, 2009). Palmer interviewed young Muslim women who lived in Australia and who played soccer recreationally. These soccer players identified the challenge of both covering their bodies appropriately and wearing a uniform that still identified them as being part of the team (Palmer, 2009). The challenges the Muslim women faced depended on how traditionally they define Islam. In particular, the more conservative women wore hijabs, which made soccer a challenge, but less conservative women did not cover their head at all. Thus, these women were less physically restricted in their play (Palmer, 2009). While not all of the players felt personally constrained by their religion, some expressed their parent's concern over their attire and desire to play sports (Palmer, 2009).

A fear of the "public gaze" (more on this below) can also apply to situations where females are conscious of their bodies and worried how other sport participants, male and female, will view them. For example, James (2000) studied the experiences of adolescent girls at swimming pools in Australia and discovered that body embarrassment constrained the frequency and quality of their swimming experiences. A study in New Zealand with women who played soccer at a premier level also found that women experience varying degrees of acceptance of their bodies depending on the context they are in (Cox & Thompson, 2000). For example, soccer players gained a sense of acceptance of different body types in the locker room, but when playing soccer they judged other players for being "fat", based on body ideals in the media (Cox & Thompson, 2000). The differences among the women in this study were clear, highlighting one benefit of conducting female-only research, as it examines the multiplicities involved in

bodily sport experiences. These multiplicities may not have been explored had the study focused on how women and men differ.

The research conducted by James (2001) in Australia demonstrated that some girls feel so constrained by swimming in public due to their body image that they avoid the pursuit altogether. That is, they do not swim. The decision making process of choosing a leisure activity often involves the weighing of potential negative impacts of the audience versus the enjoyment versus their desire to be included (James, 2001). Similarly, Aitchison (1997) concluded, in her study in the United Kingdom, that women may not feel comfortable with their body, preventing them from taking part in physical activity classes with others. It has also been found that females report experiencing high levels of teasing from both same-sex and opposite-sex peers when participating in sports (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). Often the female participants identified they felt people were staring at them because of how they looked and that they were being laughed at or made fun of because of how they looked. In a study about the role of body image in older women in the United States, Liechty and Yarnal (2010) found that if older women feel self-conscious of their body in an activity, they will stop participating or eliminate the part of it that makes them uncomfortable. This constraint was found to especially be the case for physically active leisure, where women may choose to avoid wearing a bathing suit or exercise attire (Liechty & Yarnal, 2010). These studies seem to suggest that females of all ages are constrained by body-consciousness, often preventing them from participating in sport and physical activity. This research speaks to the social relevance of the topic of women and sport, and the important role that research can play in educating females about factors that affect their leisure and sport choices and experiences.

Clearly, women face constraints to their sport and leisure participation, but they can also face constraints through their sport and leisure participation. Shaw (1994) points out, constraints emerge from gender relations, and sometimes participating in leisure can reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, female participation in fitness activities can reinforce cultural ideals about what a “feminine” body should look like and how women should strive to achieve those body ideals (Shaw, 1994). Not wanting to create or reinforce gender stereotypes, some women may avoid activities they otherwise enjoy such as sports that focus on aesthetics, like gymnastics, dance and synchronized swimming (Shaw, 1994). Fear of being labelled “masculine” can also constrain or prevent female participation in sport. Thomsson (1999) found that Swedish women who labelled sports as “sweaty”, “horrible”, and “ugly” and therefore not feminine did not want to participate. To prevent being labelled as masculine, women may avoid certain sports for fear of contradicting gender stereotypes if they participate.

The different roles that women hold may also act as constraints to their leisure. For example, Alexandris and Carroll (1997) discovered for Greek women, there are greater time constraints for women who are married than women who are single. As mothers, wives, and partners, women may also have greater family obligations and be concerned about taking the time for leisure—feeling that that would make them selfish (Thomsson, 1999). Dixon and Bruening (2007) discovered that mothers who are head coaches for Division I teams in the United States often felt pressure to be the best in their job and in their role as a mother, and this led to “stress and strain” (p. 390). The stress faced was often a result of a conflict between job requirements and social expectations of mothers to spend time with their family and prioritize family time over work time (Dixon & Bruening, 2007). In addition to sport leadership, sport participation also requires a time commitment. The same time commitment may make it



difficult for women to engage in sports, worrying that they will not have enough time for all their other commitments. Additionally, Bialeschki and Michener (1994) conclude that in the United States, mother's leisure is constrained by socialized gender roles that normalize women lacking time for leisure. While much research supports the time constraint that motherhood creates, Dilley and Scraton (2010), in their study of women who rock climb in the United Kingdom, found that women were more likely to say they are constrained by work commitments than by their role as mothers. A key limitation to the general research on roles as constraining is that heterosexuality is considered the norm leaving other sexual orientations outside of the research presented.

Another clear constraint to female participation in sport is life stage. Married women have overall less time to exercise and be physically active than unmarried women in the United States (Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004). Child rearing and family represents one particular time period that can constrain women's leisure participation. At this stage, the time available for leisure participation, of any kind, drastically decreases and women often feel pressure to fulfil family obligations (Deem, 1987). These familial obligations also leave women struggling to be able to participate in leisure outside of the home, making participation in sports very difficult (Deem, 1987). One constraint to elite running that American mothers face is the societal belief that a "good" mother is there for their children at all times and will make personal sacrifices, like giving up running, for their children (Appleby & Fisher, 2009). Nomaguchi and Bianchi (2004) note that mothers with children under five years of age have significantly less time for exercise, but that the amount of time available for exercise does not decrease more with number of children.

Just as milestones associated with lifespan can limit participation in sport, so too can age related bodily processes influence the sporting experience of women. While fear of showing signs of menstruating can cause women to withdraw from sports, the same fear can also prevent women from participating at all or cause women to have a negative experience in sports (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). Similar to how this bodily function affects sport experiences, after North American women experience menopause they are more likely to stop physical activity as a result of attitudes and views about their health (Evenson et al., 2002). Women may feel constrained by their age, feeling that they are not capable of being physically active or that at their age, physical activity has no benefit.

While some of the literature discussed above focuses on identifying what gendered constraints are, there is also research that explores the complexity of gendered constraints. Samdahl (2013) identifies the complexity of constraints in her call to “re-envision” constraints and constraint negotiation:

Constraints do not exist in isolation from other aspects of people’s lives...It is too simplistic to think of negotiation in reference to overcoming one constraint at a time. A more complete understanding requires envisioning a complex world where people live at the interactions of multiple and often competing discourses. Constraint negotiation, therefore, entails a balancing act whereby people acquiesce to some aspects of one cultural discourse while rejecting or redefining aspects of other cultural discourses. (p. 117)

In the above quote, Samdahl (2013) alludes to the larger constraining forces of cultural discourse and implicit power hierarchies that are deeply entrenched in cultural values. Henderson (1996) cautions researchers to avoid overgeneralizing and making assumptions that all women face

similar leisure constraints, as this oversimplifies women's diversity and leisure experiences (Henderson, 1996). There must be an understanding that many constraints are context specific and can vary based on race, ethnicity, age, and other individual factors (Samdahl, 2013). A further complex aspect of constraints is their ability to change with time. As women negotiate constraints, and consequently gender discourses, they may no longer view their participation as ever having been constrained as they have redefined the discourses around their leisure activity of choice (Samdahl, 2013). While Samdahl has opened the discussion of the complexity of women's constraints, there are still important questions that remain, such as how encountering gendered constraints may impact not only leisure behaviour, but desire to participate in leisure.

### **3.5 Motivations and Outcomes of Sport Participation**

While sport has historically been male dominated and not always seen as an acceptable activity for women, understanding women's motives for participation can provide insight into elements of the sport experience that are more powerful than gendered expectations. Wiley, Shaw, and Havitz (2000) note that of key interest is how individual interest and preferences can overcome ideologies about what sports are acceptable for women to participate in. In this case, motivation to participate lies within the individual based on their interests, preferences and beliefs, and can help overcome gendered norms about sport participation (Wiley et al., 2000). In regard to how motivations affect actual participation, Titze, Stronegger, and Owen (2005) concluded an individual with three or more reasons to participate in running was much more likely to follow through with her commitment for regular participation than someone with less than three motivations. This finding suggests the amount of motivations present play an important role in determining whether women start and continue participation in physical

activity. This information suggests that programs can incorporate important female motivators, such as socialization, into their structure so that women are more likely to continue their sport participation.

As for the type of motivations women have, intrinsic (within the person including feeling good or self-esteem), or extrinsic (outside the person including weight loss), research has demonstrated that exercise is often extrinsically motivated (Thomsson, 1999). However, the more exercise a woman does, the more intrinsic rewards and motivations the activity will hold (Thomsson, 1999). This finding suggests that while sport and physical activity may start off being extrinsically motivated, for health reasons, the activity can move to more internal motivations, such as feeling good, as time goes on (Thomsson, 1999). This conclusion shows that initial and continued motivations to participate in sport are not always the same.

Although motivation to participate can be for interest and enjoyment, women may also be motivated to participate in order to resist gender ideologies (Shaw, 1994; Shaw, 2001). For example, Dilley and Scraton (2010) found women who rock climbed identified leisure as resistance as a motivator for their participation. In particular, the women felt the strength and physical changes they experienced as a result of rock climbing were resistant to traditional conceptualization of body ideals (thin, weak). Sport as context for resistance is important as it creates a space for women to participate in an area that has been traditionally labelled as masculine. As a result, women are able to redefine the meaning of femininity. Given the importance of sport as context for resistance, more research is needed to address the importance of intentionality of resistance and whether the benefits of resistance still apply even without intention (Shaw, 2001).

The literature strongly supports that many women are motivated to participate in sport and physical activity for social reasons. In rock climbing, Dilley and Scraton (2010) note that social relationships with other women that create a strong sense of belonging are very important to women and a main reason that they continue to participate in sport. Women look for leisure opportunities that allow them to connect to others. Women have also been attracted to the sport of golf as it offers a chance for women to socially interact with each other and build a group culture of acceptance and enjoyment (Wood & Danylchuk, 2011). This was concluded by Wood and Danylchuk based on their Canadian study of golfers in a women's league. In runners in Austria, a key motivation for continued running is social support (Titze et al., 2005). By participating in this activity with others, women feel more encouraged and supported to participate, while also feeling pressure to follow through on their commitments. Harrison and Lynch (2005) examined the 'sense of community' present in three sports, and found it to be strong, motivating both men and women to participate. For women looking for others to connect to, a strong sense of community may be a reason they choose to play and continue playing sport with others. Therefore, an important characteristic of sport to consider then is whether or not the nature of the interaction of females in sport allows for them to experience these motivations or not.

While social interaction is a characteristic many women look for in sport, motivating them to participate, social pressures may also cause women to be active. Thomsson (1999) concludes that a lot of Swedish women face social pressure from their female friends and family to exercise and be active, and that this is a very powerful motivator. Although this may be a reason for participation in sport, it may not be a positive motivator as social pressures may change the way a sport is experienced, moving away from how the sport feels to a focus on the

external reason for participation, like approval. In the same study mentioned above by Thomsson (1999), the main reasons that women participate in exercise are for the benefits to physical appearance, weight loss, and gender-appropriateness of activity. These motivations link back to how sports that emphasize aesthetic appearance and that do not emphasize competition are seen as female-appropriate sports (Metheny, 1955; Reimer & Visio, 2003). While some of those motivations to run are health-related, like “it is good for my cardiovascular health”, often motivations are linked to physical appearance, like “I want to look good” (Thomsson, 1999). Individuals with good health also seem more motivated to run than individuals who believe their health is poor, suggesting that maintaining good health is a motivation for physical activity (Titze et al., 2005).

Enjoyment is also a strong motivation for participation in sports, as individuals are more likely to participate in something they enjoy (Titze et al., 2005). This likelihood is especially the case when the activity may be physically demanding and the enjoyment of the activity is what allows you to overcome the challenges and participate (Titze et al., 2005). In a study on college students in the United States, Kilpatrick et al. (2005) discovered the most frequent reason for women to participate in sports is for weight management. They also discovered that in comparison to men, women were overall less motivated to participate in sports (Kilpatrick et al., 2005). In understanding what conditions do and do not cause women to play sports, Kilpatrick et al. (2005) concluded that while women may use *physical activity* as stress management, they do not use *sport* as a form of stress management. This distinction between physical activity and sport is a unique feature of this study, as most other research considers motivations of sport and physical activity very similar.

In order to motivate women to participate in sports, acceptance of the activity by peers is also important. In looking at how to get more Australian females involved in sport, Rowe and Brown (1994) conclude that organizations are more likely to interest younger females in sport by word-of-mouth and peer group encouragement. In other words, if the activity is acceptable and encouraged by peers, females are more likely to participate. In addition to the peer group, family also has a large role in motivating females to be physically active. In studying marathon running, in women and men in the United States, wives of men who compete in marathon running are more likely to exercise many times during a week and compete in marathons themselves (Goodsell & Harris, 2011). Because the family values exercise, women feel more pressure, and consequently desire, to be active (Goodsell & Harris, 2011). Therefore, the views that a family and social group hold about leisure and sport can often act as motivators for women to participate in sport.

Overall, women are often motivated to participate in sport or exercise for extrinsic reasons, including changing appearance and/or weight. Women also can have motivations to participate in sport that are strong enough to overcome ideologies about what sports are female-appropriate. By participating in sports deemed male-appropriate, women can be empowered by resisting gendered expectations. Women often feel encouraged to participate in sports for social reasons or social pressure. Social acceptance and approval of physical activities are also important motivators. While the motivations to participate in sport vary from woman to woman, there is a trend that women are often motivated by extrinsic factors and family and friends.

### 3.6 Co-Gendered Sport

Many amateur and recreational sports leagues in North America for participants over the age of 18 are co-gendered. Research demonstrates, however that these leagues have difficulty recruiting female players (Evenson et al., 2002; Henry & Comeaux, 1999). As the co-gendered sport team format is prevalent for individuals over the age of 18, it is important to explore the benefits, challenges, and experiences of playing on co-gendered teams.

A body of literature exists that explores whether sport should be gender-segregated or co-gendered. Wachs (2005) argues if sports are segregated there is an implication that men and women's abilities are not comparable. Anderson (2008) agrees that segregation may have negative effects as it can lead men to develop negative ideas about women's abilities and subsequently result in a lack of interaction between male and female athletes. In studying the effect of men and women participating in co-ed cheerleading in the United States, Anderson (2008) concluded that men are more likely to view women as capable athletes if they participate in sport together. This finding is similar to what race scholars refer to as contact theory; the idea that if different racial groups interact, they will come to value each other (Pettigrew, 1998). While intergroup contact may be important, research also suggests that co-ed physical education classes can have negative effects. For example, in a study on co-ed physical education classes in Turkey, Koca (2009) discovered that teachers were more likely to interact and give attention to male students over female students and apply the belief that girls should be less aggressive and rough than boys. This difference in treatment could have very negative effects on how girls experience their physical education, namely that they are only taught certain physical skills and given less attention in learning the skills.



There are also implications of only providing gender segregated sports. As sport and physical activity offerings are often determined by enrollment numbers, leagues/programs created that accept registration of women only may decrease the sporting options available to women (Aitchison, 1997). Female-only sports may be limited, and therefore women may have difficulty finding sports they want to participate in that offer the experience they want and/or need (Aitchison, 1997). This lack of opportunity is often the case because the activities offered are stereotypical “female” activities—like dance and aerobics.

One drawback of co-gendered sport is that there are often structural rules that negate the abilities of women and view them as second-class athletes (Wachs, 2002). In an examination of the rules and regulations of co-gendered sport leagues in the United States, differences in rules for men and women have been found (Henry & Comeaux, 1999; Wachs, 2002). For example, a common rule is that a team is to have a specific number of men and women on the field, and if there are not enough women, the team must play with fewer players on the field. While this rule exists to promote equality, it fails in that the same rule does not apply in the case of an absence of enough male players. This example is just one of a variety of rules that was found to be different for men and women playing on the same co-gendered sport team. This difference in rules affected how males viewed the females on their team, causing them to see their female counterparts as a team weakness (Wachs, 2002).

In the context of participating in sports with men, women may also face constraints. On a co-gendered team, women can often face hostility from their male team members as female players may be seen as a weakness and are sometimes given playing advantages (Wachs, 2002). While these playing advantages are not requested by women, the provision of them can certainly change the experience of sport for women, as they may not be respected by their male

teammates. There is also a prevalence of sexual harassment in sport—as it acts as a way for men to uphold male hegemony—and women are often reluctant to report or label behaviour as such (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). While the degree of sexual harassment can vary from sexist remarks and comments to gender favouritism to negative behaviours, the effect that this has on women can be very negative and cause them not to want to be involved in sports (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999).

### **3.7 Organizational Culture**

As research in the previous sections of this literature review suggest, women often participate in sport and co-gendered sport within the context of its masculinist roots; accordingly women face constraints to and through sport participation. There are also specific aspects of co-gendered sport that constrain female sport experiences. To improve women’s experiences of sport, there is thus a need for organizational change to provide more equitable sporting experiences for women. While policy can be implemented to make sport organizations more equitable, it is also important to consider changing the organizational culture as this heavily influences female sport experiences (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) define organizational culture as “a set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations” (p. 437). Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group... and taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel...” (Schein, 2010, p. 18). Organizational culture is seen to relate, although not in any one way, to organizational effectiveness (Hofstede, 1998). For the purpose of this research, organizational culture will be

understood as the shared assumptions in an organization that influence behaviour, including rules and norms (Schein, 2010).

Culture, being sometimes intangible, is reflected in various forms and levels. Schein (2010) suggests that understanding organizational culture often involves examining three levels: artifacts (what is visible and observable), espoused beliefs and values (ideological elements), and basic underlying assumptions (“unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs and values”) (p. 24). To examine women’s sport experiences, one must look at both what is explicit and visible in a sport organization as well as what is less tangible, like implicit beliefs and values. An organization cannot be simply studied on its own, however, because much of organizational culture is influenced by its various macrocultures, subcultures, and microcultures (Schein, 2010). For example, when studying sexism within a soccer league consideration must be given to the organization as a whole, but also the impact of the subcultures of the individual players and teams as well as the macroculture of soccer leagues.

Although organizational culture within its various macro and subcultures can influence women’s experiences of sport, the direct culture of a sport organization can also influence individual experiences. Values are part of an organizational culture that influence individual experiences of sport as they reveal organizational priorities as well as the underlying assumptions of the organization (Schein, 2010). For women, a healthy sport organizational culture would value and prioritize fairness for all players, and failing to do so could cause constrained sport experiences (MacLean & Hamm, 2008). Additionally, for diversity to have a positive effect within an organization, such as increasing challenge or creating constructive conflict, there must be an organizational culture that supports and values diversity (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). Diversity, in the case of co-gendered sport, could include gender diversity

thus illustrating that organizational culture can impact upon individual experiences of sport. Individual experiences are further affected by organizational culture towards women as athletes; if the assumption of a sport organization is that men are more capable athletes, this implies that women are less valued as teammates. Consequently, as a result of an organizational culture that devalues women, female athletes may have lower levels of confidence in sport and experience lower levels of enjoyment (Domangue & Solmon, 2012).

In addition to values being a part of organizational culture, so too are the meanings of gender and gendered interactions constructed within an organizational culture. The ways members of an organization interact with one another produce and reproduce the rules and norms about what is fair in the relationships between and among women and men (Gherardi, 1994). For example, if men do not pass to women during soccer based on an assumption of lesser ability, this becomes a normalized part of the team culture and will continue to be reproduced. This can also become part of a “taken for granted assumption” to the point that teammates will not question why men do not pass to women (Schein, 2010).

There can also be “hegemonic masculinity underlying the dominant social practices” in sport organizations which serve to reproduce the differences between men and women (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001, p. 245). Smith and Stewart (1995) found an Australian football (soccer) club had an emphasis on masculine values that was present throughout the operations and experiences. Similarly, Shaw and Hoeber (2003) concluded that discourses of femininity and masculinity within sport organizations in the United Kingdom reflected an organizational macroculture that valued men and devalued women as leaders. This idea was reflected in the statement by a female participant that there is a discourse in sport organizations that “a strong man is direct and a direct woman is a bitch” (Shaw & Hoeber, 2003, p. 365). Furthermore, the

gendering of sport organizations as a male domain is a function of organizational culture that normalizes male leadership (Cartwright & Gale, 1995). This can help explain why women are less present in leadership positions in sport organizations (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; Cartwright & Gale, 1995). Hegemonic constructions of gender within an organizational culture are further reflected in language like ‘chairman’, ‘manpower’, ‘sportsmanlike’, which normalizes men and “others” women (Harlow & Hearn, 1995).

To provide gender equitable experiences for female athletes, sport organizations must consider how gender is understood and portrayed in their organizational culture. Shaw (2006) explained that “sport managers need to take some responsibility for thinking of gender as an organizational issue and for reflecting on social processes within their organizations” (p. 529). For example, challenging the notion of mainly male leadership in athletics exposes a culture of male dominance and power (Burton, Borland, & Mazerolle, 2012). More careful consideration of what an organizational culture is and whether it is truly benefiting members and management can help identify areas for improvements in the organizational culture that will enable the provision of optimal sporting experiences for most members (Schein, 2010).

In conclusion, there is a strong body of research that links gender to sport participation, motivations, and constraints, and a fairly strong body of research in the recreation and leisure field that links gender to motivations and constraints. Although there are strengths, there are also gaps in the knowledge of how women overcome constraints and what effect this has on their sport experience. There is also little research exploring the links between gender, league culture and structure, and how sport is experienced. This gap is significant and future research should focus on exploring how women experience sport to bring consideration to how women experience sport. It is also important to consider the rules and environment of the sports leagues

that female research participants are part of, to truly explore the context of the female sporting experience. There is much work to continue to be done in understanding how women experience sport and research with women about their co-gendered sporting experiences would certainly add a unique perspective to the recreation and leisure studies field. Thus, the purpose of my research was to explore women's experiences playing co-gendered soccer.

## 4.0 Theoretical Framework and Guiding Concepts

### 4.1 Feminist Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study was guided by a feminist lens. Feminism can be broadly defined as “a set of practices and perspectives that affirms differences among women and promotes women’s interests, health, and safety, locally and abroad” (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 207). The overall aim of feminism is to “promote justice and the well-being of all women” (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 207). While feminism is often viewed as a theoretical framework or lens used to examine topics or issues, this research will operate under the assumption that feminism also advocates for distinct ways of how research should proceed (Hawkesworth, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012). In this sense, methodology can be understood as encompassing “agenda, epistemology, and ethics, as well as methods” and feminism can be seen to encourage certain ways of knowing and conducting research over others (Thompson, 1992, p. 3). There is no one distinct way of conducting feminist research (Doucet & Mauthner, 2006; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Therefore, I turn first to a description of feminist research in general and next to the beliefs that I hold about feminism and research.

#### *4.1.1 Feminist research*

My choice of research topic, namely gender and sport, is first and foremost influenced by my theoretical orientation and epistemology. In this way, I have chosen to conduct research that can be applied to producing social justice and change (Hesse-Biber, 2012). My research seeks to show how women experience sport so that sport organizations and teammates can learn how to improve the co-gendered sports experience. Feminist research respects the importance of exploring how women’s experiences are varied and how differences in experience are not just accepted, but beneficial in helping convey the true breadth of female experience (Hesse-Biber,

2012). It is not necessary to merely compare the experiences of women to those of men, as this can work to further solidify the binary between male and female (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

One key tenet of feminist research is acknowledging women's voices as "sources of knowledge" (Campbell & Wasco, 2000, p. 784). A feminist methodology also recognizes that the process of research is just as important as the outcome of the research (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). By participating in the research, participants can be empowered and benefit from having their voices heard (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012a). There is also power in others learning about the research and being empowered by the stories and voices they are hearing. There remains a strong need for research to be conducted *for*, and not *on* women (Thompson, 1992). This means recognizing that the research participants and researcher co-create the research and that "knowledge building becomes a relational process rather than an objective product, a process that demands critical self-reflection, dialogue, and interaction" (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012b, p. 177).

#### *4.1.2 Personal feminist epistemology*

I believe that there is no *one* truth to be learned or conveyed and that multiple truths exist (Hesse-Biber, 2012). In other words, "knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, power imbued, and relational" (Haraway, 1988; Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 9). I also believe that a researcher can never be removed from her or his research. Thus, my research is a part of who I am as a person (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012a). In order to contextualize my research, I must therefore acknowledge my own position, in that I am a well-educated Caucasian female from a middle-class background (Hawkesworth, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2012).



### *4.1.3 Personal feminist methodology*

My role as the researcher is not that of an expert, but that of a facilitator. Being willing to listen to what each participant has to say while allowing women to portray their own experiences is crucial, and valued more than trying to “prove” something to be right or wrong. As a co-creator of the researcher, I must be aware of my own thoughts, feelings, and emotions throughout the research process while allowing space for the female participants to express their thoughts, feelings and emotions (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012a). As co-creator of the research, I attempted to enter each interview with an open mind, listening to the unique stories told, while also being aware of how the stories of each participant may connect and/or diverge. This emergent design helps decrease the effect of a priori ideas about the topic (Clarke, 2012). I also believe that there is no one right way to read the data, as it is accepted that there are multiple ways to read and make sense of the data (Clarke, 2012).

## **4.2 Feminist Data Collection and Analysis Methods**

Based on my beliefs about feminist epistemology and methodology, my project used conversational interviews with females 18 years or older who participate in recreational soccer on co-gendered teams. Conversational interviews vary from conventional interviews as they create a space where clarification of questions or comments are encouraged and recognized as important in the research process (Currivan, 2008). The interviews, carried out by myself and the participant, allowed for a relaxed conversation about the topic including further exploration of topics that came up in the interviews that were not part of the set of general questions (Dupuis, 1999). A benefit of the conversational interview is that it allowed me to “express interest and want to know more”, helping break down some of the barriers between the researcher and

participant (Charmaz, 2006, p. 26). Overall, since this study was grounded in feminism, the questions were open-ended in nature (see Appendix A). This encouraged me, as the researcher, to focus on each participant as having a unique story to tell and each participant being the expert of their own story (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

While other forms of interviewing attempt to have the interviewer remain unbiased and detached, preventing the researcher from “leading” the participant into confirming notions the researcher already had, conversational interviewing encourages the researcher to engage with participants in order to have a give-and-take conversation (Dupuis, 1999). Conversational interviews gave space for and encouraged the researcher to relate to the experiences of the interviewee and disclose information about themselves and/or their research (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Charmaz (2006) refers to a similar research technique as “intensive interviews”.

Intensive interviews make room for participants to:

- Break silences and express their views
- Tell their stories and give them a coherent frame
- Reflect on earlier events
- Be experts
- Choose what to tell and how to tell it
- Share significant experiences and teach the interviewer how to interpret them
- Express thoughts and feelings disallowed in other relationships and settings
- Receive affirmation and understanding. (p. 27)

Therefore, conversational interviewing is an important feminist method as it encourages the researcher and research participant to engage in the process of creating knowledge.

Throughout the interview, I needed to remain open to what was raised because the proposed research is an *exploration* of the experience of co-gendered sport for women. In a few cases, participants brought up experiences from other sports they participated in, and as this research is on the general experience of co-gendered soccer, these references helped further knowledge of the experience of women in sport. One individual's lived experience could be very different from another individual's, and so the questions I asked each participant depended on what arose in the interview. Also, using feminist theory to guide my research, I was able to acknowledge my participants' perspective and recognize them as the experts of their experiences (Clarke, 2012). Viewing research participants as the expert of their own experiences meant accepting an "equality of intellectual authority" between the participants and the researcher (Longino, 1995, p. 384). This process involved active listening and being reflexive about my own assumptions before, during, and after the interview (DeVault & Gross, 2012). To acknowledge that the participants in my research own their personal experiences, it is important that I confirmed my interpretation of their experience is accurate. This was done through member checks, which enabled participants to decide if they were still comfortable with what they shared and how I analyzed it, giving them authority over their part of the research (DeVault & Gross, 2012).

Invoking an iterative process wherein collecting and analyzing data occurred simultaneously was also an important part of my feminist method. Conducting interviews, transcribing interviews, and then analyzing each interview, enabled me, as the researcher, to gradually build my knowledge of the topic, as informed by participants, allowing me to take the knowledge and apply it to the next interview and analysis (Clarke, 2012).

The data analysis portion of my research was also rooted in the values of feminism. Reflexivity is crucial in feminist researcher, as the research process and product are inextricably linked to who I am as a person (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012a). As a result, for each research participant, a memo was created allowing me to identify my thoughts, feelings and emotions about the content and process of the interview (Charmaz, 2006). I also kept a memo for general thoughts about the research, allowing me to discuss my journey through the research. Charmaz (2006) notes that memos are important because they “catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue” (p. 72). Memos were also created for each theme and category established in the data coding process, which helped to “analyze your data and codes early in the research process” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72).

## **5.0 Research Design and Process**

### **5.1 Research Questions and Assumptions**

My main research question was “what are women’s lived experiences playing recreational co-gendered sport?” To answer this question, I had a number of sub-research questions including: (1) what is it like for women to play sports with men? (2) what are the challenges and benefits for women playing co-gendered sport? and (3) how, if at all, does league structure affect how women experience co-gendered sport? Based upon the literature, I believe that gender, in particular being female, influenced individual experiences in sport. I also held the assumption that women may not explicitly identify gender as having an influence on their experience, but how they describe their experiences in sport will suggest that it does influence their experiences.

### **5.2 Research Setting**

I answered these questions by conducting conversational interviews with female participants in the Grand River Soccer co-gendered soccer league, located in the Region of Waterloo. Grand River Soccer (GRS) league is a for-profit incorporated organization that has both indoor and outdoor soccer teams and three types of leagues; women-only, men-only, and co-gendered. Grand River Soccer was founded in 2009 and has a mission “to advance soccer within the community, promote a healthy lifestyle and help foster the culture of soccer in the Southwestern Ontario area. We do this through year-round soccer related programming that assists participants in reaching their potential.” The league has two co-founders/directors, who act as president and convenor, as well as an office administrator, who maintains the league

statistics and team rosters. Both the president and convenor will be referred to as “league organizers” in this research.

GRS has around 240 teams playing with them throughout the year of which about 80 are co-gendered. The timing of this research fell between indoor and outdoor seasons, so it was important for me to select a site that had a year-round soccer season with many female participations. Upon deciding to participate in Grand River Soccer, a player can chose to sign up as either an individual or as part of a team. If signing up as an individual, the player will be placed with an existing team that needs more players or a team constructed of individual players. On a team of individuals, someone will need to volunteer to be team captain, which will involve communicating with the league and with their team, and performing on field duties, such as deciding which team starts with the ball. Players may also sign up to play with Grand River Soccer as part of a team. In this case, a captain will sign up a team and is responsible for finding enough players to field a team and obtaining payment from those individuals. If a captain cannot find enough players they can request more players from GRS, who will accordingly send the captain the names and contact information for players who signed up as individuals. In addition to arranging payment for their team, a team captain must also compile a team roster and have their players sign an insurance waiver. As Grand River Soccer has limited staff and no volunteers, team captains are responsible for making sure their team follows the rules, shows up to games, and plays fairly. On the field, captains are responsible for ensuring their team members are calling their own fouls and captains are considered the “head referee” in cases where teams or players have conflict.

Moreover, GRS was chosen as a research site due to its explicit view of male and female ability: “by nature, co-ed sports require that all male participants remember that male players

may have a strength and speed advantage over female players”, which made it a relevant setting to explore. There are also different rules for men and women about how many male and female players need to be on the soccer field at a time, further modelling a level of gender inequality that exists in this league. For example, on a field of 11 players, at least four of those players need to be women, but there is no equivalent minimum number of male players required on the field. The various rules of this league made it appropriate to study as it has rules that can influence how women experience soccer. For a full list of Grand River Soccer rules, see Appendix B for 6 versus 6 rules and Appendix C for 11 versus 11 rules.

Lastly, I have personal experience with the league having played both indoor and outdoor soccer there over the past four years. Based upon my experience, I was aware that in this league, many gendered aspects are apparent in how teammates play with one another and with opponents. The gendered aspects of play intrigued me and I wished to explore with other female players if and how these gendered features are experienced. I selected only one sport, namely soccer, so that the gendered rules are the same for all participants. This helped enable greater understanding of how women experience the specific rules of the sport. I selected soccer as the one sport to study based upon my personal experiences as a player, but also because it has been identified as a very popular Canadian sport for women and men (Ifedi, 2005).

### **5.3 Selection of Participants**

As I am a member of Grand River Soccer (GRS) league, playing on both an indoor and outdoor team, I first contacted the league convenor to ask for permission to conduct my research through GRS. This was crucial as I relied on the league to provide me with contact information for some of its female players.

After gaining permission from GRS to use their league as the context for my research (see Appendix D), I attempted to obtain a list of the female members in their co-gendered league. My hope was to choose 10 names, at random, and then have the league contact these individuals on my behalf. Unfortunately, due to incomplete contact information for members, I was not able to obtain this list or contact participants randomly. Instead, the league convenor offered to compile a list of 10 women who play co-gendered soccer with Grand River Soccer. This list included members the league convenor was familiar with and had contact information for. Due to tight time lines, I obtained a list of only five female players over the age of 18, who play in their co-gendered league, from the league convenor. After obtaining these names, I contacted all five participants via e-mail (see Appendix E) and sent them an information letter about the study (see Appendix F). Potential participants were asked to contact me through e-mail or phone if they were interested in participating in the study. Eligible participants included any female (over 18 years old) who had played soccer, indoor or outdoor, on a co-gendered team for at least one season prior to the time of the study. This ensured that participants had at least a full season of experiences to reference and share. Two people participated in the research from the original list I received.

After conducting interviews with individuals on the contact list, I also recruited from personal connections to interview participants that were not known by the league organizers. This was an effort to safeguard anonymity as well as to ensure some data diversity regarding views on the league and its organizers. In this stage of research recruitment I also sought out individuals who play in other soccer leagues in addition to Grand River Soccer. I recruited two participants for the study through these means.



During the interviews, I noticed many participants referred to female players who had a comparable level of skill to male players, but these players were identified as “other” players, and not the self. Based upon this, I reviewed goal scoring and other statistics on the Grand River Soccer co-gendered league website and randomly chose 10 female names, listed in the top 100 individual players. I then asked the league for the contact information of the identified women, as I had no way of accessing them except through the league. After obtaining the contact information from the league, I completed my third phase of recruitment, contacting all participants on the list I received from GRS. From there I conducted interviews with three participants who expressed interest in participating in my research.

My original aim was to interview between four and eight participants in order to explore varied experiences and players from different teams. In the end, I conducted seven interviews, and felt that the experiences reflected in the interviews were varied, representing both positive and negative co-gendered soccer experiences. I also felt that the participants reflected varied levels of ability, confidence, and history with soccer. An important part of my research was also recognizing the importance of interviewing every participant who expressed interest in being a part of my research so I stopped after seven interviews, having interviewed all participants who contacted me about participating in an interview.

### **5.4 Participant Profile**

While it was expected that participants would be between the ages of 18-25, as this league is for players 18 years of age and up, the age range for participants interviewed was 24-37. The women interviewed have been playing soccer from 15 to 30 years, and most participants had played beyond recreational soccer, playing at a competitive level. Many of the women

played soccer on many teams during a season, including playing women-only soccer in addition to co-gendered soccer. The participants had varied levels of education including high school diplomas, college diplomas, university degrees, and post-graduate university degrees. Some of the women were married or in a committed relationship, while others were single. All participants primarily identified as Caucasian, while a few identified secondary ethnicities. All of the participants were employed outside of the home and worked in a variety of settings including in education, government, administrative work, and/or services co-ordination. The women identified ranging yearly household incomes, from \$20,000 to \$100,000+.

### **5.5 Research Strategies and Data Collection Techniques**

To give participants the chance to reflect on the topic, and to increase their comfort with being interviewed, the topical areas for discussion (soccer playing history, present soccer participation, what it's like to play soccer with male teammates, challenges faced in playing soccer, attraction to soccer, the structure of Grand River Soccer league) were sent to each participant prior to the interview. The interviews were face-to-face and conducted in a public yet private setting, an office at the University of Waterloo, so the participants could feel comfortable expressing their personal experiences. Interviews lasted from 40 to 60 minutes, with the average length of an interview being 45 minutes. Interviews consisted of several open-ended questions such as "What has your history with soccer been like?" and "Are there ways the league is structured that affect your soccer experience?" as well as follow-up questions dependent on the individual experiences of each participant (see Appendix A).

The interviews were recorded with an audio-recorder and then each conversation was transcribed. During the interview, I recorded short notes about the interview to ensure that if

there was a problem with the recorded interview, some content of the interview would still be available. No errors occurred with the recording of the interviews. After each interview, I wrote a memo about each participant interview, allowing me to reflect on what the research process was like and any initial thoughts I had about the interview content. To thank participants for their time, I gave them a \$10 gift card to a coffee shop. Also, to thank the soccer league for their assistance in the research process, the results of the research will be shared with them. This will include making recommendations for how Grand River Soccer can create more positive, and gender equitable, experiences for female participants. This will help provide the league with insight into how female members of the league experience its rules, teams, and overall structure.

## **5.6 Data Analysis Procedures**

As Creswell (2007) states; the first stage of data analysis is preparing and organizing the data. Based on the audio recordings of the interviews, I transcribed each interview into Microsoft Word. I then imported all transcripts into NVivo 10 to help organize the data for the data analysis stage. An important component of feminist research is to acknowledge one's own positionality to be open to the results of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Going into this research, I had my own experiences of participating in sports with male teammates. As my experiences have been on a spectrum from positive to negative it was possible that I could have had difficulty accepting and understanding what other women experienced. Acknowledging this prior to beginning data analysis was crucial, especially as I found myself struggling throughout the data analysis phase to relate to or understand some of the experiences participants had or views they held to be true. As I found myself aware of the differences between my own

experience and those of the participants, I reflected on these observations in the memo written on each interview conducted.

To focus on the content of each interview, and not my own assumptions, I first started with a general reading of each transcript to get a sense of the whole (Charmaz, 2006). This holistic approach focused on understanding what the individual and contextual experience of soccer has been like for the research participant. Using the memo started for each participant during their interview, I then wrote my impressions and general reactions to each transcript. Reading each entire transcript first helped me to understand how each story and transcript is unique. This understanding of each story then allowed me to explore how both the whole, all transcripts and ideas, and the part, individual passages and/or themes of individual interviews, relate (Wertz et al., 2011).

After reading each transcript for a sense of the whole, I read through each transcript again and began coding. This involved naming “segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). This initial coding was done by staying close to the data by creating a meaningful label, often a phrase that I felt represented what was being said (Charmaz, 2006). The selected phrases spoke about what the experiences of soccer have been like for the participant and I attempted to remain open to what was being expressed as meaningful to the participant. By starting with an analysis of each interview transcript separately, I was also able to use the emerging information to inform future interviews (Charmaz, 2006). For example, in the initial interviews I conducted, gender separation during warm ups was brought up, so this is something I asked about in subsequent interviews. I also created a memo to reflect on my overall feelings about the research and where I saw experiences coming together and diverging. Creating this memo alongside coding allowed

me to reflect on themes I saw coming up in each individual interview that seemed to connect to experiences other participants had. After highlighting significant statements in the initial coding, and reflecting on them in a participant memo and overall research memo, it then became important to organize codes into categories, created based on the data in the transcripts.

In order to make the process of categorizing data easier, when creating labels for each piece of data, I tried to create a label that spoke to the category and subcategory I felt the data may belong in. For example, if women discussed sexist behaviour from a male teammate to a female teammate, like assumed male leadership, I would label that phrase or sentence “sexist behaviours or beliefs- from men to women, men are in charge.” A new category was labelled every time the description in the text changed meaning (Kleiman, 2004). Therefore, when women talked about gendered rules being negative, and then talked about gendered rules also being positive a new category for “positives of gendered rules” was created. After coding all the phrases for each participant into meaningfully labelled units, the statements were clustered into categories across participants. If in an interview a statement was brought up that was not present in previous interviews, a new category was created to account for the new element of the co-gendered soccer experience. For example, the category “gender separation in co-gendered soccer” was created after the third interview to reflect a participant’s experience with women and men warming up separately. After coding was completed for all interviews, I then reviewed the categories and codes within each category looking for similarities and differences. Repetitive and overlapping statements were then merged, but only after reading the transcript excerpt again in the context of the entire interview to ensure the meaning was accurately described in the code name. For example, while I had created two separate categories, “reasons to play” and “motivations to play”, upon re-examining these categories I found they were similar and not

distinct categories. However, after merging these categories, I observed that motivations/reasons to play soccer were different than motivations/reasons to play co-gendered soccer, and thus I re-read participant statements to ensure appropriate sub-categories were created and used. In addition, if I found statements from participants that held opposite meaning, such as a belief that all players are equal versus a belief women are viewed as less capable players, these statements were not collapsed or merged with other categories or statements in order to represent the complexity of the participants' experiences and show unique perspectives.

The categories I used to sort the data in the end formed the basis for research themes, which are phrases or sentences that are about the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007). For example, there was a category on types of male players, and this category then turned into a subtheme of "equity versus equality." As the data for this research was very interconnected, with women frequently discussing multiple themes simultaneously, I first pulled together all the categories so that I could examine how they fit together. I sorted categories into the general themes of: soccer in general, benefits and general thoughts about co-gendered soccer, constraints and challenges of soccer, what do positive and negative co-gendered experiences look like, sexism in soccer, women's abilities, and why play with Grand River Soccer. From this general thematic overview I decided to pull elements from different categories together to better analytically discuss what co-gendered soccer is like for women. To do this, I printed off the general themes and cut up each theme into its distinct parts. For example, the category of sexism was cut into the parts of sexist behaviour/beliefs, what to do about sexism, and reasons for different abilities or sexism. I then mixed up all the subthemes and began sorting the subthemes into more analytical categories, like equity versus equality. From this step, I re-entered NVivo and re-sorted the data to reflect the new themes that had emerged. Findings, and themes, then

fell into two parts; findings about the experience of co-gendered soccer, and findings that suggest the need for organizational change.

### **5.7 Research Credibility**

A key aspect of feminist research is ensuring that the themes of the experience that I, as the researcher, describe are true to what the participants have experienced. In order to ensure that the information I am presenting is an accurate representation of each participant, I completed member checks for every interview. After each interview was transcribed and read for a sense of the whole, I made an initial analysis of the content of each interview. Once all interviews had been transcribed and the content analyzed, I then sent both the individual transcript and content analysis to each participant. This was to allow each participant the opportunity to ensure their satisfaction with the manner in which I analysed and represented her comments. Participants were given a chance to examine the transcript to look for inaccuracies, as well as to identify any part of the conversation they might not be comfortable having present in further analysis or publication. All participants provided their approval of their transcript as well as the initial analysis I provided. For example, one participant commented “It all looks great! Good luck with the final product!” while another participant wrote: “Looks good! You have my approval...”

### **5.8 Role of the Researcher**

Another important consideration in this research was my role as a researcher. As I have been a soccer player for over 19 years, playing on both all-female and co-gendered sports teams, it was important for me to acknowledge my own experiences with soccer and co-gendered sports

teams. My experience playing soccer gave me unique knowledge and understanding of the experiences shared by participants. While my experience helped me relate and communicate with participants, it was also a challenge to accept that others have had different experiences with soccer than me. Being reflexive, and outlining my own experiences with soccer up front in my research helped provide my background with sport and gender and also helped flush out some of the assumptions that I had about what I expected I may find in my research. Writing about my gendered experiences with soccer will allow readers of the research to understand how my experiences may have had an effect on my research topic, process, and results. It was also important to remain reflexive throughout the process of my research, by recording my reactions to the research I was conducting. By understanding how the results and process of data collection made me feel, I can reflect on and understand possible biases in my research. I remained reflexive by keeping a memo throughout the data gathering and analysis process of my personal feelings about the research and research process.

To ensure that my research was ethical, I received ethics clearance from the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics prior to beginning participant recruitment. This process involved ensuring that my participants and their information was kept confidential, that they were informed about the risks and benefits of my research, and that they provided their informed consent and understood that they could withdraw from the research at any time, or choose not to answer any question with no negative repercussions. This was incorporated into the introduction section of my interview guide (see Appendix A) where I outlined a participant's right to not answer any question they felt uncomfortable about and their right to withdraw from the interview at any time. In addition to receiving ethics clearance, I also committed to keeping the names and identifying information of all participants confidential, in order to ensure anonymity. This was



done by allowing each participant to choose a pseudonym, or assigning them one if they did not want to choose one. I also removed identifying information like team and player names from the data to protect confidentiality. Since the league is mid-sized, I also obtained permission from each participant to include the name of the league in my research, giving them the option of leaving it out if they felt they could be identified by their experiences.

## 6.0 Findings

Analysis of the data from the interviews with women who play co-gendered soccer revealed six themes. These themes were central to how women experienced co-gendered soccer and helped describe their positive and negative experiences playing with male teammates and opponents. The first theme, “Forward for the Win: Stereotypes in Play” identifies the various gendered stereotypes and assumptions that female soccer players face in co-gendered soccer. The second theme, “Tryouts: Prove Yourself in Order to Play”, explores how women found it necessary to prove their capability as soccer players in order to be an active player on their co-gendered soccer team. “From Striker to Defender: Gender at Play on the Field” is the third theme, which discusses how soccer experiences of female players are influenced by playing with male teammates. Theme four, “Playing “Man-to-Man”: Sexism in Soccer” talks about how sexism is present in co-gendered soccer experiences. “Free Kick or Advantage: Equity versus Equality? What is Fair?”, the fifth theme, explores how women felt they were treated, equitably or equally, on the field and how they want to be treated when playing soccer on co-gendered teams. The sixth and final theme, “Pass or Shoot: Conflicts and Tensions in Women’s Soccer Experiences” describes the experiences women had on their co-gendered soccer teams that resulted in conflict or tensions. In addition to the aforementioned themes, women provided some general feedback about why they play soccer, which was not particularly related to gender or co-gendered soccer experiences. The following description of women’s motivations to play soccer is therefore provided as context to the themes that follow.

Soccer is a dynamic and competitive team sport that involves constant movement on the field and an offensive and defensive mindset. For these and many other reasons, participants expressed their love of soccer, including Laura: “I love the team sport! I love coming together

with a group of people and working together towards something. I just love the game.” Brittany identified the specific elements of soccer that she enjoyed: “In soccer, I like to be able to play and score and be good and competitive. It’s fun!” Although Brittany had played other sports, she found that her abilities stood out more in soccer, and for that reason she loved and continued playing soccer. Julie explained her love of soccer was about a match between the level of competition and her own skill level:

I get a lot of flow from soccer. If I play at the right level I’m getting that challenge, which I love, and I’m able to use my skills and just kind of get carried away, so I’ve continued to play because it’s something that I’m relatively good at and enjoy.

The flow experience for Julie was important as it allowed her to become absorbed in her soccer game, not focusing on any external factors. While a few women were able to articulate exactly why they loved the game, for Melissa there was just something about soccer that “clicked”: “I just love the sport. I’ve pretty much grown up with it. It’s the one sport that’s kind of just clicked with me. And I’ve tried several sports growing up...but that was the one thing that just stuck with me.”

One aspect of soccer that many of the participants appreciated was the level of physical activity. Indeed, soccer was an opportunity to stay physically active in a fun and social way. Ashley said, “I play soccer to stay in shape...it’s a great work out. And it’s a social workout. I’m not running on a treadmill, being bored. It’s a good way to keep in shape.” Brittany agreed, saying that despite challenges to playing soccer, such as the financial cost, it is a great way to exercise and stay physically active. Julie noted her motivations to play soccer have changed with age, moving from a desire to win to staying physically active with friends: “I think I continue to play more now just to get out and get active and be with friends.”

While women could obtain similar benefits of competition, flow, and exercise from other sports, participants were often drawn to soccer because of its unique features. For many women, their history with soccer was what encouraged them to participate. As Julie and Laura explained, growing up with a family that played soccer, you can begin and continue playing soccer because it is a part of your family history. A family history with the sport also enhanced some players' sense of identity as a soccer player. For example, Laura stated: "[Soccer is] part of who I've been from a long time ago, so it's always been something I've loved." Similarly, Chelsea said, "I think I've played for so long that I identify myself as a soccer player, and if I stop playing, I wouldn't really know who I was anymore." Motivated by her past soccer experiences, Amanda appreciated the flexibility of co-gendered soccer and viewed it as a sport that could provide lifelong enjoyment:

I like soccer in general because you can constantly improve and change your game...no matter where you are in life, physically, or socially in your personal life, you can always find time to play...and you can always play and have fun even if your skills diminish.

Not only did soccer offer a sense of identity and opportunity to play throughout the life course, but it was an opportunity for many women to be social as well as physically active. In particular, the team aspect of co-gendered soccer afforded a number of social benefits for players. Indeed, the team aspect of co-gendered soccer facilitated deep, meaningful relationships that some considered akin to family. In Melissa's words: "...a bunch of my friends I've met while playing soccer, even on my ladies team... it's kind of like a close knit family." The social benefits of co-gendered soccer were particularly important for those looking to meet new people. For example, Ashley had recently moved to a new community and found co-gendered soccer an excellent way to meet people:

...like I said, soccer is more of a social thing for me, which being new to Waterloo Region is really good. Because it's helped me make connections...with people who are like minded [and] who have the same ideals as me, for the most part.

Chelsea so appreciated the friendships she made on her co-gendered soccer team, that she continued to play to keep up those friendships, worried she would lose touch if she no longer played the sport:

Everybody thinks I'm crazy for continuing to play, because I do get injured a lot. But the social aspect... there's a whole, huge group of people that I would count as friends, but if I took soccer out of that equation, I wouldn't really see them anymore.

All told, the women had many motivations for getting, and staying, involved with soccer. These reasons included a love of, and history with, soccer as well as the opportunity for making social connections while being physically active. None of these reasons were particularly gendered; however, upon encountering stereotypes about female and male soccer abilities, some participants discussed gendered motivations and constraints to co-gendered soccer. These constraints and motivations affected the type of soccer player women were and the experiences they had on and off the soccer field.

### **6.1 Forward for the Win: Stereotypes in Play**

Exploring the gendered experiences of women on the co-gendered soccer field is dependent on first understanding the stereotypes that exist and how they affect soccer play. On a soccer team, many times the players in forward positions are stereotyped as having big egos, based on them "winning" the game by scoring goals. While there are some general stereotypes of soccer players, there are a number of specific gendered stereotypes that are particularly

problematic as they have serious implications for women's involvement. The most common stereotype that participants described was "that guys are just better [players]" (Brittany). Melissa explained her male teammates looked at her thinking "oh, it's a girl; she won't be able to do anything." Brittany talked about assumptions from opponents about female ability: "Just being a girl... I think sometimes [opponents] won't cover you as much, because they'll make sure they cover the guys, until they realize they need to cover you." While there are stereotypes about men being generally better soccer players, there are also stereotypes that detail how men are better soccer players than women. For example, male players are stereotyped to be faster and stronger than all female players. While explicitly stating men are faster than women, Brittany also elaborated on female ability: "Girls don't run as hard [as guys] and girls don't mark as well [as guys]." As Brittany identified, women are also stereotyped as being less strategic soccer players. Amanda agreed with this assessment, mentioning a stereotype that girls will "kick the ball away" upon receiving it, instead of taking time to consider where to pass the ball. Laura explained:

The stereotype of men being stronger than women or men making better decisions, like they say the whole 'head game'—where to place the ball. And women can be there, to 'occupy the space', but the 'thinking work' is by the men. They're the ones that set up the plays... and if you get a goal, you must have been set up nicely...

Laura's quote illustrates that stereotypes suggest women are not active soccer players, and that men are responsible for making plays that may or may not involve women. The implication of this stereotype is that even when women do well on the team, the male players get credit for the strategy behind the play.

Stereotypes also exist about the characteristics of female soccer players. A few participants mentioned that female soccer players are stereotyped as "catty", dramatic, and

emotional. Laura elaborated that these stereotypes can come from coaches: “You hear coaches say ‘Oh, I wouldn’t coach a woman’s team...all those ‘hissy fits’ and ‘cat fights.’” Brittany explained that female players are also stereotyped to be “girly and fall over [easily].” Laura agreed that there seems to be a stereotype about women being “fragile” players, and Chelsea explained the result of this stereotype is men play with women like they will “break.” Based upon the overall stereotype of a female soccer player, Brittany wanted to resist being labelled a “typical girl player.” An additional characteristic of female soccer players that is often stereotyped is sexuality. Melissa expressed frustration when a co-worker made a blanket statement about all female soccer players being lesbians:

Even in a work environment, the idea of women’s soccer is not necessarily skill level, but probably more sexuality. And it’s commented as ‘Oh, [soccer is] just for lesbians’ and stuff like that. Which I’m going, ‘Okay, that’s a pretty strong comment to make...’

Similarly, Laura discussed her concern about female aggression being labelled as “butch”:

Sometimes when I’m playing... I just kind of feel like you get that butch label put on you. Like if you’re playing and you’re leaning too much into it or you’re just playing too hard, you feel like you could be given that butch label.

The stereotype that aggressive female players are “butch” can limit how women play soccer as aggression is a key part of the game. When players want to avoid being labelled butch, they are conscious of how they play, changing their focus in a game.

Stereotypes about men as superior soccer players and women as inferior soccer players are further reflected in beliefs about how men should play soccer with women. For example, Brittany explained on her team, men are told not to use their superior skills against women:

I know a lot of guy captains who would say that you never wind up full blast for a shot with a girl in front of you. You never slide tackle a girl, you never take out a girl, you never! And if they did, guys would be like ‘really man?’

The idea that female players are not able to play to the same physical level as men was echoed by Chelsea who further explained that female players should be protected by male players.

Stereotypes also contribute to the perception of ability in male and female players. For example, Brittany viewed herself as less skilled than the male players: “When I play outdoor co-ed, I actually always play midfield, because for girls to play against guys as a forward, guys are so much faster than girls, so our captain doesn’t want girls playing forward.” This quote demonstrates how some stereotypes can be explicit, as evident in the comment regarding the captain of the team who stated females should not play forward positions. While the stereotype Brittany identified was explicit, rules in co-gendered soccer also form more implicit stereotypes. Laura explained certain rules in co-gendered soccer actually reflect more implicit stereotypes; for example the rules that each co-gendered team must have a minimum number of women on the field. This rule implied women are a “handicap.” In short, women’s soccer experiences are often related to explicit and implicit stereotypes regarding women’s soccer skills.

As a result of the perceived skill differences between men and women, based on stereotypes, women often identified their reason to play soccer with men was to learn and improve their own skills. This was under the assumption that men are better soccer players. For example, Laura said, of her reason to play co-gendered soccer, “I find there is so much to learn. Maybe there’s a style of play that guys grew up doing, this instead of that, and I think getting exposure to that you can learn so much and become a better player.” Likewise, Julie identified her reason to play as being related to the opportunity to learn: “I was excited to play co-ed



because I had never played co-ed...and also that I maybe could learn new things from playing with men.” Melissa stated that she played co-gendered soccer for the opportunity to learn as well: “I’m under the philosophy that you can always learn something. So, whether or not you can learn different skills from different, even male, teammates and stuff like that, but that depends on the males on your team.” The idea that Melissa brought up, of learning from male teammates being dependant on the men on your team, was echoed by other women.

While women found motivation to play co-gendered soccer in the perceived differences between men and women’s abilities, they were also challenged by the same idea. Some women, like Julie, felt intimidated by the idea of playing soccer with men:

I do also recall being kind of nervous about [playing soccer with men], because I think you go in knowing there’s going to be some kind of gender difference, because you’ve grown up only playing with your gender. You know there’s going to be some kind of unknown, so it’s a little bit scary.

Ashley also discussed how she could understand that some of her female teammates would be intimidated playing soccer with men: “I can understand that there are challenges [playing co-gendered soccer] because typically men are bigger and stronger than women.” Laura made an important distinction that although the initial idea of playing soccer with men can be “scary” and that she was “terrified” when she showed up for her first game, after playing a few games, this intimidation and fear went away, allowing her to enjoy playing co-gendered soccer.

Stereotypes about female and male soccer players were prevalent in this study and were often intertwined with positive and negative aspects of co-gendered soccer. In addition to stereotypes affecting motivations and constraints to co-gendered soccer, women’s *experiences* of playing co-gendered soccer were often based on proving stereotypes as inaccurate. I therefore

turn next to the gendered nature of women's experiences of playing co-gendered soccer, beginning with team "tryouts."

## **6.2 Tryouts: Prove Yourself in Order to Play**

Most of the participants in this study felt like they started off on a co-gendered team at a disadvantage as a result of being women. Women, the participants argued, need to prove their skills to the male players before being considered a valuable team member. In essence, although the women were already a member of a co-gendered team as a result of having paid team fees, most felt they needed to "try out" for their team by proving their skills and abilities as a soccer player. Toward this end, Laura stated, "Everything feels like a test...not just an equal player going at it trying their best...definitely more so with guys than girls does it start out with a kind of negative expectation, and you have to work your way up to show that you can hold your own." Brittany also felt as though she had to work hard as a female player to earn the trust of her male teammates:

There were a few guys at the beginning of the season, because I didn't know them, I found until they knew me and knew I could play, they weren't as trusting and didn't pass as much...it was a bit frustrating!... I find that guys in general start passing to you once they know they can. They don't trust you like other guys at first.

Amanda made similar comments about the need to demonstrate her soccer skills to her male teammates:

...especially if there is a new player on the team and they're male, I feel like they have to watch the game and watch how the girls play first, before they will actually be convinced that you can handle getting a pass or taking a shot on the net.

The women in this study reported the need to “try out” for their own team by convincing the male players of their skills/abilities. This negatively impacted on-field soccer experiences. More specifically, the need to constantly prove themselves as players added pressure and thus took away from their ability to focus on the game. Laura explained:

On the field... you sometimes have that whole ‘big brother’ feel to it, where, you know, it almost feels like charity work, where they’re giving you the ball, and that adds to the pressure of what you do with [the ball] because it’s like ‘Oh, they gave me that opportunity; it’s my moment to shine and prove that I’m worth it.’ So if you screw it up after that, it’s like ‘Oh...he won’t choose to pass to me next time!’

For Julie, there was also a change in focus when she played soccer with men:

There are some games where girls don’t even score. I get a lot of assists, so I try to be like ‘another assist.’ I try to show that I’m doing something here... So I’m still fighting for my respect.

Julie found herself focusing more on bringing attention to her soccer successes when playing with men. This changed the focus of her soccer from being a player on the field, to trying to demonstrate that she was being a valuable player on the field. Julie added when she was able to remove herself from the added pressure of having to prove herself to her male teammates, she played better and enjoyed the game more, which resulted in a more positive soccer experience for her and *her* team.

The female players were so used to the pressure to prove themselves, many had specific actions they utilized to demonstrate to the male players they are worthy. For example, defensively covering a male player, ball control, scoring, taking a ball from a male player, and offensively getting past a male player were all strategies the female players utilized to prove their

skills to their male teammates. Toward this end Laura said, “I always feel the need to prove that I can handle covering a guy.” Brittany acknowledged that her past success at scoring meant her male teammates knew she was up for the task and could be trusted to score. Julie noted her male teammates were impressed when women proved they could take the ball from male opponents:

Yeah, I think if we [female soccer players] get the ball off of someone...especially, one or two really good guys on the other team. So if we go to attack and we get the ball, and take it up, I find the guys are usually kind of impressed and like, ‘Whoa, that was awesome!’

To complicate matters, for women to prove themselves as players, they need to be passed the ball. Yet, males were reluctant to pass the ball to the female players until the women had proved themselves. Thus, many female players found themselves in a catch 22: “It’s almost like you have to prove yourself. But, really the only way you can do that is if they pass you the ball...” (Melissa).

While most women felt the need to prove themselves to male players, a few did not. For example, Laura was clear that the need to prove oneself was situation dependent, often varying based on the personalities of male teammates. Moreover, Ashley revealed, “I feel like in co-ed, we’re all on a level playing field”, and Chelsea mentioned that her recent team experiences were with “men who actually appreciate that women have skills in soccer.” Thus Ashley and Chelsea did not feel the need to prove themselves on their teams in the same manner that the other female participants described.

Despite starting soccer off disadvantaged by stereotypes about female soccer players, women were sometimes able to prove their skills to their teammates through their actions on the field. This led to more positive soccer experiences and participants feeling like a valued player.

Unfortunately, proving themselves on the field was dependent on women being passed the ball, which did not happen until women proved their abilities to male teammates. The result of pressure to prove their skills in order to be accepted on the team was a lack of confidence in their soccer abilities and knowledge, which led to changes in how some women played on the field.

### **6.3 From Striker to Defender: Gender at Play on the Field**

The gendered nature of women's experiences playing soccer does not end after they 'try out' for their team. Indeed, my analysis of the data revealed that gender influenced all aspects of the participants' interactions in co-gendered soccer. Similar to the difference between playing striker and defender, the nature of women's soccer skills changed as a result of playing co-gendered soccer.

Some players in the current study were quick to identify the ways in which they had changed as soccer players since joining a co-gendered team. This change was often necessary because co-gendered soccer and women-only soccer are played differently. For Brittany, co-gendered and women-only soccer are completely different experiences: "It's not like I'm playing soccer four days a week, it's like two different sports, because co-ed and women's are like two different sports." Ashley discussed how women and men may have different ways of playing soccer:

Just that touch... A lot of men have that ability to stand in front of you, not moving, with the ball, and you cannot touch that ball because they're just moving it around. That's the main thing... And the ability to like dangle around people, and I'm sure that's confidence, because any guy—most guys—who are good at a sport certainly have lots of that.

Chelsea agreed that men physically play differently than women: “I’ve done a lot of running into a guy and just going ‘boom’, to the ground...because physically I can’t out-muscle them.”

Beyond physical aspects, Chelsea explained, some men have had the opportunity to play soccer at a higher and more competitive level, which can give them the opportunity to develop skills beyond that of many women. As women perceived men as having had more opportunities to play at an advanced level of soccer, and consequently learning to play differently, women had to change the way they played soccer in order to compete with male teammates.

Women explained how they changed as a player by contrasting their co-gendered experiences with their women-only experience. This difference was clearly noted by Laura when she explained how she played differently on her women-only team versus her co-gendered team:

I’m so different when I play with girls than when I play with guys. I find that I take charge on my women’s teams. I will have no problem giving advice, not advice, but putting my input in. Even just cheering in a certain way, it’s so different on my women’s team...I can take it more seriously because I feel like I’m in a position to be more serious because I feel more equal to my teammates. But I feel like I almost have to cash-out or like I don’t take it seriously with my co-ed teams because... I don’t know why. I’m sure it’s just what I do on my own, but I just seem more flighty or something. I find myself chatting more with girls on the field when I’m playing co-ed. I just don’t have my head in it. And I can really dig down and I’m really competitive, naturally, but it comes out way more when I’m playing against other women. It’s just that I have way more confidence when I’m playing with women than with men...

With women's [soccer], I can pretty much say that I'm going to be competitive and have my head in the game. With co-ed, I'll show up and I won't know how I'm going to be. I could be out of it, joking, taking it seriously, I could be frustrated. I never know how I'm going to be. And sometimes I find myself kind of playing [it] up, like I know how it's expected that I'll be when I show up.

As demonstrated in the quotes above, Laura played soccer very differently depending on the gender of her teammates. When playing with men, Laura sometimes found herself succumbing to stereotypical expectations other players had of her. From taking less of a leadership role on her team to playing differently on the field, Laura found her soccer playing changed on a co-gendered team, which made her question her decision to play co-gendered soccer.

Similar to aspects of Laura's experience, Brittany explained that she had less of a leadership role on her co-gendered team, which she attributed to the knowledge her male teammates brought to the game:

I think I just feel that they [male teammates] know better and they're more skilled. And who am I to say? I think it's just easier to tell the girls, because they're either at the same level or under me.

Clearly, Brittany is a different player on her co-gendered team than her women-only one, as she finds it easier to direct female players.

In addition to women playing differently and occupying different roles on their co-gendered teams, participants found their focus shifted in co-gendered soccer. This focus changed from playing the game and doing their best to playing the game to prove to men that women are capable athletes. As noted earlier, there are many stereotypes regarding women's soccer skills. To combat these stereotypes, many of the women in this study intentionally tried

to resist by presenting a skilled female soccer player. For example, Chelsea identified that her initial motivation to play soccer (when she was a child and the sport was very male dominated), was to “to keep up with the boys. And [be] able to have a skill that they would wish they had—that they would respect.” She also explained that she views co-ed sport as a way for younger females to learn that they are capable athletes:

And I’d like for my daughter nowadays, where it is everyone plays soccer and it’s co-ed right from when they’re little, that she sees her strength on the field. Of course, she’s stronger than a lot of the kids who’re still picking dandelions, but that’s just age and stage. But [I’d like her to see] she’s just as strong as the boys on the team. And she can be.

For Chelsea, it was important for women, and girls, to resist ideas that men are superior in athletic strength and ability. This resistance only happened when Chelsea was playing soccer with men. Like Chelsea, Laura identified that although not an initial motivation to play co-gendered soccer, she has found a positive outcome of co-gendered soccer to be showing women as capable athletes:

Yeah, I think that [co-ed soccer is] good for breaking barriers for women and showing that we can have our heads in the game, and we can compete, and we can be equals. It’s not like we all join for a learning experience for equality, but I think it’s good to show that women can be competitors and we can be athletes.

In addition to resisting notions of superior male athletic ability, some women resisted stereotypes about female athletes, which changed how they played. Brittany explained that she used aggression as a way of distinguishing herself from the stereotypical “typical girl player”:



I think I'm very aggressive. The first game I played with my co-ed team, I came out and was so aggressive and they were like 'whoa.' I don't want them [male players] to think I'm girly and fall over—the typical girl player...When I play soccer, I will look like an athlete and not like a girly girl.

In Brittany's case, resistance was not only about resisting stereotypes, but also resisting being a kind of female player she had encountered and who she felt did not represent women well.

Brittany described that, for her, resistance is not just in how you play, but also how you look when you play. Resisting notions of what women are or are not capable of was also an important part of Julie's soccer experiences: "The resistance is a huge part of my experience." Similarly, Brittany found it important to show "I'm a girl, but I can do this."

As the quotes above illustrate, resisting ideas about female athletic capabilities was an important part of the co-gendered soccer experience. When playing women-only soccer, resistance would not be a focus of the game, and thus women became players with a different focus in co-gendered soccer. In addition to describing what ideas co-gendered soccer participation resists and the importance of resistance, women also described *how* they could resist assumptions of female soccer ability. How women could resist soccer often involved playing co-gendered soccer differently than women-only soccer. Amanda mentioned that, for her, playing a position on the field typically dominated by men was a way to show that women are just as capable on the field as men:

In all of the co-ed leagues I play in, there is maybe one other female [who plays the position I do] that plays all the time. I think in a way [playing that position] is like saying 'I don't care, I am an equal and I can play any position as well.'

Although Amanda did not enjoy her new field position as much, she found that her desire and focus on showing women are capable athletes was more important than her on-field enjoyment.

Even though there were changes in how and why women played soccer, these changes were not always negative. Indeed, some women appreciated the new position and the manner of play in co-gendered soccer. For example, Julie viewed playing a new position as a positive change because she found she liked the new position:

But on my full-field I kind of play defence... I just got thrown into it because I was like, 'I'll play whatever, it doesn't really matter to me.' So they kind of threw me into defence and now I just always play defence, and I actually kind of like it.

For some women in the current study, the opportunity to play with men was a welcome change insofar as the women-only environment was more intense. For participants such as Ashley, who felt greater pressure to win on her women-only team, the co-gendered team enabled her to relax and focus on developing her soccer skills.

For many of the women in this study, a key benefit to playing co-gendered soccer was that it provided the opportunity to learn from men and become a better player. Women found themselves learning new skills from male teammates. Brittany noted that she had seen improvements in her own soccer skills since playing with men: "I think since I've played co-ed soccer, I've definitely improved...Just playing with people who are just so skilled, and smart, and fast definitely makes you better and makes you have to work harder."

Women also pointed out that they enjoyed playing soccer with men because you enhance your skills when you play with better players. Ashley discussed how in order to improve at soccer one must play with better players: "I find that I become a better soccer player when I'm playing with better players. And in my experiences, the men have been, for the most part not

always, better soccer players than a lot of the women I know.” In line with Ashley, Brittany agreed that it is also an advantage to play with players better than yourself, even as opponents: “I think it’s neat to play against people who are better. From playing with guys, I think it’s a huge advantage.” Playing with, and against male players, was seen to be an important aspect of co-gendered soccer for women, providing them the opportunity to learn from men and improve their soccer skills.

Although playing soccer with male teammates changed the focus of soccer to demonstrating athletic prowess to resist stereotypes, the accompanying feeling of empowerment was important to women. Women demonstrated their athletic prowess through doing certain actions on the soccer field that were viewed as skilled, much like the prior theme “Tryouts: Prove Yourself in Order to Play”. Additionally, a few women described specific, and empowering, experiences of resistance through soccer. As one participant, Chelsea, mentioned, resistance can be the ability to “run out there and be able to be hit in a game and continue going. That’s always made me feel stronger!” To Julie, scoring goals was a form of resistance:

But when I score, I think I feel even better about it because of the stereotype. Obviously scoring a goal feels really good, but when I do it I’m like ‘yeah; a girl scored tonight!’ I honestly think that way.

Melissa viewed her taking a corner kick, after being told not to by male teammates, as resistance:

It’s funny, I remember one year when I was playing in [a different] league, and I had just started playing with my friend’s co-ed team, and it came time to do a corner and the guys were like ‘oh... well wait for so-and-so’ and I was like ‘dude—I can do it!’ And as soon as I did it, they were like ‘oh wow!’ ...It just feels like it’s an empowering experience. I

kind of just chuckle to myself, kind of going ‘if you have a little faith in people they kind of might surprise you.’

Resistance, through showing men that women can be great soccer players, provides feelings of empowerment to women, as mentioned above by Melissa. Like Melissa, Brittany found herself feeling empowered when she scored goals after being told not to by a male teammate:

There’s one guy who at one point in time said I shouldn’t shoot anymore and I was like ‘What!?’ It was 1-0 for [our opponents], and then I scored four goals and he scored none. So I was like, ‘What? Don’t shoot?’ And that makes me mad!

Although Brittany had a track record of scoring goals, because she was a female, her male teammate told her not to take shots on the net because the game was close. In the end, Brittany disregarded his admonition, felt empowered, and ended up helping her team win the game. In this case, the experience of resistance was a positive aspect of co-gendered soccer.

In addition to being a space that allows women to resist notions of female sporting ability, soccer can also be a space where women can resist ideas about what women should be like in every-day life. Thus, although co-gendered soccer can cause you to play differently and focus on whether you are representing women’s abilities well, it can also remove some gendered societal pressures. In a society that emphasizes certain traits as more “feminine” than others, Brittany found soccer a space to embrace athletic characteristics over feminine characteristics:

I think outside of soccer I’m girly and I like pink, but when I’m at soccer, people think of me as a guy. Typically as a girl, you want guys to say that you’re small and cute, but one guy said to me ‘You’re built like a horse.’ And I said ‘Thanks?’ And he said, ‘No, you’re so sturdy when you play soccer. Nothing can knock you down.’ And as a girl, you wouldn’t want to hear that [outside of] soccer. But at soccer, I like if they [other

players] think that I'm strong and not weak and little and small. But I want to be tough...  
I'm still girly, I'm a girl playing soccer.

Brittany found soccer a space where she wanted to be labelled as strong and tough, which may not be labels she wanted in her every-day life. Chelsea also found that soccer gave her an outlet to be different than in her every-day life:

For someone who's shy and more laid-back, people are usually shocked to see I'm a soccer player, because it doesn't really fall into that [personality]. I think [soccer] maybe gives me an outlet to feel strong, and, do something different.

Being able to take on different characteristics or traits, as Brittany and Chelsea pointed out, can be a way women use soccer as resistance to societal definitions of femininity.

Playing soccer with male teammates made it necessary for women to change the way they played soccer. It also altered their role in team leadership and the positions they played on the field. Although women felt pressure to model women's soccer abilities to male teammates, this also allowed for soccer to be a space of resistance. Furthermore, women were able to learn from their male teammates and improve their soccer skills. There were some aspects of co-gendered soccer, however, that did not have redeeming qualities.

#### **6.4 Playing “Man-to-Man”: Sexism in Soccer**

Women's soccer experiences, despite opportunities to prove their skills and be resistant, were negatively impacted by gendered interactions they had with female and male teammates and opponents. In soccer, teams often set up defensive plays by marking (staying close) one player against another on the opposing team, and preventing offensive players from “slipping by” the defence. This strategy is often referred to as playing “man-to-man”, which is a sexist

term. Above and beyond terms used in co-gendered soccer, sexism is present throughout co-gendered soccer and occurs among groups of women, between women and men, and amongst groups of men.

*6.4.1 Sexism on the field*

The most frequent form of sexism, as discussed by the female participants, was male to female sexism. This form of sexism often took place on the soccer field and involved women feeling purposely ignored by their male teammates. Ashley discussed how when playing in a co-gendered tournament with new teammates, she found herself, and her female teammates, were not passed the ball: “I found...the boys were taking the ball and running up and scoring, and none of us girls even touched the ball.” Chelsea identified that when she first began playing co-gendered soccer, the same thing happened to her, “When I first started, depending on the men, but I would say at least 75% of them really would not pass to you [female teammates]. I felt more like a pylon, just kept people busy out there.” Melissa described a specific incident on the soccer field where she was ignored based on her gender:

Within the first game, I quit that team and walked off the field, which is something that I normally don't do. But it was just the experience I had: the guy had the ball, turned, I'm completely free and wide open, have a better position, he looks up, sees me, and then turns and loses the ball. I just walked off the field and was like 'I'm done.'

Despite having a play advantage, Melissa felt she was purposely not passed the ball because she was a woman. Laura, who was also open to receive the ball from a throw-in, but not thrown the ball by a male teammate, explained how being ignored on the field felt:

Then you have the [male] players that it will be such an obvious thing, like it's a throw in and they're like sizing up their options, you're wide open, and they just will not give it to

you. And I can't say that my skill level will be the same as the guy who's standing next to me, who's fully covered, but I'm open. But you know the ball is going to him, because you know this player always prefers to play with other males...So there's just that feeling of...you feel silly, although he's the one who's not using his players, and he's the one who should feel bad about it. But you stand there, and you kind of want to run behind an opponent just to be like 'Okay, he would have chosen me but I was covered.' But it's just so blatant that you were not chosen. So you can feel inferior that way.

For Laura, being overlooked on the field based on gender made her feel inferior and made her want to hide the fact that she was open in order to make sense of the sexism she faced. Further, Amanda explained that being ignored on the field based on gender is frustrating: “[male teammates] don't pass the ball [to you] when you're wide open...it drives me nuts.”

In addition to the sexism they faced from men, women also made sexist statements about women. For example, Brittany said “girls don't run as hard, girls don't mark as well.” Similarly, Julie said:

On my team, the guys are faster and stronger, and you can tell [that's the case] on a lot of teams. Even in the way my team, we always try to cover the guys because they're always all over the place and they score. It seems like kind of a repetitive thing with what our team has, and the other teams have. And you'll randomly have girls that are really good, and you're like 'Whoa! That girl was amazing!'

Julie's surprise by women who were really good made clear that she holds gendered assumptions regarding women's soccer abilities. Brittany described how she judged women dressed a certain way to be less capable athletes:

I really don't like playing soccer against girls that wear tiny shorts. I get really annoyed playing against girls that are prissy and have plastered make-up, and you can see way too much of them, and they have tight shirts. I just won't be like that... That's one of my biggest pet peeves; girls who play co-ed, and since they're with guys, they wear their tight tank tops and tiny shorts.

Brittany judged the motivations of female players based upon their physical appearance and clothing, which reflected sexist stereotypes. Participants also discussed their belief that men are smarter soccer players, often taking the time to control the ball, whereas "girls will just turn and kick the ball away" (Amanda). One participant expressed her belief that men's superior soccer skills made co-gendered soccer worthwhile "I just feel like I have the expectation that the guys should be good and make the game super competitive..." (Brittany).

Sexism was also present in assumptions participants made about the intentions of other players. For example, being fouled (intentionally or unintentionally) happens regularly in soccer, which includes being pushed on purpose or kicked accidentally. Participants revealed sexist attitudes when they discussed being more upset when fouled by another female player:

Girls will do things that kind of piss me off more than a guy would do... Playing with that girl that pushed me, that really rattled me, and I get worried that girls hold grudges, and I'm not trying to stereotype girls, but we're more emotional. I'm a very emotional girl, so I can get caught up in it. (Julie)

Similarly, Brittany mentioned that women assume other women intentionally hurt them, whereas with men, women can be fouled and believe it was an accident.



Another way sexism is present on the soccer field is in the way women are positioned on the field. Julie brought up that men are often in central positions on the field, giving them more control and power during the game:

Actually, if you think about how we usually position defence on my full-field, it's usually two girls on the wing and two guys in the middle. So I'm interacting with the guys, but I never really thought about how that could be funny... in terms of, the middle is the area, they could go to the sides, they could have a lot more control, rather than us being on the sides.

Soccer players in central positions on the field have more leeway for moving around the field and making decisions related to where and to whom the ball is placed, which means always placing men in these crucial positions gives them a great advantage. Thus, position placement can also be sexist. Laura also discussed how she felt controlled by a male player who was a sweeper (last defender before the goal keeper) saying she felt micromanaged and like a "minion" being told what to do.

Overall, although women faced sexist behaviour on the field from men, they also made sexist comments about women's soccer abilities, thus reinforcing stereotypes in co-gendered soccer.

#### *6.4.2 Sexism on the sidelines*

In addition to sexism being present on the field during soccer play, sexism was also present on the soccer sidelines. Comments made on the sidelines about what players should or should not do on the field, based on gender, often influenced on-field experiences. For example, men using gender as an insult promotes a culture of sexism on a team:

You get guys that are just like, I won't name any names, but they're just very vocal about how 'you passed it to a girl', or 'you play like a girl.' Stuff like that, you hear it all the time. Sometimes it's funny and you can laugh at it, other times it's just like 'that's so tired, it's so old.' (Laura)

Men making comments that negate female ability contributes to a team culture that views women as less-capable athletes, influencing female on-field experiences.

Sexism on the sidelines can also be very direct. This was particularly the case for Laura, who found herself having a very negative experience with a male teammate, wherein she was criticized and judged for wearing make-up to her soccer game:

I wear make-up when I play, I don't take it off, and so I remember one guy would call me 'make-up', that was my name on the team. He thought it was so funny that I wore make-up, and he would always say, 'buck-up make-up' because he thought I must be a pansy because I'm wearing make-up to soccer...But then I thought, this is how I'm presenting, so he can only make certain assumptions about how I play, so I'm starting again from behind. Because back then, I had bleach blonde hair, and I probably wore more make-up than I do now, so he had these ideas about how I would play, and he kind of had me in this box and it was really bugging me.

Although the sexism for Laura started on the sidelines, with a nickname, it also translated to assumptions about what Laura was capable of on the field:

... if I complained about a cramp or something like that, and I think I have a pretty high threshold for pain... I don't go down a lot, and I don't get injured a lot, and I don't complain about things that go on the field...and so him calling me this, I was just like 'That's so unfair.'

Having been given a nickname that discounted her abilities, Laura found her on-field actions, being questioned because of the assumption she was “a pansy.”

Sexism was not limited amongst groups of women, however. Indeed, participants in this study were quick to note that men were also sexist to other male players depending on how they treated female players. This form of sexism was often based on the stereotype that “men should not play hard against women.” Chelsea elaborated that if men do play forcefully with women, they could be sanctioned by other men:

If one of the women get hurt, unfairly, not just something that happens, but something that they [male teammates] feel like another man was being...over the top, [men] kind of get the whole protective thing going. That’s what I find. More like they’ll try and protect the girl... but sometimes, even just maybe take that guy out, or make the rest of his game more difficult, kind of thing.

By working under the assumption that women need to be protected and men hurting women in a game is unacceptable, Chelsea suggested men may take it upon themselves to “punish” other male players accordingly. While other women identified that men do not often play forcefully with female players, Chelsea was the only player to suggest that there were consequences for not following that principle.

Women both experienced, and carried out, sexist behaviour on and off the field, resulting in complex gendered interactions on co-gendered soccer teams. In understanding that co-gendered soccer experiences are rife with sexism, it is important to consider how these experiences affect overall perceptions of co-gendered soccer experiences.

### **6.5 Free Kick or Advantage: Equity versus Equality? What is Fair?**

The discussion about sexism in co-gendered soccer often led participants to reflect on conceptualizations of fairness within co-gendered soccer. Many participants discussed wanting equity on the field, while others discussed wanting equality. These two terms, while similar, have very different meanings in terms of what the on-field soccer experience would look like for men and women playing together. Equity refers to the idea of fair and even-handedness. This would translate on the soccer field to playing time based upon skills and ability rather than gender. In contrast, equality refers to equal sharing and exact division. In this scenario, all players would be treated as equal, receiving equal playing and ball time, and individual abilities, and gender, would not be taken into account. To ensure fairness on the soccer field, a referee is often present to enforce rules. In addition to enforcing rules, referees use their discretion to ensure teams are not unfairly advantaged. For example, when a foul occurs on the field, a referee may decide to allow the fouled team to keep playing if it is to their advantage or to stop play for a free kick, if the team was disadvantaged. Similarly to a referee's call, equity or equality comes down to what a female perceives to be fair treatment.

#### *6.5.1 Treatment of women by male players*

Participants frequently discussed certain types of male players they encountered during their soccer experiences. The identification of player types often related to players who played equally with all players and those who played differently based on gender and ability. Some women preferred equal treatment while others appreciated being treated equitably, or differently based on their gender and/or ability. For Chelsea, it was always unpredictable what male players would be like because they were all different: "You never knew what you were going to

experience [in soccer] because some [male players] would play with you as equals, some would play with you as if you would break...”

How men play with women can also be based on ability, with women who are more capable receiving the ball more often and newer female players receiving the ball less often; “Whereas the girls that have never played...[male teammates will] pass to them, but they don’t pass to them as much [as to me]...I think [men] weigh the skill level in the game” (Brittany).

Equity, in soccer, was valued by women who wanted to be treated differently based on their gender and/or abilities, often by male teammates. Chelsea suggested that sometimes women on co-gendered teams required intentional involvement in soccer play and that some male players would go out of their way to make you part of the game. Some male players also chose to play less physically, or aggressively, with women as both Julie and Brittany identified.

Equality, in soccer, was valued by women who wanted to be treated as an equal on the field. Ashley saw true equality as all players, male and female, being able to make suggestions for how the team should play. Amanda stated that skill level should not determine who gets the ball, and that since the game is about fun, everyone should be included. Laura discussed her appreciation of a male player treating her as an equal:

[My male teammate] likes to think of all players as equal and he uses everybody equally, so it’s nice playing with him. Although he’s a much, much better player than me, he doesn’t make it seem like ‘Oh, he’s going to be the one teaching me and taking me under his wing.’

In Laura’s interaction with her male teammate, equality was valued and viewed as not feeling like a male player was giving you special treatment because you were less skilled. Brittany also valued male honesty when women may not have played well, instead of encouragement that it

was a “good try” or a “good job.” For Ashley, however, equality could involve feeling like you were being given extra opportunities despite your lesser abilities:

On my co-ed team, I definitely feel like [my male teammates] want to help. I can't score to save my life; I'm in front of an empty net, and I'll miss the net 90% of the time. And they just keep passing me the ball because they want to help me and see me score. And I think that's nice.

Brittany had similar experiences with Ashley, but defined men going out of their way to involve women in soccer play as equitable treatment: “There were some guys that would have an open net, but they would try and get other people... and the girls to score.”

Although some men are equity driven while others are driven by equality, the way men play with women can change with time. Chelsea noted that she has seen a male teammate change, playing more equally with women:

I've definitely seen people change. There's even a guy on my team right now...I maybe started playing with him three or four years ago...he would never pass. He had fantastic skills [so] he didn't need to, he could probably just walk in... But now [when] I play with him, whereas before I would say ‘Oh man, well everyone else is okay’, he passes now. So I don't know if it's age, maturity, or what it is, but for some of them it does change.

While it is positive to receive help from male players to score, Brittany distinguished that as a female you may not want to be treated completely the same as a male player:

There's one guy on my team who will yell at me like I'm a guy, and being a girl, it's harder to take because even if I can play with guys, doesn't mean that I'm like a guy and

can take being yelled at. Because guys can yell at each other on the field and then be best friends after, whereas girls later are mad and upset, so that's sometimes hard to take.

Chelsea agreed that being treated as an equal could have a disadvantage because male players might "treat you the same as a man, and we've had girls with broken arms, just from a kick from a guy." While there is the possibility, as Chelsea identified, of women being injured by playing as equals with men, Laura discussed her preference for male players that do not hold back:

And in terms of physical play, some guys don't hold back at all. I actually prefer that. I can't stand hearing, 'How could you do that? Even to a girl?' We're all on the field, let's assess people based on their physical abilities...I don't want to be treated like I'm fragile.

Amanda also noted that she believes it is important that men play equally as hard with as women play with men, noting her frustration when women "give more aggression than they can take":

I just feel like the [female players] that frustrate me the most are the ones that can dish it out, even against a guy, but as soon as the guy does the same thing back to them, it's like they've done something wrong.

Therefore, if women, like Laura, want to be treated as equal players, they should allow men to play equally as aggressive with women. While some women may want to be treated equally on the field, other women, however, appreciated men practicing constraint on the field when playing with women. Brittany commented, "You'll never, or very, very rarely, see a guy go in hard against a girl. It's almost like guys are respectful, and they would never wind up for a shot with a girl in front of them." Amanda remarked:

I find too, that the guys that could fire the ball from halfway, and there's three or four people in the way, they don't do that. I think that is very considerate, because some of those guys can really rocket the ball.

Women also encountered male players who believed that play should be based on equity, and better players should get the ball more. Julie explained that she and a friend had conversations with their male teammates about passing to women more, but that the reason given for the unequal passing was “[but] the guys on [our] team are really good.” Melissa viewed this idea as negative, stating that playing with a team should be about everybody improving and everybody being given the opportunity to learn and develop skills.

Throughout their interviews, women identified the types of players they have encountered and whether their experiences with teammates have been fair, and positive, or unfair and negative. Women's views were often different on whether a teammate was perceived as fair or not, showing that fairness very much depended on individual preferences and whether fairness was viewed as equal or equitable actions.

#### *6.5.2 Gender separation on the field*

The theme of equity versus equality was also reflected in how women and men were sometimes separated on the soccer field and in team decision making, as demonstrated through player marking and positioning. The most common way for men and women to be separated based on gender was by player marking, as discussed in “Playing Man-to-Man: Sexism in Soccer.” While co-gendered teams could play “person-to-person”, Brittany and Chelsea commented that on their teams, men cover men, and women cover women. This meant that when on the field, men and women would switch positions so that the opponent they would defend against would be of the same gender. Laura commented that she does not “like hearing



‘only guys can cover guys, girls cover girls.’ Because that’s not always the best approach.”

Contrary to Laura’s opinion, Ashley expressed that some of her female teammates would prefer gendered player marking because, as she explained: “I know girls on my co-ed team who will not go anywhere near the person with the ball if they are a guy. They won’t mark a guy. They just won’t do it because they are afraid.” As described by Ashley, some women may choose to mark women over men because it makes a more positive soccer experience for them. Brittany appreciated men covering men defensively, but commented that when she is on offence she wants to be challenged by male players.

In regards to positioning, Laura also noted that women and men were also separated on the field in the positions they played: “I find playing co-ed, [teams] like to throw the girls back on defence. They like to let the guys take the offence, I don’t know why.” Chelsea suggested that it may be because forward positions get all the “glory”. On Chelsea and Laura’s teams, women are placed on the field based on a gendered assumption that women are less skilled soccer players, and that in order to win, equity must be exercised. This involves team’s placing more skilled (male) players in forward positions in order to score. Melissa also pointed out how women on her team are “spread out” on the field, regardless of ability: “[My team] would generally always put a girl up front, a girl in the middle, and a girl in defence, regardless of their skill level.” Even on Melissa’s team, gender is used as a structure to determine positioning, regardless of ability or preference. While equity and equality may both be used in determining the positions of women on the field, neither of these options in the way they are carried out seem fair to participants.

Some women expressed their desire to be on a soccer team that viewed them as a valued player. This could look like women playing any position on the field they wanted, or making

decisions jointly with male teammates. Melissa mentioned that on one of her teams, the entire team was involved in deciding who should play where based on ability: “We kind of sort out who has the better skills for each of the positions.” Chelsea stated that on her team, all the women would not “hesitate” in making suggestions for how the team should play.

In regards to how women and men were positioned on the soccer field, women commented that they viewed fairness as men and women being interchangeable on the field. For example, Amanda said:

[If] there were no extra guy subs, but two girl subs, I find it feels really fair on a team if the guys will come off for a sub even though it then puts three girls on a field instead of two guys and two girls. I think that’s a really good way of seeing that things are fair and [men are] taking [fair play] rules into consideration.

To be clear, the current rules for co-gendered soccer involve a minimum number of women, but not men, on the field. Thus, Amanda is referring to fairness as a team being willing to put more than a minimum number of women on the field while decreasing the number of male players on the field. Brittany identified that on her team, only the minimum amount of women are ever on the field.

In some cases, gender separation was deemed fair as it gave women the chance to be active in decision making. Ashley discussed how fairness can be women making decisions about positioning while men did the same for themselves:

When it comes to going on the field, the boys decide who is going on out of the boys, and the girls decide who is going on out of the girls. So we know we need two girls and two guys on at all times, so the girls discuss amongst themselves who is going on the field, and the boys discuss amongst themselves.

Melissa agreed that decisions being made by women for women and by men for men was common on her team as well: “More times than not, the girls decide amongst themselves... it’s kind of two circles. The girls are saying ‘Here’s what we’ll do’, and the guys are saying ‘Here’s what we’ll do.’” Amanda also identified gender separation, by choice, being present for women during game warm-ups:

I think females typically take longer to do the jogging and the stretching, and a lot of it has to do with when I’m stretching, usually my female teammates are stretching with me, so it’s a social thing. Whereas guys, they do their social thing while taking rocket shots on the net, and it’s like the pat on the back kind of thing.

In the above quote, Amanda suggested that men and women may view warming up differently, and that what men and women prefer to do during warm-ups may differ. Laura stated that she observed similar gender separation on her team:

It usually ends up with warm ups, guys are shooting on the goalie and girls are just kind of... I don’t even know what we’re doing. We’re doing some stretches, or something like that, but it’s less... You kind of have to force your way into it. If guys are passing the ball, you join. I don’t know if it’s more of a guys have an understanding, unwritten thing, that you just kind of link up, whereas I don’t know... sometimes I feel like I need an invitation, ‘Do you want to pass with me?’

Laura’s experience varied from Amanda’s because she preferred to have a warm-up more similar to the men than the women on her team, but she felt excluded from the men’s warm-up based on her gender. Laura suggested that it may not have been intentional exclusion, but rather an automatic way men warm-up together.

While gender separation may have been a choice for some women, other women simply expressed discomfort at making suggestions for their male teammates: “I might say something to the girls [about how to play], but I never tell the guys to play, ever...I just feel that they know better and they’re more skilled. And who am I to say?” (Brittany). While Brittany did not feel comfortable taking leadership with male teammates, Laura did not mention discomfort at making suggestions for her team, but did state that positioning decisions were often made by men: “Some females have a say in ‘oh, this is my position, this is where I go’, but mostly I think that you’re placed where [male teammates] want you.”

Some women discussed on-field and decision making experiences being equitable, and based on ability. This would mean that the most skilled players would make team decisions and would receive the ball more often in play. Julie stated that on her team it “seems like the better you are, the more you’re going to get the ball.” For Julie, this created more pressure in her soccer experiences because she equated not getting the ball with not having strong soccer skills. Brittany however valued team decisions being made by the most skilled players, and identified that lesser skilled players should not offer advice to more skilled players. Brittany also categorized men as being above her skill level, while women were at or below her skill level, allowing her to make suggestions to only her female teammates.

In co-gendered soccer, women were treated by male players in ways that reflected the values of equality or equity. Different participants preferred different interactions with male players. Women and men were also commonly separated on the field based on their gender, with women often being spread out around the field to mark female opponents. In expressing their views of what is fair, women identified contrasting views of fairness, hinting at the complexity of female experiences of co-gendered soccer.

## 6.6 Shoot or Pass? Conflicts and Tensions in Women's Soccer Experiences

As identified in the previous themes, throughout their interviews participants expressed positive (being able to improve) and negative (being ignored on the field) experiences of co-gendered soccer. Holding these experiences together was how women made sense of their conflicting feelings about co-gendered soccer. Experiencing conflict and tension in their co-gendered soccer experiences is similar to being close to the net in soccer and asking yourself if you should shoot or pass to another open player. The conflict women experienced was often between ideas that they held versus evidence and experiences on the field. This sense of conflict was both internal and external, relating to confidence in soccer and how women and men negotiate differences in soccer play. As a result of differences, women also experienced tension when confronted with what to do about sexism.

### *6.6.1 Conflict within self*

By playing with men and being treated with sexism and not getting the ball, women questioned their own abilities as a soccer player. Laura found herself accepting, but still being frustrated by, belittling comments made to her by a male player because she more make-up. Those comments led to Laura questioning whether she deserved the remarks because that was how she was “presenting” herself. Julie also questioned her abilities, wondering if not getting the ball was an indication of a lack of soccer skills:

I guess a lot of the times for me, if I don't get passed to a lot I really take it hard on myself because I feel like it means [my male teammates] don't necessarily think I'm very good or that I'm actually going to do something with the ball...it has been a really interesting challenge for me.

Other women faced conflicts within themselves about their own abilities. One woman expressed the complexity of her soccer experience of being willing, but afraid, to play with men and challenge them for the soccer ball: “I will challenge [men] for a ball sometimes. Sometimes I’m also that person who is scared of the ball...I mean some of the girls on my team can kick the ball just as hard as a guy can...” (Ashley).

There can also be tension between how a woman views other women and how she views her own abilities. When describing their own abilities, women were quick to explain they were good, but...: “I think if I was a guy with my skill, I would not be very good for a guy. For a girl, you’re really good...” (Brittany); “And it’s funny; for myself, I generally have a fairly hard shot, sometimes, when it’s accurate...” (Melissa);

And I think the fact that I’m a decent—I’m decently good at it, I mean...I’m not even close to competitive, but you know, I can do things and score some goals sometimes...I have a love for soccer and I think I’m a reasonably decent player...a reasonably decent player. (Julie)

In the above quotes, women were reluctant to objectively label themselves as talented athletes, often choosing to explain how they are “okay” athletes but have their limitations when compared to men. Although women often hedged their confidence in their own abilities, they were quick to point out that some “other” women are very capable soccer players: “there are a lot of women who could kick the crap out of a lot of the guys” (Ashley), “there’s girls out there that can hold their own” (Melissa), “you’ll randomly have girls out there that are really good” (Julie).

Women also wrestled through the question of whether their team was fair and equal or not. Brittany identified that her male teammates are great at passing, but upon further reflection commented: “Also, because I’m friends with the guys, they’re good at passing...so I say they

pass, but I think they also weigh the skill level in the game.” Laura similarly said that she perceived her team as fairly positioning all players, but probably because she is easy-going with where she is positioned. Exploring that idea further, Laura said,

I’ve played wherever and will be happy wherever, so I’ve never really pushed for anything there. But then to think of it, if I did have a preference, would I say something? I’m not even sure that I would. Because I would feel almost cocky, ‘I can do a better job of it than you can.’ But as for why is it more acceptable for a guy to say that and advocate for himself, whereas I wouldn’t, I’m not sure why.

Laura identified that she felt comfortable in her on-field position, but was not sure she would have felt comfortable expressing displeasure if she was unhappy with a position she had been placed in. In the above quote, Laura wrestled through why it would be difficult for her to confront her team leadership, stating she would have felt “cocky” doing that.

#### *6.6.2 Conflict between how women and men play soccer*

Women also expressed that tension between how women and men play soccer affected their soccer experiences. Brittany made numerous statements about the greater abilities of male players, suggesting they had better ball control, greater speed, and higher overall skill levels. For Brittany, this led to a male advantage in play: “It’s true if I get a breakaway, a guy defence could catch me, whereas a girl defence wouldn’t, so it’s different that way.” As a result of this, Brittany always played mid-field on co-gendered teams. Brittany’s comments suggested that men would be at a higher level of play than women, which Amanda agreed with:

The difference in speeds in which females and males can run and shoot the ball and all that, is very different and unique. I find guys are more moving off the ball and thinking ahead and sometimes girls will just turn and kick the ball away.

For Ashley, the higher level of male ability on her teams has created more opportunities for her to improve and relax, making it clear to her that she prefers male teammates: “I prefer to have male teammates as opposed to an all-girls team. I find that an all-girls team comes with a lot of drama, and I’m not a fan!”

One of the main differences that women identified between how women and men play soccer was willingness to dismiss being fouled. Women discussed how it was common that women seemed to be upset only about being fouled from other women. Julie said that it seems to be a “bitchy” attitude towards female players that women hold. Brittany mentioned that, for her, how she acted against women in soccer is so different than in every-day life:

In soccer, [anger at women] happens and it’s just so funny. I don’t know what it is. I don’t get mad [in every-day life], but at soccer I don’t think I’ve ever been mad at a guy in co-ed, but I’ve been so mad at girls in co-ed!

There seems to be something present in playing soccer that brings out aggression and anger towards other women. Brittany suggested that the reason women get upset only at women may be that women resist being told what to do by other women, taking it as a personal criticism instead of constructive criticism. To illustrate the difference between female and male reactions to a foul, Brittany shared the following experience:

It’s like personal; it’s always personal with a girl, but not with a guy. And guys are way better at right away saying ‘Sorry man!’...and patting each other on the back, saying sorry, and helping each other up. Whereas [a] girl trips another girl, says ‘Take that’, and walks away...I took a corner kick and hit [a] girl with the ball...This girl flipped out and tried to fight me...[I think] why would you take that personally?... [If] you’re standing where the ball is blasted to, you’re going to get hit!...And it’s funny because playing with



the guys, when the girls get mad, the guys are always first to step in...and calm you down.

While Brittany's experience clearly illustrated women taking fouls personally and men diffusing the situation, Amanda believed the opposite to be true; that men are more likely to take injuries personally:

Guys tend to react very different than girls. When it comes to whether someone accidentally kicks you in the leg, girls, sometimes, are very forgiving at saying 'Oh, whatever! It's okay!' But guys are like, 'Why would you do that?', and they get really angry.

From the two differing quotes above, differences between female and male players are evident, and yet contradictory, showing that women have differing positive and negative experiences on their teams.

Another difference between female and male soccer players that influences soccer experiences is level of confidence. Amanda reported that men have a level of confidence greater than that of most women: "A lot of guys are very confident in their abilities, even if they're not good. Whereas girls aren't; we always question what we're doing." Laura discussed how it seemed more acceptable for a male player to have confidence and advocate for himself than for a female player. Chelsea noted that this difference in confidence manifested in men having stronger opinions whereas women were more likely to ask "What do you think?" when confronted with decisions. Laura also questioned what the differences between female and male warm-ups implied about women's soccer abilities:

I find that usually the women are off to the side, sometimes just sitting on the bench, not even warming up, whereas the guys are warming up [on the field], which doesn't make

sense because that would make it seem that the guys are taking it more seriously... they have something to warm up for, whereas us [women], we're just socializing on the bench. I'm not sure why that's the case.

Laura's statement of how women and men warm-up differently is a tension she sees present when men and women play soccer together, as it could suggest that men are more "legitimate" soccer players than women. Playing soccer with this tension, Laura found herself sometimes confirming the stereotype of women being less focused on soccer and more focused on socializing by being more chatty on the field in co-gendered soccer than in women-only soccer.

### *6.6.3 Conflict about what to do about sexism*

As many women encountered various forms of sexism, women often found themselves at odds with how to deal with sexism. Sometimes, sexism would or could be ignored, or laughed off, as Laura said. Other times, teammates would suggest that women should just accept the behaviour and let it go, as Brittany experienced when she told teammates of a sexist interaction with a male teammate: "I said [to my teammates], 'He actually told me not to shoot', and everyone said, 'That's just the way he is...he's just kind of like that.'" As it was frustrating for Brittany to experience sexism from her male teammate, being told to dismiss sexism because "that's the way he is" did not validate Brittany's negative experience.

Participants identified it can be difficult to deal with sexism when there seems to be truth behind stereotypes, or when messages are perpetuated by rules or experiences. When discussing the challenge of playing co-gendered soccer, Julie said:

It's crazy because it shouldn't be this hard, it shouldn't at all. These are my friends too, but you can't help with the way they've grown up or how society's influenced them. Or what people put on their website—like Grand River put that [fair play] statement. It just

keeps adding to those stereotypes. The truth's always there, but the stereotype can totally be changed.

For Julie, sexism directed at her from friends was particularly difficult to address. She also noticed that rules within a league can create more stereotypes to fight against. Laura, when considering gender segregated team warm-ups, commented that she was not sure sexism was really there or whether it was simply familiarity and routine.

Julie confronted sexism in a variety of ways throughout her soccer experiences. She first acknowledged that it can be hard to confront sexism when the men on your team are better at scoring goals than the women. After a while, Julie noticed she had begun accepting sexist treatment from her teammates by "being more understanding that [male teammates are] going to shoot the ball instead of passing it to me sometimes." Julie also found herself confronting sexism and standing up for herself: "I just fight for myself. I say, 'I'm open. I'm wide open! Pass me the ball.'" She also, with a friend, confronted two other male teammates telling them to involve women in play more. With the prevalence of sexism and stereotypes in co-gendered soccer, Laura found herself succumbing to the belief that men are more skilled soccer players: "Sometimes you find yourself succumbing to that whole thought 'Oh they're [men] the mastermind behind the whole thing.' So they [men] can be the ones to figure out where we're going to go and how to strategize and things like that."

Encountering sexism sometimes left female players with the question of whether they could continue playing co-gendered soccer. One player discussed how she decided she could not play co-gendered soccer with a specific team because of her experience:

Within the first game, I quit that team and walked off the field, which is something that I normally don't do. But it was just the experience I had... the guy had the ball, turned,

I'm completely free and wide open, have a better position, he looks up, sees me, and then turns and loses the ball. I just walked off the field and was like, 'I'm done.' (Melissa)

Chelsea waited until the season was over to change teams, as her male teammates did not respect women's abilities:

I ended up on teams that didn't respect women as equals on the soccer field; it wasn't fun! So I would just join a different team the next season... And usually, if the men were really that uncomfortable they would end up leaving themselves, because they weren't enjoying it either.

Similar to getting away from sexist players by leaving a team, Laura found herself changing positions because she felt controlled by a male teammate: "I felt like I didn't have my own say back there [on defence]. I wanted to get away from him. So I moved to midfield and then forward after that."

Another player mentioned her conflict about playing co-gendered soccer at all:

But I would definitely choose women's [soccer] over co-ed. I just find there's a lot of stuff that goes on in co-ed, a lot of drama and a lot of prejudice that I don't want to contend with. I'd much rather play with other women. (Laura)

For women who played co-gendered soccer, sexism was present in various forms and was something that impacted women's soccer experiences. It was also something that women were conflicted about, as they wondered whether stereotypes were true, or somewhat true, and how or if they should confront sexism.

On the whole, women found that the mix of negative and positive experiences on co-gendered soccer teams was confusing and created unpredictable soccer experiences. From needing to prove their skills in order to be accepted, to wanting to prove their skills to resist ideas

about female athletic capability, women's co-gendered soccer experiences were diverse and complex. Adding to the complexity is how women were frustrated by sexism from men but were also agents of reproducing sexism. Furthermore, as some women were treated more positively on their teams than others, women had a hard time articulating what fair soccer looks like and whether co-gendered soccer experiences are positive or negative. Although women had some similar experiences, like being ignored on the soccer field by male players, each woman had her own history and experiences of soccer, which adds to the conversation of how there is no universal female experience. In order to unwrap some of the complexity of female sporting experiences, and make suggestions for what the current research means for sport organizations, I will next move to some policy implications which are rooted in women's co-gendered soccer experiences.

## **7.0 Organization-Based Findings**

In addition to findings related to the diverse co-gendered soccer experiences women had, there are also findings that bring together the experiences of women and suggest the need for changes at the organizational level. The following findings are based on women's discussions of the sport organizations they played with, and suggests that organizations need to examine the choices they make and how their choices, like rules and policies, affect sport experiences. First, as co-gendered sports leagues often create rules to promote gender fairness, it is important to recognize that these rules may enhance some women's experiences while also constraining others. Secondly, there is evidence that interpersonal dynamics affect women's sporting experiences. The third organizational finding is that an important element in creating positive team dynamics, as identified by this research, is supportive team leadership. Last, there are findings that provide evidence of how organizational culture influences female sporting experiences, and should consequently be considered when attempting to create positive co-gendered sport experiences.

### **7.1 Gendered Rules Enhance and Constrain Soccer Experiences**

Many co-gendered sports teams have rules related to gender. In the case of this research, the league studied, Grand River Soccer league, has a rule related to how many female players need to be on the field at all times. This is seen as a "minimum" number, in order to ensure teams are not advantaged by having additional male team members on the field. There is also a principle that is important to them called the "Fair Play Philosophy", which, in part, states: "By nature, co-ed sports require that all male participants remember that male players may have a strength and speed advantage over female players." When discussing aspects of the league that

influenced their soccer experiences, these are the rules and policies that women referenced. For a full list of rules, view Appendices B and C.

*7.1.1 Gendered rules enhance soccer experiences*

For some women, gendered rules helped create more positive soccer experiences. Based on their experiences, some women believed gendered rules help make the experiences of female players on co-gendered teams more positive. Chelsea approved of the “Fair Play Philosophy”, noting the benefits of it she observed:

I think it may make more men, again, think about protecting the women [and] I don't mind that so much myself, to be honest. If there's a man that's throwing his weight around, again, it's recreational soccer, I think there's a whole different league to throw your weight around in.

By suggesting to men they should be aware of their potential physical advantages, Grand River Soccer's gendered rules improved Chelsea's co-gendered soccer experience. Laura also saw the value in gendered rules as ensuring teams do not completely side-line female players:

But [a minimum amount of female players rules] also ensures that if you're down one goal and it's crunch time, they pull all the girls and put all guys out [on the field], it doesn't ever come to that. You wish it didn't have to be in the rules that it would have to be like that.

Above, Laura noted her appreciation as well as distaste with a gendered rule, explaining she would rather that rule not have to exist at all, but is appreciative if it prevents women from being removed from play.

While some women experienced benefits of gendered rules, most participants could see the potential benefits of gendered rules, but also questioned how effective or useful they would

be. Julie, who did not completely agree with the content of the “Fair Play Philosophy” said, “I mean, to be devil’s advocate, it can be true. On my team, the guys are faster and stronger, and you can tell on a lot of teams [that’s also true].” Therefore, to Julie, the rule could be based on something meant to enhance female soccer experiences. Melissa thought the “Fair Play Philosophy” was a great suggestion to male teammates and opponents to practice restraint, but she also wondered how restraint could truly be controlled by a statement. When asked her thoughts on the “Fair Play Philosophy” Amanda stated: “I don’t really find it that offensive because I know that it’s true.” In regards to truth, Chelsea elaborated saying that it is “one of those truths that you don’t like to hear, but are really just a truth.” Ashley also agreed with the statement that men may have strength and speed advantages over women. These women recognized that the “Fair Play Philosophy” was written as a reminder of differing abilities, regardless of whether they felt this was the best way to frame female and male sporting differences.

### *7.1.2 Gendered rules constrain soccer experiences*

While some women believed that gendered rules did or could improve their co-gendered soccer experience, other women viewed gendered rules as making their soccer experiences less positive. Regarding the “Fair Play Philosophy”, Julie stated:

That’s not even fair play at all in that statement. It’s interesting to say that and kind of be like ‘we’re aware of that.’ That’s not the way to handle it. There’s other ways you can get at that. Like you can talk about equality and equal opportunity or something rather than saying ‘Hey, all men—remember that men are stronger!’



Julie was frustrated with the statement and felt that while there may have been good intentions behind the creation of the rule, it did not truly address fair play for all. As Julie continued to process the statement, she discussed her frustration further:

So if it's fair play, how come they're singling out strong males and only saying it to males? That's very interesting. I don't like that, actually! That's something that would really make me want to leave the league to be honest. I'm kind of a feminist sometimes, so that kind of stuff gets to me.

Brittany agreed with the fair play statement, but also commented on how it was not true for everyone: "I agree with it, but at the same time I think that there are a lot of guys that aren't very good in some of the other divisions." Brittany stated that for the most part men are better than women in soccer, but noted that men can have varying abilities themselves, so a statement purely about male advantages was not accurate.

A few women believed that having gendered rules could constrain sporting experiences by further perpetuating stereotypes. Laura identified that rules to "keep things equal" may perpetuate stereotypes by making women seem like a team "handicap." Julie also viewed gendered rules as troubling: "I think writing something like that [Fair Play Philosophy] to support the stereotype and give that overall image to start with, can be really detrimental to how teams play." Discussing differing abilities, Laura noted the potential for women to have physical advantages over men and how rules can perpetuate gendered assumptions:

I think it could just as easily be put that women players can have the same [physical] advantage. I think that if you are joining these leagues and you are athletic, the propensity for a male to maybe not be as fit, or slow, is just as equal. I think having that in the rules just kind of perpetuates the problem. I don't think that should be there,

because physically, I'm taller than most guys, not most, but on par with most guys, so the strength thing I don't think is a good assumption. Maybe it is true that the majority of guys are, maybe so, but I don't think it's necessary to outline that.

Thinking of other gendered sporting rules, Laura talked about how gendered rules could suggest women need advantages to be on par with men, discounting female athletic capability. For example, Laura referenced how in golf women may be given playing advantages and how a similar advantage, of a female goal in soccer being worth more points, would be negative:

Like the women's rule in golf, 'how many strokes? Oh, but you were from the women's team so that doesn't count.' So it's like discounting your actual score. 'How many of those were women's goals? So you didn't actually win.' I can just see that as a way of skewing the results again.

Laura viewed gendered rules as perpetuating difference and discounting female ability, and did not believe gendered rules to benefit her. The only positive she saw was that gendered rules ensured women had to always be on the field, and that a team could not remove all their female players from the field. Female experiences of co-gendered sport were certainly influenced by rules, but they were also influenced on a more person-to-person level.

## **7.2 The Influence of Interpersonal Dynamics on Individual Experiences**

While there were structural elements of co-gendered soccer, such as rules, that influenced the types of experiences women had on their soccer teams, dynamics between people also influenced many of the participants' experiences. Sexism, as discussed in the theme "Playing Man-to-Man: Sexism and Soccer" was often encountered from men to women and influenced the on-field soccer experiences of women. When sexist comments were made or women were

ignored on the field based on their gender, this affected some women's decision to play on a specific co-gendered team or play co-gendered soccer at all. This has implications for organizational retention. Women also suggested that men who had negative experiences on a team would not return to play with the same team, or league. Thus, a big influence on female *and* male soccer experiences was the nature of interactions amongst teammates. For Brittany, playing co-gendered soccer was mainly about with whom she played. The more she liked her teammates, the more positive her soccer experiences and the more likely she was to return to that team and league. This implies that to retain participants, organizations need to consider how they can encourage positive interpersonal dynamics on sports teams.

When addressing what made team experiences positive or negative, women often discussed their individual team dynamics. Melissa found that the personalities of teammates sometimes constrained her soccer experiences:

I think that sometimes the team you're playing on, just with the team atmosphere, it can be difficult to come out and play, just because you're not sure what comments are going to be made or what personalities are going to show up that day...The game could start off normal and calm, and then the flukiest thing could happen, and just one player sets off and starts mouthing off, and you're just embarrassed to be on that team.

Unsure of what to expect at every game, Melissa found that to have an unpredictable team influenced her ability to believe each game would be a good experience. Furthermore, Melissa found that because some players on her team were quick to anger, she felt embarrassed of her team affecting her enjoyment of playing soccer and being a part of her team.

Even with similar people on a team from year to year, the individual personalities of a few players could negatively impact on-field experiences:

I do question sometimes if I want to keep playing co-ed or not because there's some years where it's really fun, and then there's other years, like this year, where it hasn't been that much fun...because people change and the dynamics aren't always the same...There's always been transitions on the team, but it just seems like everyone who would come to the team would kind of blend in. This year I feel like we have some players who show up to every fourth game, and it really throws off the game. (Amanda)

How a team varies from year to year certainly affects how women experience co-gendered soccer, especially with players who show up sporadically to play on a team. Since Amanda only played co-gendered soccer with Grand River Soccer and played women-only soccer in another league, if she decided not to play co-gendered soccer anymore, the league would lose Amanda's membership. Thus, it is important that sport organizations consider team dynamics and how they can encourage positive, and consistent, team experiences.

One element of interpersonal dynamics that was seen to affect team cohesion and how comfortable and valued a female felt on her team was how well teammates knew one another. Ashley identified that when playing for a tournament with a team of "random players", she experienced less equality and more sexism. She felt the reason for this was that the team did not know each other and had no personal connections. Chelsea also stated that team cohesion is dependent on knowing your teammates: "Without practicing and getting to know people three days a week, [soccer] doesn't really happen very cohesively." Julie agreed that a challenge to co-gendered soccer is creating team cohesion:

I think the challenge with co-ed soccer is that you don't have practices, and I think that would be really valuable for my teams. You can get to know, or hear more about the

types of plays they think about, because sometimes I'll get the ball passed to me and I won't be expecting it sometimes [because I] won't be expecting their thought process. Knowing each other helped create team cohesion which resulted in teams playing better together and using each other more equally. This resulted in women enjoying their soccer experiences more and continuing playing with the same team and league.

Knowing teammates can also encourage women to make suggestions for how the team should play. Julie came onto a pre-existing team that knew each other and found she felt less comfortable making suggestions for how the team should play because of her "role as a new teammate." Julie also experienced a level of nervousness when joining a team that she knew no one on. In contrast, Amanda and Laura expressed comfort at making suggestions for their team because they knew their teammates: "The teams that I've played with for a couple years now, I feel very comfortable saying [how to play] because I know that they know what I'm talking about and that I'm not just making stuff up" (Amanda); "Like you said before, being comfortable with your teammates, knowing them and having a history with them, and a rapport with them, you feel more comfortable to voice your opinion or be a part of it" (Laura). For both Amanda and Laura, familiarity helped build trust and comfort among teammates, creating more positive soccer experiences for women and organizational retention. As discussed by participants, informal relationships among teammates are an important element of positive co-gendered experiences; so too is how a team makes decisions.

### **7.3 Team Leadership**

In addition to team dynamics being influenced by interpersonal interactions, team leadership also influenced individual experiences and satisfaction with the overall sport

organization. Team captains were an important part of decision making and overall leadership of a team. In Grand River Soccer League, team captains are responsible for organizing the team, securing team payments from individuals, keeping up to date with game details, and ensuring the team follows the league rules. In addition to the formal organization expectations of captains, participants also appreciated specific roles their captains filled. Brittany appreciated her team captain providing inspiration and discussing how the team was doing: “With [my captain] there, he is so intelligent and so good. He always gives us a talk of how we should play before the game and half-way through.” In addition to coaching the team, Amanda explained that captain sets the team dynamic: “The guys on our team respect what [our captain] decides and they look to him for those decisions, and he’s usually pretty calm, so he helps to keep things calm on the field.” As described by Amanda, team captains are often looked upon to make team decisions and model behaviour that the rest of the team will follow. Having a respectful, and calm captain, helped Amanda’s team feel like a place of mutual respect. Melissa also viewed the team captain role as one of ensuring team control: “More or less...the captain has to try and talk [a worked up] person down, just so that they’re not hot-headed so much...Our captain will kind of call out the person and tell them just to relax, and let it go.”

While captains can have a positive role on the team, ensuring respect and calm, captains can also help create negative experiences for women on co-gendered teams. Amanda noted a few issues with her team captain:

On my other team, the captain kind of sits back and he doesn’t really say much... We have one player on our team who never passes the ball, and our captain never says anything to him, even though our captain knows everyone is frustrated with it...

We have three girls on my team, which is nice because you only have two on the field at a time, so you're almost always on ...but the one girl on my team keeps inviting this other girl out as an extra, so we have four people. And I find it really frustrating because I'm not getting as much playing time, and I don't get as much into the game and you don't get into the flow of it.

Amanda had expectations that her captain would confront unfairness on the team, and because he failed to do that, Amanda was not able to fully engage in play and enjoy her soccer experience. Had her captain confronted a player who failed to pass, or ensured that only players on the team roster were attending games, Amanda would have had more positive team experiences.

As far as who leads a team, participants observed that team leadership was often carried out by men who were team captains. Julie noted that both her captains were male: "In terms of who's in charge I guess both [my] captains are males...with our team it was just who[ever] took on the role of organizing and paying for the team, became the captain." Although a few participants had a female captain, most participants identified that their teams were led by male captains. Laura discussed her observations of the gender of team leaders:

I have yet to see, on a co-ed team, a female delegating or taking charge before the game...If the captain's away—that captain's usually a guy—it usually falls to another male on the team [to be in charge]...and they're the one calling the shots, and putting players here or there. So organizationally, it would be men organizing.

In regards to the experiences of women in leadership positions, only one participant identified herself as a team captain. As some teams have played with Grand River Soccer for multiple years, some teams have grown and split into multiple teams. For these teams, there is often an overall team organizer that divides up players and is in charge of managing multiple

teams. As a result, there may be an individual responsible for on-field responsibilities and sending out game reminders, but not responsible for all team details, such as payment or recruiting players. One player identified that she was a team captain for a team run by an organizer not on her team. This player viewed her role as different than a team captain:

Because [our team had multiple] teams, the head organizer guy put me in charge of my team...me being the captain, I pretty much never say anything about how to play...because the guys are better than me, so I'm not going to coach them.

Even with her female teammates, this participant often did not offer much advice for how the team should play: "And [with] the girls, it's for fun and it's co-ed, so I'll maybe say a few things, but I don't really say much."

In addition to the more formal role of team captain, decision making and team organization also occurred on a more informal level in the form of peer leadership. Chelsea noted on her team that suggestions of how the team should play were made by both men and women. For Ashley the same was true, and suggestions from all players have helped her team move from losing to winning games. While not a captain, Julie explained that she was sometimes responsible for sending out game details to her teammates. Laura found that although some women would state where they wanted to play, ultimately decisions about positioning were made by male teammates. In looking at the soccer experiences of women, the peer leadership that occurred on a team was influential in creating positive or negative sporting experiences. While interactions with team members and decision making influenced whether women viewed their team experiences as positive or negative, team leadership was also a reflection of the sport organization.



## 7.4 Organizational Culture

How an organization positions itself, with its mission, values, and objectives, to ensure optimal sporting experiences is important. For women to have positive sporting experiences, they must feel that the organizational culture aligns with their values and expectations about positive sporting experiences. Women conveyed that the organizational culture of a sport organization needs to be clear, consistent with individual values, and communicated. Beyond being clearly communicated, women also believed that rules and whether they were reinforced was a reflection on the values of an organization. Women in this study also expressed their appreciation of organizing staff being physically present at games to reinforce policies and rules and receive feedback on experiences in the league. This norm was viewed by participants as important in conveying an organizational culture that values member feedback.

### *7.4.1 Clear communication of values through rules*

Women chose to play with Grand River Soccer for varying reasons, but often they were looking to be part of a league where particular values were portrayed as important. One value that women wanted to see more clearly communicated in the league was a greater focus on fairness through clearer divisional play. More fairness was equated with more fun, which was a great motivator for women to play co-gendered soccer, and a reason that women chose one sports league over another. Julie commented that her time in another soccer league had been more positive because the competition among teams was more evenly matched:

I'm enjoying my time more at [another league]...One of the reasons, the main reason, is that...our team has gotten better. Before, when we started, we sucked. [When] we played in Grand River...we played a lot of teams that didn't match our team and ... it started to be less fun, because we were always losing...It's really not fun if you're going

to play a team and you know you're going to lose....You try really hard but they're just so good and you're like, 'You're just not at our level!'

Julie noticed that her soccer experiences were more fun in another league and this influenced her desire to continue playing with Grand River Soccer. Melissa mentioned that the result of varying skill levels of players and non-divisional play could be additional fouls:

More or less having different skill levels, you're just seeing stuff that should be called fouls. Like clipping of ankles, people going in a little more aggressively than probably what they are able to do...even just being clumsy and colliding with other people and stuff like that. And then after a while, certain players' tempers get the better of them, and then they lash out...

When play is interrupted by fouls, players can become frustrated and this impacts individual sport experiences and whether players view their team, and league, positively. By having teams compete against teams that have a higher skill level, the focus of the game can change, resulting in less positive sporting experiences for women.

In addition to fairness through equal competition, participants articulated the importance of the league more clearly communicating the values of fair play or sportspersonship. Julie discussed how having been hurt badly influenced her view of the need for greater sportspersonship in Grand River Soccer league:

[A female opponent] deliberately shoved me, and I could see in her face, before she pushed me, that she was mad that I had taken the ball from her. I don't even know why she was so mad. And I was out [of soccer] for two months. She really hurt my shoulder, and I wasn't able to do other things [as a result]... I was really mad! I honestly couldn't play her. I didn't even want to see her because she didn't even have any compassion.

And so I think that's the thing about [Grand River Soccer that] my team really didn't enjoy; that people would get so competitive and angry and would lose the whole idea that we're here to have fun and play soccer.

[Because I got hurt really badly]...I may have a skewed perception, but there were a few teams where we would get into arguments. It felt like people were there thinking they were playing high competitive soccer, and we're like, 'This is recreational soccer, we're here to have fun!' I think I feel better in [the other] league. It makes me a little nervous to go back to Grand River...I think the thought of people playing and being so angry and competitive, just doesn't seem to fit the league. We're playing co-ed, recreational soccer, so I think addressing that is important.

For Julie, it seemed that Grand River Soccer did not communicate the value and purpose of recreational soccer enough, resulting in teams that focused on winning at all costs and her injury. Playing these teams, Julie had negative experiences to the point where she was not sure she wanted to continue playing with Grand River Soccer. An improvement in the culture of fair play in Grand River Soccer would ensure that players have more positive experiences and continue to be part of the league.

As the rules dictate the "how to" of an organizational culture, it is important that rules are clearly communicated and reinforced. When asked their thoughts on the rules, some of the participants expressed that they were unfamiliar with the rules. Amanda questioned whether communicating the rules in writing was the most effective method for conveying league values:

It is good to remind people [about fair play], but I think that the ones that would read it and understand it are the ones that already know, and the ones that would read it and

think ‘who cares?’ don’t care anyway. It’s nice that [the fair play philosophy is] there, but [I’m not sure] whether it’s getting that message across to those who need to hear it.

Melissa said that for her, it was hard to keep track of the rules, as they varied based on league format:

Just trying to keep all the rules straight [is a challenge] because you have some rules that are set up specific for the co-ed, because it’s not officiated. But then I play on other leagues where it is officiated, so there are some rules that are different.

Making changes to the league that would clarify the rules could help familiarize all players with them in order to improve soccer experiences and maintain an organizational culture of fairness.

How Grand River Soccer promoted fairness of competition was also important to women, as they wanted their team to have the opportunity to come out, play fairly, and possibly win.

Chelsea noted an improvement to rules about the roster could help more clearly model the league’s value of fairness:

When the roster’s set, that’s it. Even though I know that there is a balance between [wanting] to be able to play the game...like if your whole team comes out and [the opponents] only have three players, you’d still rather play the game. But then there should be a forfeit of some sort rather than bringing in three ringers [really good players not on your roster] and them beating your team. I know that’s something that [the league is] trying to do, it’s just a hard one to enforce...

By ensuring that teams only play with players on their roster, Chelsea believed the league could ensure that the rules are clear and promote fairness. Laura believed that re-structuring rules about gendered fair play, to remove the assumption of female weakness, could also improve female soccer experiences.

Beyond how rules were communicated and what they were, it was evident that women also wanted rules to be enforced. Chelsea commented that enforcing the rules is important in creating a culture where rules are truly valued and “they’re not just written rules.” In relation to how rules were enforced, a few participants mentioned it would be beneficial for soccer games to be officiated by a referee. Amanda stated: “I sometimes wish there were referees because self-officiated just doesn’t always work.” Ashley agreed and explained her reasoning for wanting officiated leagues:

I don’t like that Grand River Soccer co-ed leagues are not officiated. I think that affects the way that everyone plays because you’re not going to get caught for anything. I mean, as long as you’re a good sport, which most people are in that league, it’ll be fine. But there are some people who will try and get away with crap because there are people like that everywhere.

Part of rule enforcement, as Chelsea identified, is the identification of clear consequences for not following the rules:

The only thing I hear teammates talk about...is [that they want the league to] continue to control players who get overheated during the game. Or if there’s one [player] that is consistently having a problem, [don’t let them] play for that season or give them some sort of consequence...[Players want] to know that if [you] don’t follow the rules, you’re not going to be allowed to play in the league or whatever the consequences are...

From Chelsea’s comment it is apparent that her team was not aware of how players were sanctioned for not following the rules, and that this would have been beneficial for the team to know. For Chelsea and her team, the consequences for not following rules need to be more

clearly identified by the league, in order that teams feel the league values and promotes fairness through rule enforcement.

*7.4.2 Presence of league organizers*

A further subtheme of organizational culture was the importance of the presence of league organizers. To further enforce and carry out an organizational vision, it was valued by participants that league organizers were present at games. The presence of organizers on the field was a part of the Grand River Soccer organizational culture that women appreciated. All women shared stories of interactions they had with the league organizers, which ranged from recruiting women to the league to playing soccer with or against them. Ashley explained her motivation to stay engaged with Grand River Soccer related to knowing who ran the league:

I think the good thing about that league that I really, really like, and helps me want to stay engaged in it, is I know who runs the league. And most people I think in the league do, I mean they know [the league organizers], and they're visible, and they play on the teams. I think that makes a big difference in wanting to play for a league where you know who's running it.

Chelsea suggested that beyond simply league staff being present, presence of female league staff is important and something she noticed had improved with Grand River Soccer:

Just to have female soccer players have a woman to look up to, and respect her knowledge in the sport, instead of kind of it being the 'old boys league' [is important]...I think that [Grand River Soccer has] already started by having [a female staff member] there, because she's a strong woman, and when there's [problems]—she has no fear of dealing with altercations. And I think that's fantastic! I think she really fills that role very well.

Having management present and visible in the sport organization helped create comfort for participants with voicing their thoughts and concerns about the organization. Ashley mentioned that she felt comfortable approaching the league organizers: “You know if you have a complaint you can go and talk to [the league organizers].” Amanda also said having the league organizers present on the field allowed her to ask questions if necessary, which was more positive than her experiences in another league:

And both [league organizers] are at the fields almost every time there are league games. So if you ever have questions, they are there and they make themselves known. I find that’s really nice. Whereas the [other] league doesn’t feel like there is anyone there to help you if you need it. They have one person who walks from field to field...

Having league organizers that were clearly visible and easily identified helped create positive soccer experiences for women and a comfort with how the organization was managed.

While many participants had a positive view of the league organizers, Julie experienced greater support at another league:

The other thing I’ve noticed with [the other league] is that the staff are just there more. When you’re saying the score at the end, and the spirit points, they come and ask you so you’re not submitting it. I think there’s benefits and non-benefits [of that] because you feel obligated to say [the other team] gets a full spirit score because they’re right there. But it’s nice to have that face to face interaction....I know at Grand River the convenor would come out once in a while to check-in, which is nice...

Despite some league organizer presence at Grand River Soccer games, Julie observed staff presence only occasionally and more appreciated the consistency of staff presence at games in another soccer league. Whether or not women experienced staff presence with Grand River

Soccer, having league organizers or staff present at games was seen to be an important part of a co-gendered soccer organizational culture that promoted open communication between players and management.

The positive and negative experiences women in this study had in co-gendered soccer suggests that although co-gendered leagues are important, some organizational change would improve female sport experiences and consequently positively affect organizational retention and affiliation. Being aware of how gendered rules can perpetuate differences between women and men is also important. This can help sport organizations realize the constraining effect on female sport experiences that rules designed to create fairness can create and help organizations re-focus to create a greater organizational culture of gender equality. In recognizing the importance of team dynamics and the influence of team leadership on individual experiences, sport organizations can also strive to ensure that team leaders have values consistent with the organization, ensuring player satisfaction. In conclusion, a greater organizational awareness of the effect of organizational structure and culture on individual sport experiences can help create optimal sporting experiences for women and men.



## **8.0 Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore women's lived experiences playing recreational co-gendered sport, specifically related to the experience of playing sports with men, the challenges and benefits of co-gendered sport, and how structural program elements affect women's sport experiences. This involved interviews with women who play recreational co-gendered soccer. The findings from this research suggest that co-gendered sport is an important space for women to improve their soccer skills, have diverse sporting opportunities, and socialize with women and men. Despite the positive aspects of co-gendered soccer, women also faced sexism from their teammates which affected on-field playing experiences. Findings indicated that women played soccer differently and were less involved in team decision making when playing soccer with men compared to how they played on women-only teams. The rules and leadership of a team were also influential in determining whether women had positive or negative co-gendered sport experiences, with gendered rules both enhancing and constraining sporting experiences. Co-gendered sport was also used as a way to prove skills thereby resisting ideas and stereotypes about female sporting abilities that were experienced. In summary, female sporting experiences with men were both positive and negative, and those experiences created a space where women challenged and reproduced gender discourses.

### **8.1 Playing with the Masculinist Underpinnings of Sport**

Previous research has indicated that sport has historically been a male dominated area which may reflect women's current experiences in sport. For some women in this research, their experiences of playing sport with men indicated an assumption and acceptance of male athletic superiority. Krauchek and Ranson (1999) suggest women in elite sports can accept the male

sporting model of aggression, or accept a second-class athlete status, or resist the male sporting model and play differently. Despite playing *recreational* co-gendered sport, these ways of participating in sport were echoed by the experiences of women in soccer. For example, participants viewed successful soccer players as those who are fast, strong, aggressive, and able to score goals. These characteristics are similar to the values of a male sporting model (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). Participants in their interviews reflected an acceptance of a second-class sport status by making comments that women would never be as capable as men in soccer. Women in this study also viewed men's greater sporting ability as a biological fact, and beliefs about men's inherently greater athletic abilities continued even when women discussed the high capabilities of their female teammates. Consequently, the current research confirms Lorber's (1993) view of 'biology as ideology'; based on ideologies of male superiority, greater male ability has become biological truth. The current study also confirms Wachs' (2005) conclusion that stereotypes persist despite contrary evidence. Perhaps these stereotypes continue to be reproduced "because people believe they exist" and because individuals look to confirm gender differences to make sense of how women are treated in sport (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Fontayne, Boiché, & Clément-Guillotin, 2013, p. 136). For example, women may look to confirm the men on their soccer team are better so that it makes sense that men are passed the ball more frequently.

Although some women accepted second-class status in co-gendered soccer, a few women resisted notions that men are better athletes, and instead, claimed their own abilities as superior to a few of their male teammates and opponents. This is an example of women using their leisure as resistance to cultural norms (Shaw, 2001). This can be for personal outcomes, such as freedom or empowerment, and/or collective outcomes, such as challenging sexism or weakening

dominant discourse, and can involve intention or not (Shaw, 2001). Krauchek and Ranson (1999) found that women who resisted the male sporting model were more likely to challenge harassment in sport. While Krauchek and Ranson's view of sport was fairly categorical, my research points to the complexity of women's experiences in co-gendered sport. That is, in my research, harassment was resisted by women who accepted the male model of sporting or secondary sporting status *and* by those who challenged this model. For example, one participant believed that women were not as skilled as male soccer players, thus she accepted a secondary athlete status, but she still chose to confront sexism by confronting men who chose not to pass to women. Participants also both accepted and resisted a secondary sport status by stating that although men may be more skilled in soccer than the participant, "other" women on their team were just as skilled as men. The tendency for women to both accept and resist notions of superior male sporting ability identifies the need for a model with greater flexibility. The current research is also in a different context, co-gendered sport, than Krauchek and Ranson's (1999) research, which was conducted in more competitive, women-only sport coached by men. The difference in context could account for the differences in findings. It is possible that women's experiences in my study were more fluid as they were playing sports with men who were teammates rather than in positions of power such as a coach.

The masculinist structure of sport is also reflected in the lack of confidence that women in this study have about their soccer abilities. Harrison and Lynch (2005) found that young girls are less likely than young boys to label themselves as good at sports. This idea was revealed in the hesitancy of women to label themselves as good athletes, instead pointing out their limitations. Research shows that female athletes may also discredit ability based on gender by setting different standards for women than men (Domangue & Solmon, 2012). For example, in

the current research a number of participants would note they were skilled as far as female players go, but not in comparison to male soccer players. This raises the question of what definition of “good player” women are using to measure their abilities. This research suggests that women are often using masculine ideas of success to measure their abilities, such as doing individually well by scoring a goal or making a save, instead of a more feminine (caring for others) ideal of communal success, such as helping the team to do well by consistently marking a player (Abele, 2003). Defining skill simply by the number of goals scored is troublesome when the current research finds that women, even those who have been playing forward positions for their entire soccer career, are often placed in defensive positions on the field during co-gendered games. While some of the women may have felt unhappy with their defensive positions, Clark and Paechter (2007) found that young girls naturally choose defensive positions, even when playing soccer only with girls. This suggests that women’s on-field positioning is complex and influenced not only by history and preference, but also by a general hesitancy to play aggressive forward positions, perhaps from gendered socialization of female passivity. While encouraging women to play all positions on the field would help disrupt the masculinist structure of sports, a further focus on redefining success to prioritize the demonstration of sportspersonship and not the scoring of goals would benefit co-gendered soccer (Nlandu, 2011).

The language participants use to describe themselves and other female soccer players also reflects how women view female athletes. Krauchek and Ranson (1999) noted that accepting secondary status in sport is often characterized by labelling female teammates “girls”, which women in this study frequently did throughout their interviews. The words women use are a reflection of what they view as true in the world, and thus using the term “girls” can reinforce gendered stereotypes:

The words we use can also reinforce current realities when they are sexist... Words are tools of thought. We can use words to maintain the status quo or to think in new ways—which in turn creates the possibility of a new *reality*. It makes a difference if I think of myself as a “girl” or a “woman”... (Kleinman, 2013, p. 22)

Cralley and Ruscher (2005) distinguished that the term “girl” is not inherently sexist, but it does “connote low dominance and high warmth,” invoking stereotypical traits of women (p. 302).

Women in this study often referred to the women on their team as “girls”. While this term has evolved into meaning friends or peers, the definition of the word is still infantile in nature, and use of it is a form of subtle sexism (Kleinman, 2013; Swim, Mallett, & Stangor, 2004).

Interestingly, one participant almost exclusively used the term “girls” correctly to refer to her experiences as a child, but also used it twice in reference to men protecting or injuring “girls” on her co-gendered team. Another participant, who in her interview discussed male athletic superiority, used the word “girl(s)” 103 times, but in contrast used the male equivalent word “boy(s)” zero times. In this research, women’s use of this term perpetuated views of women as less capable athletes and invoked stereotypes that women and men are not on the same level of play and competition in sport. Women in this case contributed to the masculinist underpinnings of sport by their referencing of female athletes as girls.

Further perpetuating the masculinist underpinnings of sport is the overrepresentation of men in leadership positions on sports teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2000; Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). The current research supports that men are overrepresented in leadership positions in the soccer context. In Grand River Soccer, the league studied, the two league organizers are men and almost all of the women identified their team captain as a man. Varpalotai (1995) discovered, in her research of male leadership in ringette, that few women are

critical about the potential effects of only male leadership. This was confirmed in my research, where most women had male team captains and did not identify this as affecting their experiences. One participant noted the leadership on her team was male and while reflecting on whether men and women differ in leadership, she concluded that although the strength of opinions between men and women may differ, that was probably the extent of gender leadership differences. Research shows however, that male and female leaders deal differently with those they are leading, with women more likely than men to use norms of democracy and participative leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Rosener, 1990; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). This suggests that men and women would be different team leaders in a sports context. Research also indicates that female coaches are more involved in passive coaching tasks like sideline coaching or administration (Landers & Fine, 1996), which was seen in my research, where women would take administrative leadership roles, such as e-mailing game reminders. An interesting distinction about how women view their leadership on a team was made by one participant. This participant, who is a team captain, identifies her role more as a team *organizer* than team *captain*. She does not feel it is her place to make comments on how male teammates should play, since she sees them as more skilled than herself. With the knowledge that largely male leadership perpetuates sport as a male-dominated space, it would be beneficial to explore team leadership in more detail, determining how female and male leadership is experienced by women and men in the context of co-gendered sport teams.

In order to continue moving sport away from a masculinist structure, it is important that more women are in leadership positions in sport. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) noted that having women in sports leadership models the value of female sporting ability, whereas not having women in leadership allows people to conclude women have less to contribute to sports.

One participant agreed and stated the importance of soccer progressing towards greater female visibility so that younger women can have female sporting models. This participant also agreed with Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) that women need to be more present in media coverage to continue to show the importance of female athletes. One way that the lack of female captains could be addressed is through the use of incentives. This is supported by Lips and Keener (2007) who identified that high-dominant women were more likely to take leadership positions, when paired with low-dominant men, when incentives were present. If a league offered an incentive, like a small discount off the team or individual playing fee when a team was captained by a woman, this may encourage more women to take leadership roles on their teams, thus changing the structure of the league leadership from almost entirely masculine. Further exploration of this is needed as providing incentives may have unintended consequences especially in regards to equity versus equality as raised by the participants in this study.

## **8.2 Doing or Undoing Gender Through Co-Gendered Sport Participation**

While women found themselves playing in the masculinist structure of co-gendered soccer, and thus sometimes performing gendered behaviours, it was also a space where gender could be undone. Sport has become a context in which athletes can “do” or “undo” gender by performing gender typical or atypical behaviours (Deutsch, 2007). In my research, women used their soccer participation as a way to resist, and undo, gender norms. Some participants stated their confidence in their skills and how they were better than some male players. This is a way of undoing gender by challenging notions of male superiority in sport (Hills & Croston, 2012). Women also resisted notions of what being female meant for how sport “should” be played. For example, while aggression is viewed as a “masculine” trait (Lorber, 1994), in soccer women

wanted to be aggressive to prove their skills to male players. When women took a corner kick, “deked out” (quickly dribbled around) a strong male opponent, or took a shot on net and scored, they felt they were proving their abilities as a female athlete, often surprising male teammates. Ultimately, proving unexpected abilities to male teams empowered women by allowing them to resist gendered notions of sporting ability.

Although women resisted ideas about how they “should” play because of their gender, gender is still performed in co-gendered soccer. By women viewing men as more capable (strong and fast) in soccer, gendered norms about male athletic superiority are reinforced. Women in this study also emphasize the differences between how men and women play soccer by explaining that women are less controlled in soccer play and less smart in their tactical soccer decisions. Participants further performed gender through their hesitancy to admit their own skill. Clark and Paechter (2007) suggested that younger female soccer players were unsure of how to acknowledge their own skills and would then sanction other female players for perceived arrogance. This reinforced a view that truly “feminine” players were humble (Clark & Paechter, 2007). One woman echoed this sentiment by explaining she would feel “cocky” if she made suggestions for how the team should play, feeling that it would seem like she knew better than other teammates. Through her hesitancy to make suggestions for fear of coming across “cocky”, or *too* confident in her abilities, gender was performed by this woman.

Gender ideologies are also reinforced by the way women interact with their female teammates on a co-gendered team. Participants in this study identified a stereotype that women playing sports together are often “catty.” Specifically participants mentioned that they had experienced this verbal and physical aggression from other female players. Women discussed how in soccer, more frequently on their women-only teams, female players will keep an informal



record of perceived negative actions on or off the field, which will influence how they play on the field. For example, if a player was not invited to a social event they may choose to not pass the ball on the field to the player that did not invite them out. Also, if a player was injured by an opponent in a previous game, that player may remember that slight and play more aggressively on the field against that opponent. These examples support Keathley, Himelein, and Srigley's research (2013) which found that females, as described by their parents, were sometimes vengeful players, holding on to a grudge and/or excluding other players on purpose. Participants noted that playing with men seemed to remove some of the tension between female teammates. However, one player mentioned it did not remove tension from experiences with female opponents, as she was injured by a female opponent who did not express sympathy and instead seemed to smile as if to say "take that." During their interviews, women also openly discussed their tendency to be argumentative when receiving playing feedback from female teammates. Moreover, women interpreted being fouled by female players in co-gendered soccer as personal, and were perplexed by this behaviour. Additional research about women's aggression towards other women, including why women interpret aggressive soccer playing more personally from women would be beneficial and aid in understanding the complex ways women perform and resist gender in sport.

Previous research has indicated that female athletes may use their physical presentation as a way to do or undo gender in sports (Hendley & Bieibly, 2012). For example, women could choose to overemphasize stereotypical feminine behaviour, like wearing make-up or having their hair long and styled (Cox & Thompson, 2000; Malcolm, 2003). This would be a form of emphasized femininity, or hegemonic femininity, which is compliant to patriarchal views of what is feminine, like subordination to men (Connell, 1987; Krane, 2001). In the present study,

women often declare their athletic ability through their presentation of self. One participant determined she would undo gender by always using her appearance to portray her athletic ability. This involved intentional choices to not wear short in length shorts, tight shirts, or the colour pink on the field. While undoing gender on the field, this woman also discussed that she chose to conform more to feminine ideals of dress and behaviour off the soccer field. This is similar to the idea that some women actively resist looking “girly” when playing soccer, but that they may choose to embrace “girly” characteristics outside of athletic environments (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; Ross & Shiner, 2008). In contrast, another female soccer player often left her make-up on for her soccer games thus, by Malcolm’s (2003) standard, “overemphasizing” stereotypical feminine behaviour, and thus performing gender. For wearing make-up, this participant was trivialized as a soccer player by a male teammate, consistent with Krane’s (2001) discovery that there is a fine balance between athleticism and hegemonic femininity. For this woman though, her emphasis on femininity, whether conscious or not, was also matched with ways she actively resisted gendered notions. For example, this participant wanted to be played with on the soccer field as an equal by men and had confidence that she was more capable than some men, effectively undoing gender. For this individual, the meaning and intention behind her actions could be important in distinguishing whether her outward appearance is classified as “doing” gender. Similar to research on using leisure as resistance (Shaw, 2001), exploration of the role of intention on doing and undoing gender would be beneficial in understanding whether the benefits of resistance depend on intention.

Women in this study actively undid gender on the field by playing with “masculine” traits and asserting their confidence in their abilities. While some women were confident, others reinforced gendered expectations by viewing men as inherently better athletes and emphasizing

gender differences in soccer play. Furthermore, this research suggests that gender was performed by how women negatively interact with their female teammates. Finally, women use their physical appearance and presentation as a soccer player to both do and undo gender.

### **8.3 Negotiating the Gendered Constraints to Sport Participation**

Doing and undoing gender relies on cultural scripts about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for women and men (Deutsch, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The same ideologies and resulting life experiences also affect a women's ability to participate in leisure and sport. Despite women facing challenges to participate in sport, participants in this study described how they were often able to negotiate gendered constraints in order to participate in soccer.

Aspects of sport may conflict with gender ideologies and prevent women from participating at all, or affect the level to which they are able to participate in sport (Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey, 1993; Samdahl, 2013; Shaw 1994). One constraining ideology is that women should place the needs of their children and families before their own (Shaw, 2001). One participant experienced this as she transitioned into being a mother, feeling that she needed to start taking up more solitary leisure, like running, so that she could be with her family more. The time that she was able to devote to soccer also changed as she began to prioritize the needs of her family. The time women have available for leisure is less than that of men, so time constraints are common for women (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Samdahl, 2013). That being said, women actively negotiate constraints including gender ideologies in order to participate in leisure (Samdahl, 2013). One participant in this study negotiated time constraints by choosing teams that played later at night on week days, and bringing her children with her to soccer games when

they were younger. Co-gendered soccer was the format that allowed this mother to play on nights that were convenient for her, since there were many different nights of the week on which to play. Although this participant's leisure is constrained by gendered ideologies, she negotiated constraints in order to continue participating in sport and soccer.

There are also aspects of trying to maintain a "feminine" identity which constrain on-field soccer experiences. For example, fear of being labelled masculine could prevent female participation in sport (Thomsson, 1999), but in my research it also constrained on-field experiences as women did not want to be labelled butch. Caudwell (2003) noted that in sport, "because masculinity in women has been inextricably annexed to lesbianism, particularly in sport...butch is used to belittle and devalue women" (p. 376). Women often feel pressure to express their heterosexuality by way of appearance and play style (Grundlingh, 2010). For one participant, the concern about being labelled butch was on her mind when she was aggressive during soccer play. For this player, it was negative to be labelled butch and something to avoid, thus affecting on-field soccer experiences.

Additionally, female athletes negotiate tension between playing sport and being feminine by creating multiple identities for different spaces (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Cox & Thompson, 2000). This idea was reflected in how women made sense of the contradictions in their lives and identities by describing desirable *soccer* behaviour and characteristics, and desirable *every-day* behaviour and characteristics. One participant explained this by stating that in soccer it is acceptable to be labelled with less feminine characteristics because in your every-day life, you know you are feminine. Therefore, some women's experiences on the soccer field are constrained by the pressure to be "feminine", while other women take sport as an opportunity to

redefine femininity. This redefining process often involves distinguishing between femininity on and off the field.

As far as constraining experiences, women also identified the prevalence and influence of sexism in co-gendered soccer. Despite discussing clear stories of sexist behaviour or harassment from male teammates, none of the women explicitly labelled behaviour as “harassment” or sexism. Research has shown that many times, women’s experiences included being the target or observer of forms of gender harassment, which is unfavourable behaviour towards individuals based on gender (Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Krauchek & Ranson, 1999). This can include sexist remarks and comments, gender favouritism, and/or negative behaviours. One reason women may not ascribe a label such as harassment to the gender inequities they face is because women are often conflicted between denying that inequities exist and rationalizing why they are there (Hoerber, 2007a). In this research, women did not deny there were gender inequities on their team however, they were quick to rationalize why the gender inequities existed, often pointing to male teammates being more skilled and consequently receiving more opportunities on the soccer field.

One specific experience women had on the soccer field with male teammates that constrained their co-gendered soccer experience was not being passed the soccer ball, specifically from male teammates. Women often attribute this to their gender, much the same as young girls in Hills and Croston’s (2012) study identified that their exclusion in co-gendered sport was due to their gender. Similar to Koca’s (2009) research where female skill development was ignored within co-ed physical education classes, females on the soccer field have fewer opportunities to play and learn when they are excluded during co-gendered soccer play. The exclusionary soccer behaviour could be understood by framing it as “zero-sum behaviour”

because it means that the actions towards one person affect the available actions towards another (Biernat & Vescio, 2002). When a male player passes the ball to another male player that means the ball (a limited resource) cannot be passed to a female player. Even though women did not receive the ball from male players, they did receive compliments from their teammates. Compliments are considered “non-zero-sum” behaviour since the same action can be made towards an unlimited number of people (Biernat & Vescio, 2002). It is important for teammates to realize that, based on the current research, bestowing positive, non-zero-sum behaviours on female teammates, such as compliments, does not compensate for women being overlooked in zero-sum situations, such as being passed the ball.

Women negotiated the constraint of being left out of play by attempting to prove their skills when they did receive the ball. It is a particularly difficult constraint for women to work through because in order to prove their skills, women must be passed the ball, which in turn requires proven skills.

In addition to facing acts of sexism, how women respond to sexism can also affect their soccer experiences. When facing harassment, women in sport may respond with internally focused strategies, such as denial, endurance, or, externally focused strategies, such as physical avoidance, assertion or confrontation, or seeking social support (Fitzgerald, Gold, & Brock, 1990). The participants in this research reacted in a variety of ways to harassment. The most frequent reactions included enduring the situation, detaching by minimizing what was happening, avoiding the perpetrator, and/or confronting the unfair behaviour. One specific, and interesting, way that a participant negotiated sexism on her team was by trying to cover it up. This participant felt embarrassed that she would be treated by a teammate with such overt sexism that she explained her desire to move towards an opponent in order that it was clear she was not

open. Changing from open, able to receive the ball, to covered, not able to receive the ball, was a way this participant actively relabeled her situation in order to cover up the blatant sexism she experienced by a male player (Fitzgerald et al., 1990). Generally, women negotiated the sexism on their teams by either ignoring it, thus still having it affect on-field soccer experiences, or getting away from it, in an attempt to minimize the on-field effects. Research has shown that in addition to influencing on-field sport experiences, harassment could cause women to stop participating in sports (Fasting, Brackenridge, & Walseth, 2002). Although a few women noted their reluctance to continue co-gendered soccer, none of the participants suggested they would completely stop playing soccer, and thus sexism mainly constrained on-field soccer experiences, impacting enjoyment, but not soccer participation.

Team captains were also recognized by women as influential in creating a team dynamic that could encourage negative, or constraining, soccer experiences. Women view good team captains as leaders who will confront problems head on, which helps to create a supportive environment which values opinions from women *and* men. Participants had negative experiences with captains who did not address unfairness, thus allowing team dynamics that negatively impact soccer experiences. Captains have an important role in athlete experiences because, as Andrew (2009) acknowledged, leadership behaviour influences the satisfaction that athletes have in their sporting experiences. The more that coaching behaviour, or team leadership, matches what is preferred by an athlete, the more likely it is that positive experiences will occur (Andrew, 2009). In the current research, one participant preferred a team captain who gave advice for how the team should play, and another wanted a captain who confronts unfairness on a team. Teammates' needs vary and captains must therefore be aware of the individual needs of players and attempt to address them through action. When captains fail to

fulfil the needs of female teammates, they are viewed as contributing to negative soccer experiences such as conflict between players. This suggests the importance of establishing an organizational culture that ensures captains are fair and approachable, which in turn can decrease constraining team dynamics that do not value women's opinions and abilities.

Ultimately, although women were able to work through most constraints that prevented participation, sport experiences were still negatively impacted and thus not optimally beneficial as a result of gendered constraints.

#### **8.4 Motivations to Play Co-Gendered Sport**

In fully examining what the female sport experience is like, it is important to look beyond what can constrain sporting experiences to identify what may encourage or motivate women to participate in co-gendered sport. One aspect of active leisure that makes individuals more likely to follow through with participation is the number of motivators, or reasons to participate, women have. With a greater number of motivators, individuals are more likely to follow through with participation in active leisure (Titze et al., 2005). This may be a reason that women in this study were comfortable enough to play soccer with men. Participants identify many reasons to play soccer, including for physical activity, fun and/or social reasons. Additionally, the participants all identified a long history with soccer playing which may further encourage women to overcome constraints in order to play co-gendered soccer. Sport history as a motivation to participate may not be specific only to co-gendered sports, but rather to any sport with which a participant has a history and therefore identity with, that they want to maintain (Jun & Kyle, 2011). It also suggests that it may be even more challenging for a young-adult or adult to choose to play a new sport, as their motivation may not be strong enough to overcome



constraints. Ensuring that co-gendered sports are fair and competitive and have a positive social atmosphere in which teammates know each other, can help increase motivations for sport participation, and thus create more reasons for women to negotiate constraints and participate.

In addition to history with soccer adding to the number of motivators women have to participate in sport, women also participate in soccer because it is a part of their identity. Women stated that without soccer, they would not know who they are and this is evidence that women's self-definitions have incorporated their leisure participation (Jun & Kyle, 2012). Having a history and identity with a leisure activity can serve as motivation for individuals to overcome constraints and participate in an activity, as they want to maintain their athletic identity (Jun & Kyle, 2011). This can help explain why women who view themselves as "soccer players" will continue to play co-gendered soccer, despite constrained experiences. This is similar to what Jun and Kyle (2012) found; women were more likely to participate in golf, despite constraints, if they identified as a "golfer." There are often desirable traits of a leisure identity, such as the strength of a soccer player, that motivate individuals to participate and allowing them to affirm who they are by what they do (Haggard & Williams, 1992). In short, sport participation can be an important part of a personal identity that encourages women to overcome constraints in order to reaffirm their leisure identity.

Another motivator that encourages participation in co-gendered soccer is that soccer is a potential space of resistance. Some women see their participation in soccer as a way to show that women are capable athletes, thus resisting norms of female inability (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Shaw, 1994; Shaw, 2000). While participants indicated resistance as part of their co-gendered soccer experience, it was unclear at which stage—before, during or after some participation—this acted as a motivator. A few participants indicated that resistance may not

have been a motivation to start or continue participation, but rather a motivation *to do well* when participating. The comments about resistance from this study add to the knowledge that motivation affects leisure satisfaction and leisure participation, which may be why motivation can occur at different stages of the sport experience (Ragheb, & Tate, 1993). Furthermore, motivation to participate can change with time, experience, and context. Women explained that while they did not join soccer to prove that women are capable athletes, they found themselves wanting to do well to model female ability, depending on the attitudes of their teammates. Shaw (2001) noted that an area for future research is whether the benefits of resistance apply without intention. The findings of this research suggest they do. Not all women felt they participated in co-gendered soccer to show men they were capable, but regardless of intention, women expressed feeling empowered when they prove their abilities on the soccer field.

In addition to using sport as a space of ideological resistance, women participate in sport for social reasons (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Harrison & Lynch, 2005; Wood & Danylchuk, 2011; Titze et al., 2005). Keathley et al. (2013) concluded that for women, sport was more important for deepening, rather than making a larger number of, social connections. The women in the present study identified that in their experiences, social connections were often deeper, and more rewarding, in women-only sport. Thus, co-gendered sport may have been more important in broadening social connections. The reason for deeper social connections on women-only teams may have been related to time spent with a team, as women-only teams have team practices and team games, ensuring greater time spent with women-only teams than co-gendered teams. One participant, however, noted that her relationship with a player was stronger in co-gendered soccer than on her women-only team: "... one of the girls I play with on my co-ed team also plays on my women's team, and I talk to her more when we're playing co-ed than when I play

women's." This is in line with research conducted by Stuntz, Sayles, and McDermott (2011) that found women received more support from other women on mixed-sex teams than they did on same-sex teams. This could be explained by women looking for support from other women in discussing their negative sport experiences with male teammates (Fitzgerald et al., 1990). Whether an all-female team has better levels of social interaction and connection than a co-gendered team would be an interesting area for future study that could illuminate further motivations for women to play women-only or co-gendered sport.

Social motivations are further reflected in how and why women began playing co-gendered soccer. For women, an effective recruitment strategy is word-of-mouth (Rowe & Brown, 1994). This is in line with my research which suggests that many women play co-gendered soccer because a friend or acquaintance suggested they join their team. This may be because women use soccer as a way to connect with other women and that in order to play well together, women need to like each other (Keathley et al., 2013). This would make sports with friends more attractive to women, as they can deepen relationships that have already formed. One participant identified that she would have preferred to join a women-only team when returning to soccer, but she first found out about a co-gendered team from a workmate, so she played co-gendered soccer instead. The implications of this for sport organizations is that women will recruit their friends and acquaintances to play on their teams, but that women who do not have a network of sport contacts may have difficulty accessing sport leagues. Leagues should consider how they can connect with other local sport and non-sport organizations to address issues of constraints (Cousens, Barnes, & MacLean, 2012) in order to better advertise to individuals not already in their league, thus promoting diverse sporting opportunities to women and men.

### **8.5 Equity or Equality: What is Fair?**

The women in this study did experience constraining experiences in co-gendered soccer, making it important to explore what the converse fair co-gendered soccer experiences would and do look like. On the theme of equity versus equality, the concept of what is fair in soccer is very complex. Different women expressed different preferences for how they wanted to be treated on the soccer field; some women expected to be treated differently by men and other women wanted to be treated the same as men treat men. This confirmed Hoerber's (2007b) conclusion that there is no unitary definition of what gender equity means to female athletes. While equity may be what many sports are based on, with more skilled players receiving the ball more often, when men and women play sports together, this model does not seem to work (Wachs, 2002). As women feel they are coming onto the field disadvantaged by the assumption they are not capable athletes, they often are not passed the ball even if they are highly skilled. Until women have proven themselves, they often will not receive equitable treatment on the field.

Equality on the other hand, demands that all players, regardless of ability or gender, receive equal playing opportunities in soccer. In this study, the women identified that the principle of equality would help make their soccer experiences seem fairer. According to this model, passing the ball does not require judgement of ability, but rather a willingness to pass to everyone. When discussing their preferences for equitable or equal play, women referred to the right of all players on the field to receive the ball on the field. A few women commented that although some players of both sexes are less-skilled, everyone should pass to each other so that everyone can improve. This agrees with Kahn, Krulewitz, O'Leary, and Lamm's (1980) research, which concluded that women prefer equal, or communal, success, while men prefer

equitable, or competitive and agentic, success. Even in competitive situations, women made more equal allocations to group members than did men (Kahn et al., 1980). The identification of equality as important could be attributed to women placing higher value on fairness and how the people around them are doing in sport (MacLean & Hamm, 2008). Regardless of the reasons women value equality, it was clear that most participants believe that fairness is expressed in equal play on a co-gendered team.

In identifying what it is like to play soccer with male teammates, women described types of male players encountered in co-gendered soccer and reflected on how fair those players were. Neels and Curtner-Smith (2012) typified younger soccer players, and since their typology corresponds to the types of players women described in their interviews, it will be used to discuss women's experiences with male teammates from the current study. The most common types of players that women in this research discussed were MVPs (most valuable players), ball hogs, and chest thumpers (Neels & Curtner-Smith, 2012). Participants in the current research viewed male MVPs favourably because these players are skilled, but they also strive to play fairly with teammates (Neels & Curtner-Smith, 2012). This player type was described by women to be someone who went out of their way to involve women, without it seeming like a favour. Ball hogs on the other hand, were viewed as a negative kind of male player that women encountered on the soccer field. Ball hogs are competitive, well-skilled players who have little concern for fairness and prefer to pass to other skilled ball hogs (Neels & Curtner-Smith, 2012). This is the type of player that women often felt excluded by, as these players did not pass to them on the field. Lastly, the women in this study discussed encountering male and female chest thumpers. These players were not as in control of the ball as ball hogs or MVPs, but they play with a "win at all costs mentality" and often will contest calls made (Neels & Curtner-Smith,

2012). Women had negative experiences with chest thumpers, since their personal ideals of fairness and sportspersonship often clashed with these players' goal of winning no matter what. By way of their stories, women felt that the perceived fairness of male players varies depending on their individual behaviour and the resulting type of player they are.

Another important element of a fair soccer experience is level of competition. With higher levels of competition, the goal of winning becomes stronger (Kreiner-Phillips & Orlick, 1993). This causes sport experiences to be more equitable, because there is more pressure to win, and in order to do so, the team's best players must play the most. This was reflected in a participant's statement that since her team plays in a highly competitive division, she agrees to play midfield (instead of her usual forward position) because the male forwards are more skilled at getting past defenders. It is interesting to note that almost all of the players interviewed had been playing soccer for a long time and had been part of more competitive soccer leagues, yet changed positions when they played co-gendered soccer. Most women did not negatively comment on being in positions on the field that were different than those they had previously played, but rather mentioned they went where they were told to go (most often by male team captains). Having a history with competitive soccer, it is possible that the participants still hold competitive ideals and therefore see the value in better players playing in more central and crucial positions related to scoring and getting more ball time. This may also be why women do not always confront sexism that creates inequality on their team. One woman noted that for her team, equality shifted to equity when her team changed divisions:

It never used to be that way with the team I play with [that they don't pass], and I think this is my fifth year playing with them. They used to be really good when I first started

playing with them, and now that we're in a higher division, it's like it has changed, that they don't pass to us, the girls.

With greater competition comes a corresponding pressure to win and do well as a team. While the results of this study identify that competition influences co-gendered experiences, little supporting research has been found to further verify this. Additional exploration of how the level of competition in co-gendered sport influences female sporting experiences would be beneficial in describing the context of fair experiences as equitable or equal.

### **8.6 Men's Co-Gendered Soccer Experiences**

While the focus of this research was on women's experiences of co-gendered soccer, some identification of male experiences also occurred. Women referred to their views on the differences between female and male soccer players on their teams. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) noted that young boys are more likely to view themselves as skilled athletes, making them display more confidence in their abilities. Women confirmed that the men on their teams had greater confidence than female players, even going so far as to say that male teammates made statements about the men on the team "just being better" than women. One aspect not discussed by women was the possibility of lesser-skilled men being disadvantaged in a similar way to women in co-gendered sport. The idea of lesser-skilled men being disadvantaged aligns with Bryson's (1987) idea that only some men are advantaged by values of hegemonic masculinities, and that other men are excluded from the benefits of hegemonic masculinity.

The current research also has a unique finding regarding the experiences of men on co-gendered soccer teams as they negotiate expectations of play. Women stated that men may sanction men for playing "too equally" with women, which would involve men having bodily

contact, using aggression, or shooting the ball “too hard” at female players. Peterson (2013) found similar sanctions in her study of co-ed softball, where if a female player was hit by a pitch, men would then intentionally hit the ball up the middle of the field, attempting to hit the opponents’ pitcher. Women in the present study described the principle behind these actions as it not being acceptable for men to go too “hard”—or equal—against female opponents. The results of Peterson’s (2013) study agreed with this, as male players were told not to hit a ball up the middle of a field, which requires quick reactions from the pitcher to catch or move out of the way, when a female was pitching because it would be “unfair”. Additionally, in a finding that was not discussed by participants in this study, Peterson (2013) suggested that men felt the need to limit their hitting, thus constraining their experience, when a female pitcher was present, to ensure they did not hit the ball up the middle of the field. Men’s experiences in Peterson’s (2013) study were therefore constrained. Based on the expressed experience of men being sanctioned by other men for equal play with women in the current study, an important area for future study is how men experience co-gendered soccer. Research that includes an exploration into whether male experiences are constrained and/or enhanced by playing with women would add knowledge to the body of literature about co-gendered sport.

### **8.7 League Organization and Rules**

In addition to how women’s experiences were constrained by playing with male teammates and opponents, and how the same may be the case for men, women also expressed dissatisfaction with some of the rules and values of their soccer organization. For example, women felt that the value of fair play within the co-gendered league was not strong enough, resulting in an overemphasis on some teams to win at all costs. Participants also suggested that



the league should reconsider the message that gendered rules send about women's sporting abilities. While most participants negatively viewed and experienced gendered rules, a few participants saw the benefits of gendered rules. This leads to the important discussion of how sport organizations can reduce gender inequality while helping create positive soccer opportunities for most participants. Despite some dissatisfaction, women were content with how the league organizers were present and lead with their personalities. Furthermore, although there are certainly disbenefits to co-gendered leagues, there are overall benefits of having women and men participate in sport together.

Women identified that having a greater sense of fair play, or sportspersonship, would improve their soccer experiences. This value was contrasted with the "win at all costs" mentality that women sometimes encountered on the field. While fair play is often exhibited by individuals who live principles of fairness in their every-day lives (Popescu & Masari, 2011), a fair play team mentality can also be influenced by the organizational culture of the sport league (Schein, 2010). For example, ensuring that teams with low spirit points (a way of ranking how fair a team plays each week) do not play in championship games, may encourage teams to focus not only on winning, but on playing fairly (Siedentop, Hastie, & van der Mars, 2004). An organizational change that was suggested by some participants to increase fair play and decrease team arguments was to have official referees on the field instead of self-refereed games. This belief, however, is contrary to Nlandu's (2009) conclusion that having referees removes the need for individuals to play fairly, and instead makes fair play an externally regulated process. Despite referees not positively influencing fair play, they may ensure that teams do not argue with other teams. My research indicates that arguments with other teams may be more influential in female experiences than actual fair play. Furthermore, it is possible that by

changing league rules to incorporate spirit point ratings linked to championship participation, leagues could externally regulate fair play, which could move to more internally regulated fair play over time (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Previous research has indicated that gendered rules can create a sporting environment where women are viewed as a team weakness (Wachs, 2002), a finding that was confirmed in the present study. Moreover, Wachs (2005) mentioned that gendered rules, while intending to level the playing field, perpetuate stereotypes about women's abilities. For example, in some softball leagues, if a male player is pitched four balls (walked) and a female player follows him in the batting order, he gets to take two bases and sometimes the female player gets to take a base without going up to bat. This is to "punish" teams in an attempt to ensure they do not intentionally walk male players in order to get an "easy out" with a female player (Peterson, 2013). A few women commented on the gendered rules of co-gendered soccer, stating that by creating a minimum number of female players to be on the field, the soccer league suggests that women are not capable athletes. Despite this, women also saw the positive side of gendered rules, viewing them as enhancing some aspects of play, like creating the mindset that women should be protected by male players and then having men enact this on the soccer field. Participants also view gendered rules as ensuring female players have space on the field and cannot be sidelined in order to let more male players on the field. The positive feelings women had about gendered rules could be a result of the rules being a form of benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is "a set of interrelated attitudes towards women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver)" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). Connelly and Heesacker (2012) suggested this can be because although inequality at the structural level is often negative, there

may be some benefits to participants at the personal level. Despite sometimes perceived individual benefits of benevolent sexism, Jost and Kay (2005) concluded that benevolent sexism perpetuates gender inequality. As gender inequality on the soccer field often frustrates women, creating negative soccer experiences, sport organizations should reconsider having gendered soccer rules.

When identifying areas of gender inequality, an important consideration is whether organizational change will help make sporting experiences more equitable. Velija and Malcolm (2009) suggested that participation of women in cricket, a male-dominated sport, would not increase with organizational change, but rather from attitude and ideological change. This is similar to a few participants' view that gender equity needs to be worked out on a team, and that organizational changes will not make experiences more positive. Training could be undertaken by league organizers and staff as well as team captains in order to identify and deal with gender harassment effectively (Fasting, Brackenridge, & Walseth, 2007). There also must be clear consequences for gender harassment, and protection for individuals who identify harassing actions or else individuals will not feel comfortable talking to the league if they feel they can and will be identified by those that are harassing female players (Fasting et al., 2007). By working to inform staff and team leaders about what gender harassment looks like, how it negatively impacts soccer experiences, and how it can be confronted, sport organizations will help create a culture that values all teammates and takes action against sexism.

Other aspects of league organization can also impact the types of experiences women have on co-gendered teams. An aspect of the league that the participants appreciate is the clear presence of league organizers at soccer games. Based on this, it seems the league organizers use transformational, and not transactional, leadership (Peachey & Burton, 2011). In other research

this is demonstrated by the individualized attention that the league organizers give captains and participants and the charisma they have in their interactions with soccer players (Bass, 1990). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on rules and procedures over vision and relationships (Bass, 1990). While transformational leadership is appreciated, women also want a sport organization that has some aspects of transactional leadership, in order to ensure rules are clear and enforced. The personality of the league organizers was also identified by participants as important in creating positive soccer experiences, as they were friendly and open to hearing concerns. Women often commented on their comfort with talking to the league organizers and how everyone is aware of the identity of league organizers. This is similar to Rubin, Munz and Bommer's (2005) idea that agreeableness and positive affect were important aspects of leaders who utilized transformational leadership. By using a model of transformational leadership to organize and run the league, league organizers were visible, appreciated and viewed positively by female members, helping create positive soccer experiences.

Although organizational structure, such as gendered rules, can negatively impact soccer experiences, some research has indicated that there are positive effects for women participating in sports with men, identifying the complex benefits and disbenefits of co-gendered sport. The existence of organizations that provide opportunities for co-gendered sport encourages these positive effects, and without such leagues, the benefits may not exist. For example, men are more likely to view women as capable athletes after participating in sports together (Anderson, 2008). This is confirmed by my research, which suggests that with time, women have seen men change from dismissing to respecting women's abilities. This idea is further in line with contact theory, which suggests that attitude change requires time as the ingroup, in the case of my research, men, must first learn about the outgroup (women) before behavioural change is

possible (Pettigrew, 1998). Change is also more likely to occur after positive experiences encourage relationships to be formed between members of the ingroup and outgroup (Pettigrew, 1998). In contrast, Landers and Fine (1996) found that girls were more likely to view boys as more talented when they played sports together, which can perpetuate ideas of male athletic superiority. Furthermore, Clark and Paechter (2007) suggested that younger girls should be given the opportunity to play female-only sports to encourage skill development and confidence in a variety of on-field positions. If the women in this study had only played co-gendered soccer, it is likely they would not have the same variety of on-field positions that they have experienced. It is also possible that if men and women only ever played sport together, women may be more comfortable asserting their opinions and preferences on and off the field. Wachs (2005) suggested that if sports are only ever segregated, they perpetuate male and female difference which is part of the reason women felt intimidated to come back and play sports with men after time away from co-gendered soccer. For one woman, having only played against male athletes who were two years younger, the differences between men and women were defined making her anxious about playing with men because of their “apparent” advantages. For the women in this study, having co-gendered sport opportunities was appreciated as it opened up diverse sporting formats, leaving space for learning and improvement, but participating in co-gendered sport was also constraining, as they faced gendered beliefs and constraints.

### **8.8 Future Areas for Research**

The present research provides some interesting insights into what co-gendered sport participation is like for women, however, there are also areas that could be further studied in order to provide greater insight into specific aspects of sport participation.

While this research is important in exploring what sport participation is like for individuals over the age of 18, as high-school and college/university aged individuals are typically over-studied age groups (Henderson, Bialeschki, Shaw, & Freysinger, 1996; Knoppers & McDonald, 2010), there are further questions to answer related to age and sport experiences. Relating physical sport experiences, like running or being injured, to aging related processes is an important area of study as it increases knowledge about how sport experiences can be influenced by age. While research examines some body processes on sport participation, like menstruation for young adults (Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005) and menopause for older women (Evenson et al., 2002), there are other age related changes that women discussed as challenges. This often related to injury and changing athletic abilities. Despite the identification of these issues by women, there is scant research exploring how women beyond adolescence and before older adulthood experience their changing bodies and sporting abilities. Participants also had different views on whether soccer is a lifelong sport, which suggests the need to explore how age affects ability to engage in aggressive team sports, like soccer. Future research on how women aged 25 to 50 physically experience team sport would be beneficial in understanding how the body changes with age and the subsequent impact on athletic experiences.

A limitation of the present study is the racial and ethnic homogeneity of participants. Walseth (2006) and Palmer (2009) made interesting discoveries about the conflicts present for Muslim women who want to participate in sport. The women in my study identified themselves as Caucasian and they did not identify the presence of cultural constraints. Cultural constraints may be present for women of different ethnicities. Further research exploring the cultural constraints present for women of varying ethnicities in co-gendered sport would be beneficial in broadening the scope of research on women's experiences of co-gendered soccer. This

knowledge could then be used by sport organizations to create more inclusive leagues that meet the needs of women of varying ethnicities.

Previous research has discovered that women are more likely to withdraw from team sports than men (Lunn, 2010; Moreno-Black & Vallianatos, 2005). My research adds to this knowledge, pointing out that even women who have been playing soccer for most of their lives sometimes stop participating in sport. In this research, temporarily stopping soccer participation was often due to injury or transitioning to a more busy time of life, like university or college. While female sport attrition has been studied (DuRant, Perdergrast, Donner, Seymore, & Gaillard, 1991; Guillet, Sarrazin, Fontayne, & Brustad, 2006; Kirshnit, Ham, & Richards, 1989; Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, & Konttinen, 2013), little attention has been paid to whether individuals resume sport participation later in life. A unique finding of this research is that despite stopping soccer participation during young adulthood, women were motivated to return to soccer after time away. This suggests a need for more longitudinal research on the sporting experiences of women, as attrition at one point in life does not exclude participation in the future. Further exploration regarding motivational factors in the change, and the experience of attrition as positive or negative, may lead to development of strategies to prevent attrition and/or re-engage women who have discontinued sport participation

Another area for future research is how sport is viewed by women beyond adolescence. Research suggests that peers' views, such as if the sport is viewed as "uncool" to participate in, and the gender appropriateness of sport influences sport participation (Koca, 2009; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). If soccer is viewed as more masculine, or "uncool" to participate in, this could help explain why women do not participate or lack confidence in their skills, which was evident in this research. One participant mentioned that she enjoys sport because she sees it as

“cool” to be able to speak about her current athletic accomplishments, instead of reflecting on athletic accomplishments from high school. This contrasts with adolescents’ view of sport as “uncool” (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010) and suggests that views of sport may change with age. Similarly, views of gender appropriateness of sports are dynamic and change over time. Soccer can be labelled as an aggressive sport, whereby opponents are face-to-face and regularly come in contact with one another. Based on Metheny’s (1965) concept of gender appropriate sports, soccer would be viewed as inappropriate for women, but more recent research has indicated that soccer is viewed as a gender-neutral sport and more equally participated in by men and women (Aaron et al., 2002; Hardin & Greer, 2009). Furthermore, the women in this study did not feel that their participation in soccer went against gender norms. Additional research is warranted to explore both what influences sports being viewed as gender-neutral, gender-appropriate, or gender-inappropriate, and how views about sport change with age.

There is also a need for additional research on co-gendered sport in a variety of sport contexts. Much of the existing research on co-gendered sport uses the context of softball to examine sporting experiences (Biernat & Vescio, 2002; Peterson, 2013; Snyder & Ammons, 1993; Wachs, 2002; Wachs, 2005). The current research adds to knowledge of how co-gendered sport is experienced in another context, soccer. While the present research is in line with findings from research on co-gendered softball, this may be because all of the leagues studied have gendered rules. Other sports, like dodgeball or badminton, do not often have gendered rules when men and women play together, and an exploration of whether these sports create more equitable experiences for women would be interesting. Overall, additional research exploring co-gendered sporting experiences in diverse contexts would be beneficial in examining whether co-gendered sports vary in their gender equitability and why they do or do not.



## 9.0 Recommendations

The findings of this research suggest a number of recommendations. First, sport organizations should consider the effect of gendered rules on sport experiences. Secondly, sport organizations should work towards creating teams that are fairly led and consistently provide positive experiences. Lastly, sport organizations should ensure a culture of fairness is clearly communicated to its members.

### 9.1 Consider the Effect of Gendered Rules

Although gendered rules are created to ensure fairness on a team, most participants found these rules constraining. A few women felt that gendered rules could have positive effects, but on the whole women in this study suggested that instead, gendered rules further perpetuate stereotypes about female and male sporting abilities. This suggests that sport organization should strongly consider whether they should utilize gendered rules in co-gendered sport leagues. Despite gendered rules perpetuating stereotypes, women did, however, appreciate the philosophy behind gendered rules, creating fair play for everyone. Participants felt that in place of gendered rules, sport organizations should make changes to the philosophical underpinnings of gendered rules (the fair play philosophy, in the case of this league), to truly address fairness for all players.

Despite some women believing there should be no gendered rules, participants also made specific suggestions for how organizations could improve gendered rules to make them fairer. Fair rules were said to be ones that focused on all players, regardless of gender, having differing abilities. One participant in this study noted that the focus of fair play should shift to all players being aware of all players' abilities: "Yeah, [it's important] just to be aware of the different skill

levels of the players. There are even some guys that are weaker than some [other] male players...just to be aware of your surroundings [is good].” Another woman explained that “there’s actually quite a few guys that girls are better than,” so a statement about only male advantage would not be the full picture of soccer abilities. Participants agreed that statements discussing true fair play should not be written to men about men, but rather to all players about all players. Similarly, one woman said all players need a reminder to play with restraint:

I think that all players should be reminded that everybody has a different skill set. Like I said, there are some guys in co-ed soccer who have never played soccer a day in their life, and there are women who have played for Ontario. I think everybody needs to be reminded that everybody plays at a different level and it is recreational soccer. I don’t think just the men need to be reminded of that, I think everybody needs to be reminded.

This statement highlights the variety of soccer experiences that players on co-gendered teams may have, ranging from no experience to experience at a provincial level. To reflect the diversity in soccer experience that both women and men have, fair play statements should not emphasize gender but rather differences in ability among all players.

While women were quick to offer suggestions about how rules of fair play would be better if offered to all players and about all players, one woman expressed her opinion that gendered rules should not be created at all:

When you try to kind of implant this sense of equality, I don’t think it’s something that can be mandated from above. I think it’s something that has to flow naturally and it will come with time as guys and girls get used to playing with each other.... I think the more that a league would try to intervene to create a sense of equality would be counterproductive, whereas it seems forced instead of chosen.

For this participant, equality was not about play advantages or the rules in a league, but rather ensuring everyone was treated as an equal member on the team. To address issues of inequality in this case, another participant noted: “Maybe if females played on teams, and were experiencing [inequality], they could write it in a suggestion box. ... ‘this team is having issues with these guidelines.’ Maybe that team could then be spoken to.” A sport organization must carefully consider the rules they create. In the case of gendered rules, the intended effect and actual experience of gendered rules should both be weighed in determining if there should be gendered rules, and what the gendered rules will be.

## **9.2 Help Create Positive and Consistent Team Experiences**

A second recommendation for sport organizations is that they are intentional about helping create positive and consistent team experiences for participants. As women identified that the type of sporting experiences they have often depend on who is on their team, it is important that leagues recognize this and encourage positive team dynamics. Women suggested that team experiences are often more positive when teammates know one another. Therefore, to improve team dynamics, a participant suggested that the sport organization encourage team get-togethers. This participant discussed her positive experiences with team get-togethers:

Thankfully, for things like a BBQ after soccer...I can get to know my teammates, which I think is really valuable when you're playing soccer with them. Just knowing what kind of person they are and their values, even with soccer, then you can get to know them as a player better.

By getting to know teammates outside of the context of soccer, players can become more comfortable playing soccer as they know the individuals on their team better. Ultimately,

through helping teammates connect and form positive relationships with one another, sport organization can help encourage positive sporting experiences. This can help organizations retain and recruit participants as sport participants seek positive sporting experiences and avoid negative experiences.

Although it is positive for teammates to know one another, attention also needs to be paid to providing opportunities for new players to join teams. One participant identified that for her, she found “coming onto a new team was even easier than with people I did know because there was no expectation, other than what I had in my own mind.” This means that while it is important that teams get to know each other, it is also important for sport organizations to provide opportunities for new teams to form and new players to get to know one another. This will encourage new players to join existing teams and enable positive team experiences for those new players as well. Sport organizations must also market their services beyond word of mouth, as new community members may not have connections to individuals who play sports. It is recommended that sport organizations market to diverse groups and include information about the various formats the organization offers (women-only, men-only, co-gendered); this will help ensure that the organization continues to attract new participants.

Another recommendation is that sport organizations encourage positive team experiences by being mindful of team leadership. Women in this study were looking for their captains to address unfair behaviour on a team, and failing to do so created less positive soccer experiences, which increased the chance women would leave their team and sport organization. As captains often volunteer to manage a team and then take on the necessary responsibilities, it may be hard for an organization to truly control who is leading a team. One way that an organization could encourage positive leaders is through the use of training. By providing team captains with some

training on the basics of managing a team and the expectations of teammates, team captains could be more aware of the effect they have on individual sport experiences. This training could also discuss sexism, its various forms and impact, and how to recognize and confront it on a team. Empowering team captains with the knowledge and skills to deal with gender issues on their team could help decrease sexism, which also encourages change at an individual and not just organizational level.

Sport organizations should also be conscious of the gender of their leaders. It was observed in this research that most team leaders were men. This leadership included both formal roles, such as team captains, as well as informal leadership, which took place in the form of suggestions for how the team should play. Beyond the team level, organizational leadership was also male. Mainly male leadership can perpetuate stereotypes about women being less capable athletes and leaders, which suggests organizations should put effort into having women in leadership positions. It is recommended that intention be put into implementing strategies that recruit female leaders to the league, for example providing incentives to teams that have female captains.

Overall, as interactions with team members strongly impact female sporting experiences, sport organizations should consider who they are putting in positions of leadership on a team, and whether those individuals are fair and consistent with organizational values.

### **9.3 Create an Organizational Culture of Fairness**

While individual experiences are often impacted by interactions on the team level, sport experiences can also be influenced by the organizational culture. Therefore, it is recommended that sport organizations create an organizational culture of fairness. Women in this study made

some important observations about the importance of organizational culture being consistent and clearly communicated. One aspect of communication that should be considered is the method of communication. As rules are often written, and require each team member to read the rules on their own time, some players may not read the rules. This could impact how the game is played as the rules are important in encouraging a culture of fair play. Ensuring that team captains review relevant rules with their teams could be an additional method of rule communication that could result in a greater culture of fairness. While rule enforcement is not a direct component of organizational culture, it is a reflection of the values an organization holds. Women in this study felt that more positive soccer experiences would also result from rules being more clearly enforced in the league. This would ensure that players who were not playing with a mindset consistent with league values, like fair play, would know there were clear consequences for their behaviour. Outlining the consequences of negative behaviour, and communicating this to the entire league is recommended in further ensuring a culture of fairness.

In addition to clearly communicating and enforcing rules, women expressed their belief that the culture of fair play could be improved within the league. It was noted that competition can create less gender equality, and consequently less positive soccer experiences for women. I recommend therefore, that sport organizations strongly consider the effect that having teams compete against those with a greatly varied skill level has on the perception of a sport organization being fair. Divisional play can be a way that sport leagues ensure that teams compete against similarly skilled teams in order to decrease negative playing experiences. Furthermore, to create a culture of fair play, sport organizations should be aware of how they are measuring and rewarding team and individual success. In fair play, the emphasis is not on winning, but on each team playing their best and being good sports, for example admitting when

you have fouled another player. This value is not reflected, however, in success being mainly equated with winning each game. As sport organizations often provide awards and recognition for individuals who score the most goals, including the statistic leader board, or teams who win the most games, winning becomes the goal of play. This approach may contribute to a culture of “winning at all costs”. To combat this culture, and instead emphasize fair play, sport organizations should consider rewarding teams for fair play, and penalizing teams who do not. For example, excluding teams who are consistently ranked with low spirit points from tournament play could emphasize the importance of fair play over winning.

Women, in the present study, also felt a fair organizational culture was one that valued member feedback. In discussing positive elements of the league, participants identified their appreciation of the culture of approachable management. By having league organizers who came to games to observe and play on teams in the league, women felt the league organizers were invested in ensuring positive soccer experiences. This resulted in women commenting that they would be comfortable approaching the league organizers to comment on improvements or issues with the league. Overall, the presence of visible management in the league led to women wanting to remain engaged in the league and feeling that it had a culture of fairness. Therefore, I recommend that sport organizations have clear and visible management to reflect a culture that values member feedback.

## 10.0 Conclusion

Through my initial research questions, I aimed to explore what co-gendered sport experiences are like for women. Through the seven interviews conducted, I found that co-gendered sport is both constraining and meaningful to women. As co-gendered sport provides women the opportunity to play sports in a different way, and learn through interactions with male teammates, women appreciate the co-gendered format. In contrast, when participating in co-gendered sport women also find themselves being ignored and experiencing sexism. Women found themselves proving their skills as female athletes both to become actively involved on the field and to prove to men that women are capable athletes. Trying to make sense of the negative experiences they have in co-gendered sport, participants both reinforce and resist gendered expectations through the kind of soccer player they become. Participants also discussed what fairness in co-gendered soccer would look like and how organizational decisions, like gendered rules, can further improve or enhance sport experiences. Although co-gendered soccer was a space where women sometimes reproduced dominant gender discourses, it was often described as a place for women to assert their abilities and resist gender ideologies.

This research set out to address gaps in the existing literature. As adolescent sport is an often studied context of female sporting experiences, this research sought to explore what sporting experiences beyond adolescence are like. In doing so, this research expanded knowledge of how women can return to sport after time away in adolescence and early-adulthood and how sport is viewed by individuals over the age of 18. Furthermore, in seeking to explore whether co-gendered sport leagues are appreciated by women, this research found that while appreciated, co-gendered sport experiences have some drawbacks that could be improved



by organizational, and team level, changes. Negative experiences, however, motivated the women to use co-gendered sport as resistance to gendered ideologies.

Despite filling gaps in the literature, this research also leaves some areas to still be explored. Having focused on the experiences of women in this study, there remain gaps in knowledge of how men experience co-gendered sport. The current research suggests that men may have constraining sport experiences with women based on ideologies that men should protect and not be aggressive with women. If and how men experience constrained co-gendered sport experiences would be an interesting area to further explore. There is also the need for more exploration of the gendered sport experiences of women of varying cultural backgrounds and identities. The current research was homogenous in ethnicity, and thus could not add to the discussion of how non-Caucasian women experience sport and co-gendered sport.

As I conclude this research study, it is important for me to reflect on how this research has influenced my roles as a leader and sport participant. As a team captain, I find myself aware that co-gendered sport experiences can become gendered and negatively impact women's soccer experiences. I also find it difficult to be fair in prioritizing what different teammates want from their sport experiences. I question how I can fairly balance winning, which is important to many of my teammates, with gender fairness, which is very important to me. In examining my own experiences as a player and team captain, I admit that while I confront unfairness when it influences me, I sometimes ignore it when it does not influence me and instead influences other women. Since beginning this research and conducting interviews, I have realized that as a woman, and team captain, I need to confront inequality on my team. While I informally address my teammates directly when they make sexist suggestions, such as "all women cover women", I had avoided making statements to the team about gender inequality I have observed. Upon

beginning writing the implications of this research for practice, I decided it was necessary for me to “practice what I preach” and confront the problem of some men passing to men and not to women. I wrote an e-mail to my teammates expressing my concerns and urging us, as a team, to be more concerned about growing as a team than winning by excluding some players, namely women, on the field. I received a few supportive e-mails from my teammates expressing their willingness to change and appreciation of my words. Since addressing this problem, I have noticed marked improvements in passing from men to women, which has illustrated to me the importance of being a team captain that confronts gender inequity on my team. Although still negotiating what it means to be a fair captain and player, having completed this research I feel more aware of the need to make changes in my own life. It is my hope that this research identifies the need for change in co-gendered sport, and inspires athletes, team leaders, and sport organizations to make changes to improve female sporting experiences, ultimately moving sport towards greater gender equality.

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**Appendix A**  
**Female Soccer Participation Interview Guide**

**Introductory comments:** The purpose of this study is to explore women’s experiences of playing co-gendered soccer. Therefore, this interview will focus on what it is like for you to play soccer with men. If there are any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, you can skip them. You may also decide that you do not want to participate at any time.

1. Let’s begin by talking about what your history with soccer has been like.
  - When did you start playing? Did you ever stop playing?
  - What position(s) do you currently play; what position(s) have you played?
  - What kinds of leagues or levels of soccer have you been a part of?
  - How many co-gendered soccer teams have you played on?
  
2. Now, let’s talk about your present soccer participation.
  - Why did you choose to play co-gendered soccer versus women-only?
  - Is there anything about the Grand River Soccer league that particularly attracted you?
  - How many teams do you currently play on?
  - What format are your teams? (indoor, outdoor, 7 v. 7, 11 v. 11, full-field, half-field)
  
3. Thinking about when you are on the field playing, what is it like having male teammates?
  - Do you feel that your male teammates treat you as a capable and equal teammate?
  - Are your experiences different playing with men in indoor versus outdoor soccer?
  - What is it like interacting socially (off-field or on-field) having male teammates?
  - What is it like making team decisions with male teammates?
    - Is your soccer captain male or female?
    - Do you feel comfortable making suggestions for how your team should play or be organized?
  - Overall,
    - Are there any stereotypes you feel you are up against?
    - Do male and female teammates equally interact (for example, during warm ups)?
    - Have your experiences on different teams been different?
  
4. Reflecting on your past and current soccer experiences, what are some of the challenges you have had to overcome in order to play soccer?
  - Are there any unique challenges to playing co-ed soccer?
  - Do these challenges affect your on-field soccer experience?



5. Despite these challenges, you have continued to play co-ed soccer. What is about soccer (or sport) that makes you continue to play despite challenges?
  - Are there specific benefits to co-ed soccer (or sport) you can think of?
  - Are there social benefits (beyond the field)?
6. Are there any parts of the way the Grand River Soccer league is structured that affect your soccer experience? (i.e. rules within the league, league organization, etc.)
7. Thinking about challenges you have had playing soccer or your experiences on your team(s), what suggestions would you have for league organizers to address these aspects and improve your experience?
8. As part of the Grand River Soccer “Fair Play Philosophy” the league writes: “By nature, co-ed sports require that all male participants remember that male players may have a strength and speed advantage over female players.” How do you feel about this statement?
9. Some research has indicated that since sport has been a male dominated domain, women may use participation in sport as a way of resisting norms about what men and women should be like. For example, women participating in rock-climbing have identified that they were motivated to participate because rock-climbing gave them strength allowing them to resist the cultural ideal of a thin and weak body. Do you see your participation in soccer as a way of going against what women are told, or suggested, to be like?
  - Do you feel like participating in soccer goes against what women “should” be like? How so?
  - Is there intention behind your use of sports as resistance?
10. What else about your participation in soccer do you think is important that we have not yet discussed?

Before we end, I also have a few demographic questions for you.

- How old are you now?
- What is your marital status?
- Are you presently employed?
- Do you have children?
- What ethnicity do you consider yourself to be?
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- What kind of work do you do?
- What income bracket best represents your household:
  - i. \$20,000-\$40,000
  - ii. \$40,000-\$60,000

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- iii. \$60,000-\$80,000
- iv. \$80,000-\$100,000
- v. \$100,000 +
- Address for future correspondence

**Appendix B**

**Grand River Soccer- 6 versus 6 Indoor Soccer Rules**



**INDOOR SOCCER  
LEAGUE RULES**

**Last Updated: Oct 7, 2012**

## ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

In order to promote a safe and sportsmanlike environment for its players, GRAND RIVER SOCCER has clarified its stance on unsportsmanlike behaviour. All players must understand the expectations for playing in our leagues. Team Captains are required by GRAND RIVER SOCCER to ask players to leave the game/playing area if they are involved in any of the following acts:

- Swearing directly at another player or the League Coordinator.
- Intentionally pushing, shoving or making physical contact with another player.
- Making comments to instigate an altercation with another player.
- Spitting at an opponent

In addition to being dismissed from the game, a one game suspension (or more) may be assigned by GRAND RIVER SOCCER to the involved player or team.

## FAIR PLAY PHILOSOPHY

### What is the co-ed rec fair play philosophy?

The co-ed recreational soccer league was created in order to offer adults the opportunity to play soccer in a recreational environment, while at the same time offering a great social experience.

By nature, co-ed sports require that all male participants remember that male players may have strength and speed advantage over female players. As well, more skilled players (male or female) must remember to not be aggressive and instead be helpful, respectful and patient as you will be playing with beginners or less-proficient players. This is not a "win at all costs" league.

Our league expects that ALL participants demonstrate safe and fair game play, positive attitudes, team participation and good spirit to teammates and fellow players at ALL times. This will be referred to as playing with the "proper fair play spirit" of co-ed participation.

Please show your fair play spirit!

- 1) RECREATIONAL soccer for FUN and SPIRIT
- 2) Playing soccer for FUN, to LEARN the game, IMPROVE skills and SOCIALIZE with your teammates and other players
- 3) Act as a GOOD SPORT at ALL times
- 4) Be GENEROUS when you win; be GRACEFUL when you lose
- 5) SHARE your knowledge and experience with fellow players
- 6) Have *EVERYONE* on your team participate in the play
- 7) Maintain your SELF-CONTROL at all times and ensure SAFETY for fellow players
- 8) Show RESPECT for your opponents
- 9) Be a TEAM PLAYER not an individual (*even if you signed up by yourself...*)

**We expect all co-ed rec players to obey our fair play philosophy.  
Show your fair play spirit!**



## 1. SPIRIT RATINGS

In order to encourage sportsmanlike play, each team must choose and report a rating for their opponent after the game.

The spirit rating for your opponent gets reported when the Team Captain or designate submits the game results online. If a team captain or designate does not report their score within 72 hours of the games completion, their team will receive a 2 spirit rating (unless their opponent has given them a 1) and the score will be processed as their opponent reported it.

### **Spirit rating = 5**

The other team was a great team and we really enjoyed playing against them. They showed up on time and really showed great spirit throughout the game. During the game they played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were open to discuss the rules. This was one of the best spirited teams we have every played against, we are really looking forward to play against them again.

### **Spirit rating = 4**

The other team was a fun team and we really enjoyed playing against almost all of their players. They showed up on time and showed good spirit throughout the game. During the game they generally played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were receptive to discuss the rules. This is a good spirited team.

### **Spirit rating = 3**

The other team was a fun team and we enjoyed playing against most of their players. They showed up on time and showed decent spirit throughout the game. During the game they generally played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were pretty receptive to discuss the rules. Not a bad team to play against.

### **Spirit rating = 2**

The other team was an OK team and we enjoyed playing against only a few of their players. They showed up late and showed poor spirit throughout the game. During the game they really didn't play by the rules, and really didn't want to learn the rules. The captains should discuss what happened so it doesn't happen again. This wasn't a fun game.

### **Spirit rating = 1**

This wasn't a fun game. We did not enjoy playing against this team. They showed up late and showed horrible spirit throughout the game. During the game they really didn't play by the rules at all, and didn't want to learn the rules. This is the least spirited team we have every played against. Our captain is going to send a report into the league.

The rating should combine "accountability" and "spirit of the game". Accountability is based on how you felt your opponent took responsibility for calling their own fouls. A team that does well on Accountability either: committed few or no fouls so it was not an issue, or committed several fouls but made a genuine attempt to call most of them. Spirit is based on how fun your opponent was. A high rating would be for a team that appeared to have a fun-first, winning second attitude and encouraged themselves and/or their opponent in a positive way.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF PLAYERS**

All players participating in our co-ed leagues are expected to play with respect and a "fun first" attitude. In all Grand River Soccer leagues, there is an emphasis on the players to know the rules and manage their own actions on the field.

Soccer can be an intense and physical sport however, GRAND RIVER SOCCER leagues must be a fun, non-threatening environment.

All players are expected to know the rules and manage their actions on the field.

Players are required to call themselves if they commit violations or penalties. Not calling yourself can be considered poor spirit.

Players should promote fun and safety throughout the game by: calling themselves on fouls; trying to control their



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kicks in front of vulnerable players; talking to their own teammates who are not following the rules.  
Promote spirit throughout the game. Let the opposing Team Captain know if you are enjoying their team, congratulate your opponent on fun and fair play throughout the game.

Players that are concerned about a player on the opposing team are required to talk to their Team Captain so he/she can address the issue with the opposing Team Captain at the appropriate time.

Players are expected to act in a respectful manner if approached by an opposing Team Captain regarding their style of play and to make any requested changes.

Players should be mindful of how hard they kick the ball if an opponent is directly in front of them. This applies to goalies when trying to quickly move the ball to the other team's end.

Players can provide constructive feedback to GRAND RIVER SOCCER as needed through their captains, regarding field conditions, unsportsmanlike play, or helpful comments/suggestions.

## **Positive behaviour includes:**

- o Calling fouls on yourself.
- o Communicating with opposition in a friendly manner.
- o Exhibiting all-around good sportsmanship.
- o Avoiding unnecessary fouls or rough play.
- o Promoting friendly, fun atmosphere.

## **Negative behaviour includes:**

- o Repeated or reckless fouls or rough play.
- o Failure to call fouls on yourself.
- o Making questionable calls on opposition.
- o Arguing calls or non-calls.
- o Attributing vicious motives to opposition.
- o Individuals who exhibit "unsportsmanlike" behaviour.

## **REPORTING SPIRIT CONCERNS**

If during the game you have a concern with the other team, address the issue respectfully with the opposing captain at the appropriate time (during play on the sidelines or at halftime).

If at the end of the game you do not feel that the issue has been resolved, report the details of the issue to GRAND RIVER SOCCER when reporting your scores.



## 2. GAME REQUIREMENTS & ROSTERS

### **For 5v5 leagues: teams will have 4 players on the field plus the goalkeeper.**

Teams are required to have a minimum of 2 women on the field at all times (not including the goalkeeper)  
If a team has less than five (5) players they can play shorthanded  
If a team has less than four (4) players, they will 'default'

### **For 7v7 leagues: teams will have 6 players on the field plus the goalkeeper.**

Teams are required to have a minimum of 3 women on the field at all times (not including the goalkeeper)  
If a team has less than seven (7) players they can play shorthanded  
If a team has less than five (5) players, they will 'default'

To avoid possible 'defaults', each team will be given a ten (10) minute grace period from the scheduled kickoff time to field a team with the minimum requirements as noted above. In the event of a default, a score of 5-0 will be issued and a spirit rating of 1 will be awarded. Teams are encouraged to participate in a friendly scrimmage in the event of a default. (with teams of equal numbers)

Teams can reduce the length of play but both captains must agree on a time before the game starts.

Captains should agree on one timekeeper prior to the start of the game.

There is no additional time added for injuries etc...

To diminish the risk of default games as much as possible. If a team cannot field a team, they are responsible for notifying the league who in turn will contact the opposing captain the day before the game. At that time, it can be discussed whether there are sufficient players interested in playing a practice game, and hopefully one can be arranged. Failure to provide proper notification prior to a default will result in the defaulting team receiving a 1 spirit point rating and a \$50 league fine.

## 3. FACILITY CONSIDERATIONS

GRAND RIVER SOCCER rents the fields on which we play. As tenants, players must respect the standards and rules of each facility.

Consumption of alcohol is not allowed at the fields; players caught violating this by-law are subject to fines from the facility and/or GRAND RIVER SOCCER.

Any player who causes GRAND RIVER SOCCER to receive a complaint regarding a field rented by GRAND RIVER SOCCER will face a \$100 fine and may be ejected from the league.

Teams are expected to clean up after themselves, please do not leave any garbage behind.

Any player who causes GRAND RIVER SOCCER to receive a complaint regarding a facility may be ejected from the league. GRAND RIVER SOCCER asks all players to arrive 15 minutes prior to the game start time. This 15 minutes should be used to change shoes, stretch and any other pre-game preparations.

**NO SPITTING ON THE TURF!**

Players are responsible for property damage.



#### 4. EQUIPMENT & TEAM SHIRTS

NO OUTDOOR CLEATS ARE PERMITTED AT CORE LIFESTYLE COMPLEX. THIS IS A FACILITY RULE.  
Only indoor/turf shoes are permitted at Core Lifestyle Complex.

Outdoor cleats are permitted at Com-Dev Soccer Park.

Solid metallic shoe studs are not permitted to be worn, nor are baseball-type cleats.

Braces and casts of any type must be completely covered with a protective sleeve.

A player cannot wear anything which is dangerous to another player. This includes earrings, hairclips, rings or other jewellery.

Shin guards are mandatory. The player must have them fully covered with socks.

Each team must bring a size 5 soccer ball to each game.

Team jerseys are permitted provided everyone wears jerseys of the same colour. **Each team member should have an alternate shirt colour in case of conflicts.** Home teams are responsible for changing shirts in case of a conflict.

Eg. Team "A" wear blue jerseys and is the home team. Their opponents, Team "B" wear black jerseys. Since the colours are similar, members of Team "A" should have 'white' colour shirts as alternates to avoid confusion. Similarly, if both teams had light colour shirts which are too similar, the home team should have alternates which are dark in colour.

#### 5. LEAGUE SPECIFIC RULES

##### GAME PLAY EXPECTATIONS

Before the game, the Captains will meet to introduce themselves, discuss rules or spirit issues that need to be emphasized.

Team Captain's are the "head referees" and have the FINAL say on any decisions.

Team Captains are to communicate their expectations to each other. At the end of the pre-game meeting Team Captains are required to communicate all information with their players.

Players are required to call themselves if they commit violations or penalties. Not calling yourself will be considered poor spirit.

At halftime, the Team Captains can meet with one another to discuss any issues that arose in the first half. It is the responsibility of each Captain to communicate these issues to their teammates before resuming play.

At any time during a game, if the Team Captain(s) determine that the play is getting dangerous or too intense, they should call a one minute time-out to cool things down and discuss resolutions with each other. Play must have stopped for a time-out to be called.





# WOMEN AND CO-GENDERED SOCCER

At the end of the game, all players must shake hands and Team Captains meet to discuss any issues with the game and confirm the score.

## GAME FORMAT

Arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled game time to allow for warm-up.  
Games consist of two 25-minute halves, with a 5 minute half time.

## START OF PLAY

To decide which team will have the first kick-off, team captains will either flip a coin or do 'rock, paper, scissors'. The winner can decide whether they want to kick-off or choose the end that they would like to start on.

To start the second half, teams will switch sides and the team that did not kick-off in the first half will have the will do so in the second.

After each goal, the team that was scored on will kick-off to re-start the game.

Kick-offs may be put into play only in a forward or backward direction and may not be touched by the kicker again until the ball has been contacted by another player.

## SUBSTITUTIONS

Substituting a goaltender can only occur during a stoppage in play.

Substitutions on all other players can happen at any time as long as the leaving player is on the sidelines before the replacement steps on the field of play. This is very similar to hockey's changing on the fly.

## HANDBALLS

A handball occurs when the ball touches any part of a player's arm from the top of the shoulder to the fingertips (except a goalkeeper within their own crease). See 'Fouls' section for associated repercussions.

Calling a handball:

It is the responsibility of the player who touched the ball with their hand to call 'handball'.  
If an obvious handball occurs and is not called by the violating player, the opposition may stop play by yelling 'handball'. See below under 'Fouls' for consequences.

Unintentional hand balls should not be called. This is generally referred to as "ball to hand" rather than "hand to ball." This typically happens when someone is trying to protect themselves from a shot to the face or other sensitive areas. If an unintentional hand ball occurs in the 18 yard box area and it is called, it is suggested that a corner kick be allowed as an acceptable compromise. If the unintentional hand ball is called outside the 18 yard box, an indirect free kick should be awarded.

If a handball is deemed intentional by a defender in his/her penalty area, a penalty shot should be awarded.

## GOALKEEPER

When a player passes the ball to their goalkeeper, the goalkeeper is not allowed to pick the ball up or use his/her hands on the ball in any way. If this happens, it will be considered a hand ball and the opposing team will be



awarded an indirect free-kick from where it happened.

The goalkeeper can leave the crease to defend his/her goal or retrieve a loose ball. They may not touch the ball with their hands once they have left the crease.

The goalkeeper can leave the crease to play the ball up the field.

The goalkeeper can cross the centre line.

A goalkeeper is allowed to score.

## **BALL OUT OF PLAY**

The ball is out of play when it has wholly crossed the end-line or side-line, whether on the ground or in the air.

A kick-in will take place when the ball crosses the side-line by a player of the team opposite to that of the player who last touched it.

The kicker must not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player. A goal cannot be scored directly from a kick-in.

The defending team must stand at least 5 yards away from the ball until it goes into play.

The ball may be placed one ball length over the line due to obstructions from field partitions etc...

## **CORNER KICKS**

When the ball passes over the end-line and was last touched by a member of the defending team, a member of the offensive team will take a corner-kick.

The ball is placed within a one yard radius from the corner closest to where the ball went out of play.

A goal may be scored from a corner kick.

The defending team must stand at least 5 yards away from the ball until it goes into play.

The kicker is not allowed to play the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

## **GOAL-KICK**

When the ball passes over the end-line and was last touched by a member of the offensive team, a member of the defensive team will take a goal-kick.

The ball must be touched by a player other than the person taking the kick for it to be back in play.

Opposing players must stand a minimum of 5 yards away from where the ball is being kicked from.

A goalkeeper cannot receive the ball into his/her hands from a teammate's goal-kick.



# WOMEN AND CO-GENDERED SOCCER

The kicker cannot play the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

## FREE KICKS

All free-kicks are to be indirect (except penalty kicks).

All indirect free-kicks are to be taken from the point where a foul occurred – see below 'Fouls' section for an explanation. This also applies to when the goalkeeper illegally plays the ball with their hands.

The ball must touch at least 2 players before it can be a goal (the kicker and 1 other, which could include the goalkeeper).

All opposing players (defence) of the team taking the free-kick must be at least five yards away from the ball, except when the ball is being kicked from a point closer than five yards from the goal mouth - in which case the defending players may stand on their end-line.

## PENALTY KICK

A penalty kick will be awarded anytime a foul (major or minor) is committed within the goal crease. It will be taken from the penalty-mark (or two yards from the outer goal crease line) with all other players outside of the penalty-area and at least 5 yards from the penalty mark.

The goalkeeper must stand (without moving his/her feet) on their own end-line, between the goal posts, until the ball is kicked; the kick must go forward and the kicker cannot touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player (goalkeeper).

## MERCY RULE

The game will be called when one team gains a lead of 8 goals. The score will freeze and teams are encouraged to play the rest of the game for fun.

## GAME STOPPAGES

If the ball comes in contact with the netting/roof, the play is stopped and the ball is taken to the sideline closest to where the contact occurred and a kick-in is awarded against the team that last touched the ball.

If the ball comes in contact with the steel wire directly above half, the ball is considered 'LIVE' and play continues on.

## OFFSIDE

There are NO offsides.

## 6. INFRACTIONS & FOULS

Slide tackling is not allowed in any GRAND RIVER SOCCER co-ed leagues. Slide tackling includes any player, including the goalie, who leaves the ground in a feet-forward motion towards the ball or another player. Any sliding is a safety concern for yourself and your opponent and is considered reckless play.

Despite best efforts, the following infractions may occur during a game. If they appear to be **unintentional** and not

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malicious in nature then they should result in an **indirect free-kick**. These infractions include:

- Accidentally tripping an opponent. A minor hold of an opponent.
- Bumping or minor contact with an opponent.
- Yelling at an opponent to distract him/her.
- An unintentional handball: When the player touching the ball gains advantage and the play is not in the goal crease.
- When a goalkeeper touches the ball with their hand after it has been passed to him/her from someone on their own team.

The following would result in a **10 minute major penalty** (the fouling player sits off for ten minutes, but the team is not short-handed). This also results in an indirect free-kick:

- Aggressive contact during the course of normal play (tripping, slide-tackling, pushing off, armbar), that could harm or injure an opponent.
- Unsportsmanlike behaviour: Excessive verbal abuse of your own team or throwing equipment to show displeasure at a play.

The following would result in a **penalty kick**:

- Any major penalty that occurred in the goal crease by a defensive player.
- Any intentional handball in the crease by a defensive player, unless a goal is scored on the play.

The following would result in a **game misconduct**:

- If any player receives (2) two 10 minute major penalties in a game, they will receive a game misconduct.
- Physical contact with an opponent that's violent or dangerous, and is clearly intentional.
- Profanity or verbal abuse directed at another player.
- Striking or attempting to strike an opponent.
- Spitting at an opponent.

In the event of a play that is witnessed by other players and is uncontested, and should result in a **game misconduct** it is the captain's responsibility to ensure that the player leaves the premises immediately before the game is resumed; and supplies the name of the player to the opponent to be reported to GRAND RIVER SOCCER with the Score and Spirit rating.

**If the teams are not in agreement over a play (the play is contested) that could lead to a game misconduct, the captains must decide how to best handle the situation, and the incident must be reported to GRAND RIVER SOCCER for follow- up. At the very least, the player committing the foul should be sent off.**

**Grand River Soccer has implemented "Game Review Hearings" which allow league officials to meet with Captains where low spirit scores or aggressive behaviour was reported. A league convenor will be in attendance at most league sanctioned games.**

## 7. PLAYOFFS

There are no ties in the playoffs.

If the score is tied at the end of regulation time, penalty kicks will be taken.



When penalty kicks are taken, the initial five players will consist of a maximum of three males. Teams will alternate between male and females or vice versa. If all females have shot once, they must shoot a second time. Five players from each team will alternate shots from the penalty-mark at one end of the field (refer to the section on penalty kicks).

At the end of the ten shots (five by each team) if the score is still tied, then penalty-shots will continue with the remaining players on the team (a player is not allowed to take a second shot if there are players on his/her team that have not yet shot).

As soon as one team has a higher score and both teams have taken the same number of shots, that team will be the winner.

## 8. REPORTING SCORES & SPIRIT RATINGS

Team captains or designates are responsible to report the score of their game and the spirit rating of their opponent to GRAND RIVER SOCCER within 72 hours of the games completion.

All scores must be submitted using the online score report form : [Submit Your Score](#)

If for some reason the website is non-functional, please email you scores to: [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com)

If a team captain does not report their score within the 72 hours, their team will receive a 2 sportsmanship rating (unless their opponent has given them a 1) and the score will be processed as their opponent reported it.

## 9. ROSTERS

To encourage fair play spirit and to prevent teams from bringing in 'ringers', all rosters will be locked after February 1, 2013. Captains are required to carry a copy of their final rosters with them in case they are challenged about the eligibility of a player. You may only challenge a players eligibility up until the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the game. Once the 2<sup>nd</sup> half starts, there can be no challenges.

Teams found using ineligible players will receive a spirit rating of 1 and will receive a written warning. A second violation of this rule will deem them ineligible for the playoffs.

If there is a genuine reason for needing to add players, please email the league at [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com) and list the players names and the reason you are adding them after February 1, 2013. You must submit this request 48 hours prior to your next game. The league will review the request and advise you of their decision.

Questions, Suggestions or Concerns ?

Email: [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com)



Appendix C

Grand River Soccer Rules- 11 versus 11 Outdoor Soccer Rules



**OUTDOOR 11v11  
SOCCER LEAGUE  
RULES**

**Last Updated: April 21, 2013**

## ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

In order to promote a safe and sportsmanlike environment for its players, GRAND RIVER SOCCER has clarified its stance on unsportsmanlike behaviour. All players must understand the expectations for playing in our leagues. Team Captains are required by GRAND RIVER SOCCER to ask players to leave the game/playing area if they are involved in any of the following acts:

- Swearing directly at another player or the League Coordinator.
- Intentionally pushing, shoving or making physical contact with another player.
- Making comments to instigate an altercation with another player.
- Spitting at an opponent

In addition to being dismissed from the game, a one game suspension (or more) may be assigned by GRAND RIVER SOCCER to the involved player or team.

## FAIR PLAY PHILOSOPHY

### **What is the co-ed rec fair play philosophy?**

The co-ed recreational soccer league was created in order to offer adults the opportunity to play soccer in a recreational environment, while at the same time offering a great social experience.

By nature, co-ed sports require that all male participants remember that male players may have strength and speed advantages over female players. As well, more skilled players (male or female) must remember to not be aggressive and instead be helpful, respectful and patient as you will be playing with beginners or less-proficient players. This is not a "win at all costs" league.

Our league expects that ALL participants demonstrate safe and fair game play, positive attitudes, team participation and good spirit to teammates and fellow players at ALL times. This will be referred to as playing with the "proper fair play spirit" of co-ed participation.

Please show your fair play spirit!

- 1) RECREATIONAL soccer for FUN and SPIRIT
- 2) Playing soccer for FUN, to LEARN the game, IMPROVE skills and SOCIALIZE with your teammates and other players
- 3) Act as a GOOD SPORT at ALL times
- 4) Be GENEROUS when you win; be GRACEFUL when you lose
- 5) SHARE your knowledge and experience with fellow players
- 6) Have *EVERYONE* on your team participate in the play
- 7) Maintain your SELF-CONTROL at all times and ensure SAFETY for fellow players
- 8) Show RESPECT for your opponents
- 9) Be a TEAM PLAYER not an individual *(even if you signed up by yourself...)*

***We expect all co-ed rec players to obey our fair play philosophy.  
Show your fair play spirit!***



## 1. SPIRIT RATINGS

In order to encourage sportsmanlike play, each team must choose and report a rating for their opponent after the game.

The spirit rating for your opponent gets reported when the Team Captain or designate submits the game results online. If a team captain or designate does not report their score within 72 hours of the games completion, their team will receive a 2 spirit rating (unless their opponent has given them a 1) and the score will be processed as their opponent reported it.

### **Spirit rating = 5**

The other team was a great team and we really enjoyed playing against them. They showed up on time and really showed great spirit throughout the game. During the game they played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were open to discuss the rules. This was one of the best spirited teams we have every played against, we are really looking forward to play against them again.

### **Spirit rating = 4**

The other team was a fun team and we really enjoyed playing against almost all of their players. They showed up on time and showed good spirit throughout the game. During the game they generally played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were receptive to discuss the rules. This is a good spirited team.

### **Spirit rating = 3**

The other team was a fun team and we enjoyed playing against most of their players. They showed up on time and showed decent spirit throughout the game. During the game they generally played by the rules, but if we had a dispute they were pretty receptive to discuss the rules. Not a bad team to play against.

### **Spirit rating = 2**

The other team was an OK team and we enjoyed playing against only a few of their players. They showed up late and showed poor spirit throughout the game. During the game they really didn't play by the rules, and really didn't want to learn the rules. The captains should discuss what happened so it doesn't happen again. This wasn't a fun game.

### **Spirit rating = 1**

This wasn't a fun game. We did not enjoy playing against this team. They showed up late and showed horrible spirit throughout the game. During the game they really didn't play by the rules at all, and didn't want to learn the rules. This is the least spirited team we have every played against. Our captain is going to send a report into the league.

The rating should combine "accountability" and "spirit of the game". Accountability is based on how you felt your opponent took responsibility for calling their own fouls. A team that does well on Accountability either: committed few or no fouls so it was not an issue, or committed several fouls but made a genuine attempt to call most of them. Spirit is based on how fun your opponent was. A high rating would be for a team that appeared to have a fun-first, winning second attitude and encouraged themselves and/or their opponent in a positive way.

## **EXPECTATIONS OF PLAYERS**

All players participating in our co-ed leagues are expected to play with respect and a "fun first" attitude. In Outdoor Soccer, there is an emphasis on the players to know the rules and manage their own actions on the field.

All players participating in our leagues are expected to play with respect for everyone at the field and with a "fun first" attitude. Outdoor Soccer can be an intense and physical sport however, GRAND RIVER SOCCER leagues must be a fun, non-threatening environment.

All players are expected to know the rules and manage their actions on the field.

Players are required to call themselves if they commit violations or penalties. Not calling yourself can be considered poor spirit.





## WOMEN AND CO-GENDERED SOCCER

Players should promote fun and safety throughout the game by: calling themselves on offside's and fouls; trying to control their kicks in front of vulnerable players; talking to their own teammates who are not following the rules. Promote spirit throughout the game. Let the opposing Team Captain know if you are enjoying their team, congratulate your opponent on fun and fair play throughout the game.

Players that are concerned about a player on the opposing team are required to talk to their Team Captain so he/she can address the issue with the opposing Team Captain at the appropriate time.

Players are expected to act in a respectful manner if approached by an opposing Team Captain regarding their style of play and to make any requested changes.

Players should be mindful of how hard they kick the ball if an opponent is directly in front of them. This applies to goalies when trying to quickly move the ball to the other team's end.

Players can provide constructive feedback to GRAND RIVER SOCCER as needed through their captains, regarding field conditions, unsportsmanlike play, or helpful comments/suggestions.

### **Positive behaviour includes:**

- o Calling fouls on yourself.
- o Communicating with opposition in a friendly manner.
- o Exhibiting all-around good sportsmanship.
- o Avoiding unnecessary fouls or rough play.
- o Promoting friendly, fun atmosphere.

### **Negative behaviour includes:**

- o Repeated or reckless fouls or rough play.
- o Failure to call fouls on yourself.
- o Making questionable calls on opposition.
- o Arguing calls or non-calls.
- o Attributing vicious motives to opposition.
- o Individuals exhibit "unsportsmanlike" behaviour.

### **REPORTING SPIRIT CONCERNS**

If during the game you have a concern with the other team, address the issue respectfully with the opposing captain at the appropriate time (during play on the sidelines or at halftime).

If at the end of the game you do not feel that the issue has been resolved, report the details of the issue to GRAND RIVER SOCCER when reporting your scores.



## 2. WEATHER POLICY

Games are played rain or shine.

Games will be stopped if thunder/lightning, severe storms, or other dangerous conditions arise.

**LIGHTNING POLICY:** If thunder is heard within 30 seconds of seeing lightning, games will be postponed. All participants must leave the playing area and seek shelter in a building or an automobile. Never stand under trees, in an open field or under an umbrella. Games will resume 15 minutes after the thunder and lightning have moved away. If thunder and lightning are still present 15 minutes after, the game will be cancelled and the score counts as it was when the game was stopped. At least 30 minutes of game time must have been played in order for the game to count towards the league standings.

If a game is stopped due to inclement weather the score at the time of stoppage will stand.

Games will not be rescheduled. Games that are rained out before they start will be considered a 1-1 draw.

Field cancellations will be announced on the website by 5:00 PM the day of the game. Please check the website before you leave for your game. We will attempt to communicate with Team Captains if cancellations occur.

**It can be very difficult to reschedule games! Don't call games without good reason. Be prepared to play through some poor weather!**

## 3. GAME REQUIREMENTS & ROSTERS

Team will have 10 players on the field plus the goalkeeper.

Teams are required to have a minimum of 4 women on the field at all times (not including the goalkeeper)

If a team has less than eleven (11) players they can play shorthanded

If a team has less than seven (7) players, they will 'default'

To avoid possible 'defaults', each team will be given a ten (10) minute grace period from the scheduled kickoff time to field a team of at least 7 of which 2 must be females. In the event of a default, a score of 8-0 will be issued and a spirit rating of 1 will be awarded. Teams are encouraged to participate in a friendly scrimmage in the event of a default. (with teams of equal numbers)

Teams can reduce the length of play but both captains must agree on a time before the game starts.

Captains should agree on one timekeeper prior to the start of the game.

There is no additional time added for injuries etc...

To diminish the risk of default games as much as possible. If a team cannot field at least 7 players, they are responsible for notifying the league who in turn will contact the opposing captain the day before the game. At that time, it can be discussed whether there are sufficient players interested in playing a practice game, and hopefully one can be arranged. Failure to provide proper notification prior to a default will result in the defaulting team receiving a 1 spirit point rating. A second offence will jeopardize the team's entry in to the league in future seasons.



#### 4. FIELD CONSIDERATIONS

GRAND RIVER SOCCER rents the fields on which we play. As tenants, players must respect the standards and rules of each facility.

Consumption of alcohol is not allowed at the fields; players caught violating this by-law are subject to fines from the City and/or GRAND RIVER SOCCER.

Most fields do not have a port-a-potty or washrooms. Players will not urinate on public property.

Any player who causes GRAND RIVER SOCCER to receive a complaint regarding a field rented by GRAND RIVER SOCCER will face a \$100 fine and may be ejected from the league.

Players are expected to clean up after themselves, please do not leave any garbage behind.

Any player who causes GRAND RIVER SOCCER to receive a complaint regarding a facility may be ejected from the league. Facilities are chosen based on quality and location. Some leagues utilize many facilities; GRAND RIVER SOCCER always tries to ensure a fair distribution of locations throughout the city in each division.

GRAND RIVER SOCCER asks all players to arrive 15 minutes prior to the game start time. This 15 minutes should be used to change shoes, stretch and any other pre-game preparations.

Players are responsible for property damage.

#### 5. EQUIPMENT & TEAM SHIRTS

Solid metallic shoe studs are not permitted to be worn, nor are baseball-type cleats.

Braces and casts of any type must be completely covered with a protective sleeve.

A player cannot wear anything which is dangerous to another player. This includes earrings, hairclips, rings or other jewellery.

Shin guards are mandatory. If wearing shin guards, the player must have them fully covered with socks.

Each team must bring a size 5 soccer ball to each game.

Team jerseys are permitted provided everyone wears jerseys of the same colour. Each team member should have an alternate shirt colour in case of conflicts. Home teams are responsible for changing shirts in case of a conflict.

Eg. Team "A" wear blue jerseys and is the home team. Their opponents, Team "B" wear black jerseys. Since the colours are similar, members of Team "A" should have "white" colour shirts as alternates to avoid confusion. Similarly, if both teams had light colour shirts which are too similar, the home team should have alternates which are dark in colour.



## 6. LEAGUE SPECIFIC RULES

### GAME PLAY EXPECTATIONS

Before the game, the Captains will meet to introduce themselves, discuss rules or spirit issues that need to be emphasized.

Team Captain's are the "head referees" and have the FINAL say on any decisions.

Team Captains are to communicate their expectations to each other. At the end of the pre-game meeting Team Captains are required to communicate all information with their players.

Players are required to call themselves if they commit violations or penalties. Not calling yourself will be considered poor spirit.

At halftime, the Team Captains can meet with one another to discuss any issues that arose in the first half. It is the responsibility of each Captain to communicate these issues to their teammates before resuming play.

At any time during a game, if the Team Captain(s) determine that the play is getting dangerous or too intense, they should call a one minute time-out to cool things down and discuss resolutions with each other. Play must have stopped for a time-out to be called.

At the end of the game, all players must shake hands and Team Captains meet to discuss any issues with the game and confirm the score.

### GAME FORMAT

Arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled game time to allow for warm-up.

Games consist of two 45-minute halves, with a 5 minute half time.

### START OF PLAY

To decide which team will have the first kick-off, team captains will either flip a coin or do 'rock, paper, scissors'. The winner can decide whether they want to kick-off or choose the end that they would like to start on.

To start the second half, teams will switch sides and the team that did not kick-off in the first half will have the will do so in the second.

After each goal, the team that was scored on will kick-off to re-start the game.

Kick-offs may be put into play only in a forward direction and may not be touched by the kicker again until the ball has been contacted by another player.

### SUBSTITUTIONS

Substituting a goaltender can only occur during a stoppage in play.

Substitutions on all other players can happen at any time as long as the leaving player is on the sidelines before the replacement steps on the field of play. This is very similar to hockey's changing on the fly.



## HANDBALLS

A handball occurs when the ball touches any part of a player's arm from the top of the shoulder to the fingertips (except a goalkeeper within their own crease). See 'Fouls' section for associated repercussions.

Calling a handball:

It is the responsibility of the player who touched the ball with their hand to call 'handball'.  
If an obvious handball occurs and is not called by the violating player, the opposition may stop play by yelling 'handball'. See below under 'Fouls' for consequences.

Unintentional hand balls should not be called. This is generally referred to as "ball to hand" rather than "hand to ball." This typically happens when someone is trying to protect themselves from a shot to the face or other sensitive areas. If an unintentional hand ball occurs in the 18 yard box area and it is called, it is suggested that a corner kick be allowed as an acceptable compromise. If the unintentional hand ball is called outside the 18 yard box, an indirect free kick should be awarded.

If a handball is deemed intentional by a defender in his/her 18 yard box, a penalty shot should be awarded.

## GOALKEEPER

When a player passes or throws the ball to their goalkeeper, the goalkeeper is not allowed to pick the ball up or use his/her hands on the ball in any way. If this happens, it will be considered a hand ball and the opposing team will be awarded an indirect free-kick from where it happened.

The goalkeeper can leave the crease to defend his/her goal or retrieve a loose ball. They may not touch the ball with their hands once they have left the crease.

The goalkeeper can leave the crease to play the ball up the field.

The goalkeeper can cross the centre line.

A goalkeeper is allowed to score.

## BALL OUT OF PLAY

The ball is out of play when it has wholly crossed the end-line or side-line, whether on the ground or in the air.

A throw-in will take place when the ball crosses the side-line by a player of the team opposite to that of the player who last touched it.

Throw-ins must be done by both hands, with both feet on the ground and from behind the head.

The thrower must not play the ball again until it has been touched by another player. A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in.

*If an illegal throw-in is made, the player who made the incorrect throw-in should be informed of the problem and asked to repeat the throw. They will be given one additional attempt only to correct their throw-in.*



## **CORNER KICKS**

When the ball passes over the end-line and was last touched by a member of the defending team, a member of the offensive team will take a corner-kick.

The ball is placed within a one yard radius from the corner closest to where the ball went out of play.

A goal may be scored from a corner kick.

The defending team must stand at least ten yards away from the ball until it goes into play.

The kicker is not allowed to play the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

## **GOAL-KICK**

When the ball passes over the end-line and was last touched by a member of the offensive team, a member of the defensive team will take a goal-kick.

The ball must be touched by a player other than the person taking the kick for it to be back in play.

Opposing players must stand a minimum of 10 yards away from where the ball is being kicked from.

A goalkeeper cannot receive the ball into his/her hands from a teammate's goal-kick.

The kicker cannot play the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

## **FREE KICKS**

All free-kicks are to be indirect (except penalty kicks).

All indirect free-kicks are to be taken from the point where a foul occurred – see below 'Fouls' section for an explanation. This also applies to when the goalkeeper illegally plays the ball with their hands.

The ball must touch at least 2 players before it can be a goal (the kicker and 1 other, which could include the goalkeeper).

All opposing players (defence) of the team taking the free-kick must be at least ten yards away from the ball, except when the ball is being kicked from a point closer than ten yards from the goal mouth - in which case the defending players may stand on their end-line.

## **PENALTY KICK**

A penalty kick will be awarded anytime a foul (major or minor) is committed within the goal crease. It will be taken from the penalty-mark (twelve yards from the centre of the goal mouth) with all other players outside of the penalty-area and at least ten yards from the penalty mark.

The goalkeeper must stand (without moving his/her feet) on their own end-line, between the goal posts, until the ball is kicked; the kick must go forward and the kicker cannot touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player (goalkeeper).



## MERCY RULE

The game will be called when one team gains a lead of 8 goals. The score will freeze and teams are encouraged to play the rest of the game for fun.

## OFFSIDE

No Offside rule exists. Please don't cherry pick! This could adversely affect your spirit score.

## 7. INFRACTIONS & FOULS

**Slide tackling is not allowed in any GRAND RIVER SOCCER co-ed leagues.** Slide tackling includes any player, including the goalie, who leaves the ground in a feet-forward motion towards the ball or another player. Any sliding is a safety concern for yourself and your opponent and is considered reckless play.

Despite best efforts, the following infractions may occur during a game. If they appear to be **unintentional** and not malicious in nature then they should result in an **indirect free-kick**. These infractions include:

- Accidentally tripping an opponent. A minor hold of an opponent.
- Bumping or minor contact with an opponent.
- Yelling at an opponent to distract him/her.
- An unintentional handball: When the player touching the ball gains advantage and the play is not in the goal crease.
- When a goalkeeper touches the ball with their hand after it has been passed or thrown to him/her from someone on their own team.

The following would result in a **10 minute major penalty** (the fouling player sits off for ten minutes, but the team is not short-handed). This also results in an indirect free-kick:

- Aggressive contact during the course of normal play (tripping, slide-tackling, pushing off, armbar), that could harm or injure an opponent.
- Unsportsmanlike behaviour: Excessive verbal abuse of your own team or throwing equipment to show displeasure at a play.

The following would result in a **penalty kick**:

- Any major penalty that occurred in the goal crease by a defensive player.
- Any intentional handball in the crease by a defensive player, unless a goal is scored on the play.

The following would result in a **game misconduct**:

- If any player receives (2) two 10 minute major penalties in a game, they will receive a game misconduct.
- Physical contact with an opponent that's violent or dangerous, and is clearly intentional.
- Profanity or verbal abuse directed at another player.
- Striking or attempting to strike an opponent.
- Spitting at an opponent.



# WOMEN AND CO-GENDERED SOCCER

In the event of a play that is witnessed by other players and is uncontested, and should result in a **game misconduct** it is the captain's responsibility to ensure that the player leaves the premises immediately before the game is resumed; and supplies the name of the player to the opponent to be reported to GRAND RIVER SOCCER with the Score and Spirit rating.

**If the teams are not in agreement over a play (the play is contested) that could lead to a game misconduct, the captains must decide how to best handle the situation, and the incident must be reported to GRAND RIVER SOCCER for follow-up. At the very least, the player committing the foul should be sent off.**

## 8. PLAYOFFS

The teams with the best spirit rating are guaranteed playoff games. Thirty-two (32) are guaranteed a spot of Fridays and twelve (12) teams on Tuesdays. The other teams may be entered into the playoffs, but this is solely the decision of the league coordinators and is not guaranteed.

There are no ties in the playoffs.

If the score is tied at the end of regulation time, penalty kicks will be taken.

When penalty kicks are taken, the initial five players will consist of a maximum of three males. Teams will alternate between male and females or vice versa. If all females have shot once, they must shoot a second time. Five players from each team will alternate shots from the penalty-mark at one end of the field (refer to the section on penalty kicks).

At the end of the ten shots (five by each team) if the score is still tied, then penalty-shots will continue with the remaining players on the team (a player is not allowed to take a second shot if there are players on his/her team that have not yet shot).

As soon as one team has a higher score and both teams have taken the same number of shots, that team will be the winner.

## 9. REPORTING SCORES & SPIRIT RATINGS

Team captains or designates are responsible to report the score of their game and the spirit rating of their opponent to GRAND RIVER SOCCER within 72 hours of the games completion.

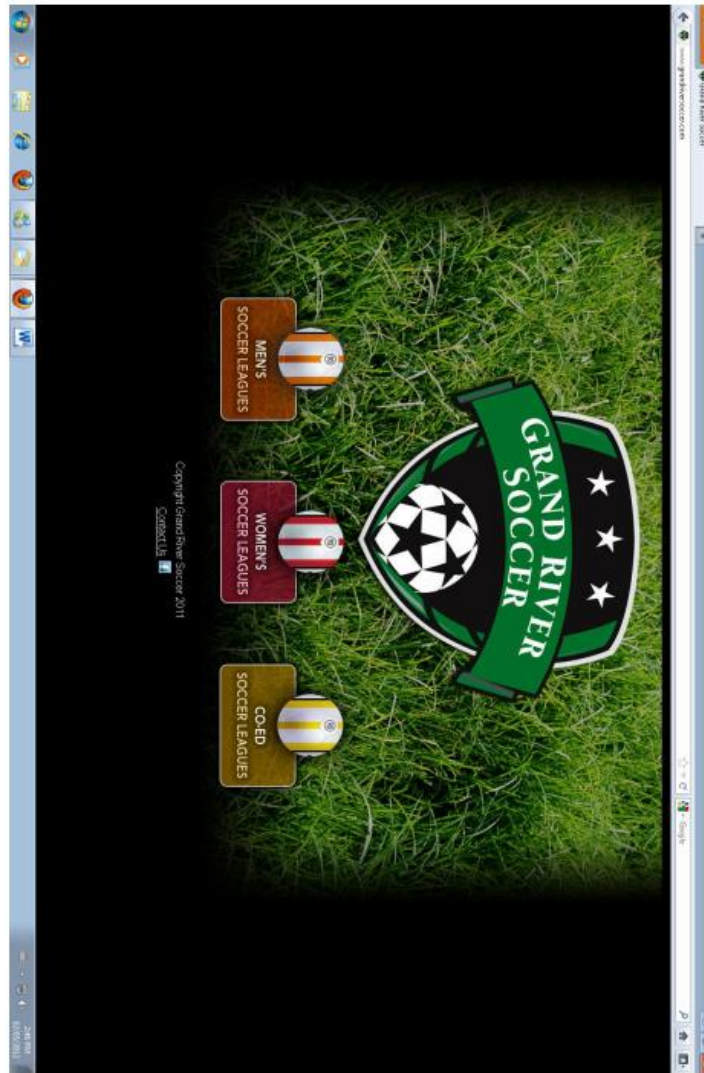
All scores must be submitted using the online score report form : [Submit Your Score](#)

If for some reason the website is non-functional, please email you scores to: [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com)

If a team captain does not report their score within the 72 hours, their team will receive a 2 sportsmanship rating (unless their opponent has given them a 1) and the score will be processed as their opponent reported it.



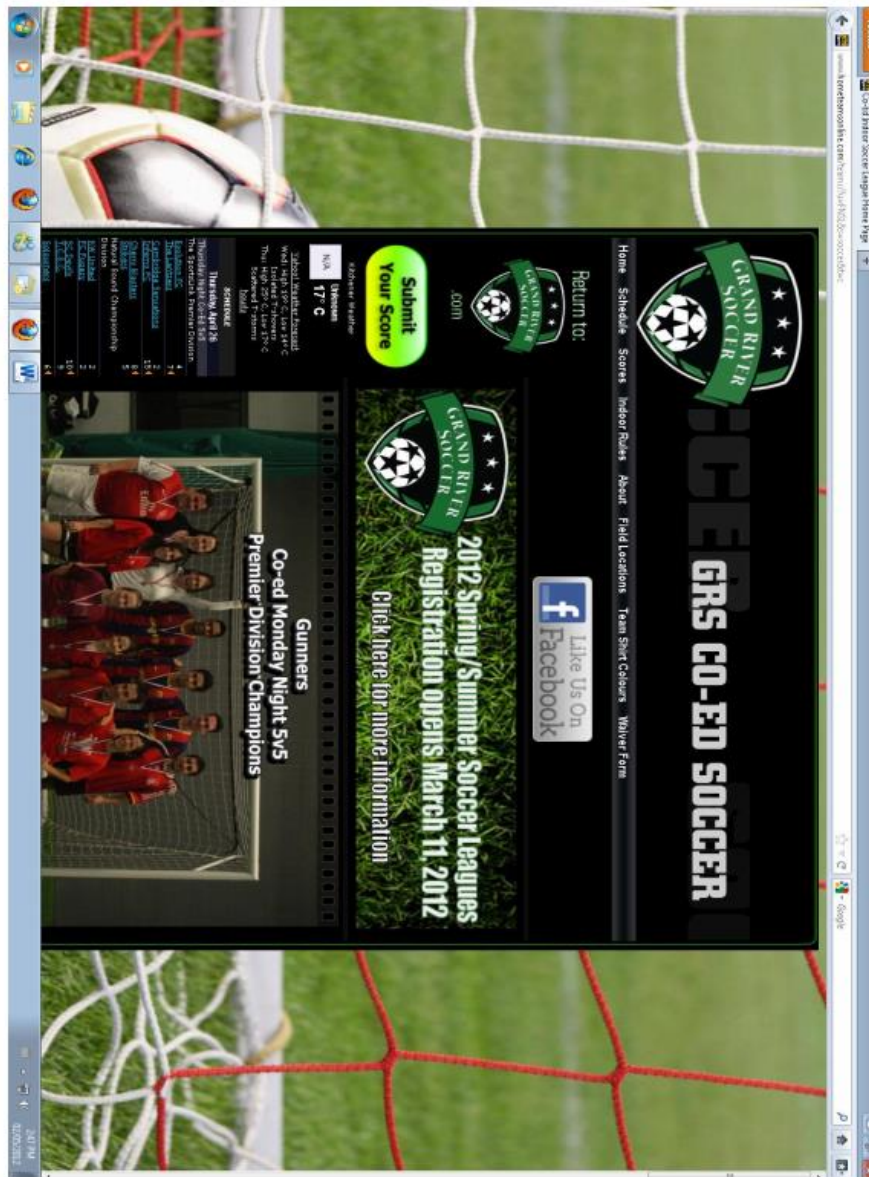




1. Select the appropriate Soccer League. For this example, we'll use the CO-ED SOCCER LEAGUES

12





2. Click on the BRIGHT yellow button that says: “SUBMIT YOUR SCORE”

13



The screenshot displays a web browser window with a form titled "GRS Co-Ed Indoor Soccer Game Report". The browser's address bar shows the URL: "www.heredon.com/Forms/Default.aspx?Page=1&PageID=1&PageName=GRS%20Co-Ed%20Indoor%20Soccer%20Game%20Report". The form includes several input fields and dropdown menus:

- Your Name \***: Text input field.
- Your Email Address \***: Text input field.
- Date of Game \***: Date picker (MM / DD / YYYY).
- Your Team Name \***: Text input field.
- Opponent Name \***: Text input field.
- Score being \***: Text input field.
- Your Goals/assists \***: Text input field.
- Your Score \***: Dropdown menu.
- Opponent Score \***: Dropdown menu.
- Submit Your Score**: A prominent blue button.
- Comments / Other Report:** A text area for additional information.

At the top of the page, there is a navigation menu with links: Home, Schedule, Scores, Indoor Rules, About, Field Locations, Team Shirt Colours, and Wolver Form. A "SCORE SUBMISSIONS" section is also visible.

3. Submit Your Score ! It's that Easy !



**10. ROSTERS**

To encourage fair play spirit and to prevent teams from bringing in 'ringers', all rosters will be locked after Week 10. Captains are required to carry a copy of their final rosters with them in case they are challenged about the eligibility of a player. You may only challenge a player's eligibility up until the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the game. Once the 2<sup>nd</sup> half starts, there can be no challenges.

Teams found using ineligible players will receive a spirit rating of 1 and will receive a written warning. A second violation of this rule may deem them ineligible for the playoffs.

If there is a genuine reason for needing to add players, please email the league at [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com) and list the players names and the reason you are adding them after Week 10. You must submit this request 48 hours prior to your next game. The league will review the request and advise you of their decision.

Questions, Suggestions or Concerns ?

Email: [info@grandriversoccer.com](mailto:info@grandriversoccer.com)



**11. LEAGUE CONTACT INFORMATION**

General Information

Website	www.grandriversoccer.com
E-mail	info@grandriversoccer.com
Fax	(519) 621-1091

Administrators

League President	Louie Antoniou	<a href="mailto:louie@grandriversoccer.com">louie@grandriversoccer.com</a> Mobile: (519) 577-4474
League Convenor	Sultan Qamar	<a href="mailto:sultan@grandriversoccer.com">sultan@grandriversoccer.com</a> Mobile: (519) 841-6858
Office Administrator	Christina Holst	<a href="mailto:Christina@grandriversoccer.com">Christina@grandriversoccer.com</a>

Field Closure Websites

City of Kitchener	<a href="http://app.kitchener.ca/sportsfields/es_spfields.aspx">http://app.kitchener.ca/sportsfields/es_spfields.aspx</a>
City of Waterloo	<a href="http://www.waterloo.ca/en/living/fieldsandballdiamonds.asp">http://www.waterloo.ca/en/living/fieldsandballdiamonds.asp</a>
City of Cambridge	<a href="http://www.cambridge.ca/community_services/sportsfield_closures">http://www.cambridge.ca/community_services/sportsfield_closures</a>



## Appendix D Gatekeeper Consent Form



University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1  
519-888-4567 | ahs.uwaterloo.ca

November 6, 2012

Dear Grand River Soccer:

This letter is a request for Grand River Soccer's assistance with a project I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry. The title of my research project is "Playing the Game: How Women Experience Co-gender Soccer". I would like to provide you with more information about this project that explores what the soccer experience is like for women who play soccer with men.

The purpose of this study is to explore women's experiences playing co-gendered soccer. Knowledge and information generated from this study may help soccer or other sports leagues plan opportunities for women that provide optimal benefits to participants.

It is my hope to connect with women who are engaged in the programs of Grand River Soccer to invite them to participate in this research project. I believe that the participants of your program have unique understandings and stories relating to gender, leisure experiences and soccer. During the course of this study, I will be conducting interviews with female participants to gather their stories of gendered soccer experiences. At the end of this study the publication of this thesis will share the knowledge from this study with other leisure researchers, leisure programmers, and community members.

To respect the privacy and rights of Grand River Soccer and its participants, I will not be contacting the female participants directly. What I intend to do, is provide Grand River Soccer with information flyers to be distributed via e-mail and in the building of their indoor soccer leagues, at their discretion. Contact information for me and my advisor will be contained on the flyers. If a player is interested in participating they will be invited to contact me, Faith-Anne Wagler, to discuss participation in this study in further detail.

Participation of any player is completely voluntary. Each player will make their own independent decision as to whether or not they would like to be involved. All participants will be informed and reminded of their rights to participate or withdraw before any interview, or at any time in the study. Participants will receive an information letter including detailed information about this study, as well as informed consent forms.

To support the findings of this study, quotations and excerpts from the stories will be used labeled with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Names of participants will not appear in the thesis or reports resulting from this study. Participants will not be identifiable, and only described by level of experience and stories shared. If Grand River Soccer wishes the identity of the organization to remain confidential, a pseudonym will be given to the organization. All paper field notes collected will be retained locked in my office and in a secure cabinet in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. All paper notes will be confidentially destroyed after three years. Further, all electronic data will be stored indefinitely on a CD with no personal identifiers. Finally, only myself and my advisor, Dr. Diana Parry, in the



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519-888-4567 | [ahs.uwaterloo.ca](http://ahs.uwaterloo.ca)

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo will have access to these materials. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation belongs to Grand River Soccer, and its female players. If you have any comments or concerns with this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

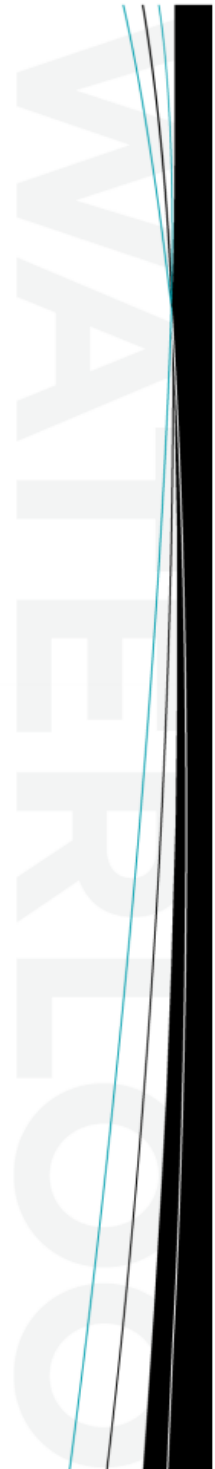
If you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at [fwagler@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:fwagler@uwaterloo.ca). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Diana Parry at 519-888-4567 ext. 33468 or email [dcparry@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dcparry@uwaterloo.ca).

I hope that the results of my study will be beneficial to Grand River Soccer, to your female participants, and to co-gender soccer leagues across Canada, as well as the broader research community. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project. In appreciation of your assistance, I will give you a report of my findings in order that you may use the information to understand how female players experience Grand River Soccer.

Yours sincerely,

Faith-Anne Wagler  
Master's Candidate  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Diana Parry, PhD  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo



**Organization Permission Form**

We have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Faith-Anne Wagler of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, under the supervision of Dr. Diana Parry at the University of Waterloo. We have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to our questions, and any additional details we wanted.

We are aware that the name of our organization will only be used in the thesis or any publications that comes from the research with our permission.

We were informed that this organization may withdraw from assistance with the project at any time. We were informed that study participants may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

We have been informed this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo and that questions we have about the study may be directed to Faith-Anne Wagler at 519-570-4437 or by email fwagler@uwaterloo.ca and Dr. Diana Parry at 519-888-4567 ext. 33468 or by email dcparry@uwaterloo.ca.

We were informed that if we have any comments or concerns with in this study, we may also contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005.

Faith-Anne Wagler  
Master's Candidate  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

Diana Parry  
Associate Professor  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo

We agree to help the researchers recruit participants for this study from among the families who are users of the program and services of the **Grand River Soccer**.

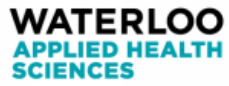
YES  NO

We agree to the use of the name of Grand River Soccer in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

If NO, a pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the organization.





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519-888-4567 | ahs.uwaterloo.ca

Director Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

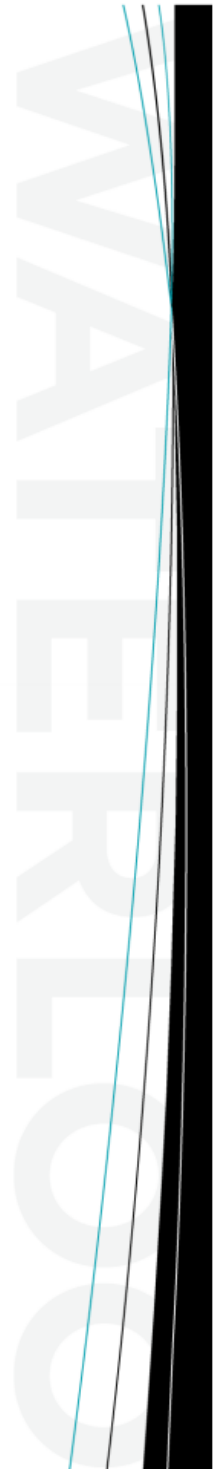
Board of Directors Representative Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Board of Directors Representative Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix E**  
**Recruitment E-Mail**

Hello,

My name is Faith-Anne Wagler and I'm from the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am looking for participants for research on female sport participation. More specifically, I am looking for female volunteers to take part in a study of how women experience co-gendered sport. I have been given your contact information by Grand River Soccer, who has indicated you might be interested in participating in this study.

Participants should be over the age of 18, female, and have experience playing on co-ed soccer teams.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: *answer questions in an interview about what it is like to play sports with men.*

Your participation would involve 1 session, which is approximately 60 minutes, and will be held at the University of Waterloo.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$10 Tim Horton's gift card.

For more information about this study, please read the attached information letter. To volunteer for this study and to set up a time to meet, please contact:

*Faith-Anne Wagler*  
*Recreation and Leisure Studies*  
at  
E-mail: [fwagler@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:fwagler@uwaterloo.ca)

**This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo.**

**Appendix F**  
**Information and Consent Letter**



University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1  
519-888-4567 | ahs.uwaterloo.ca

July 31, 2012

Dear Grand River Soccer Member:

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Diana Parry. I am looking for female participants, over the age of 18 who have played soccer on at least one co-ed soccer team. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Historically, sports have been male dominated, but over the last decade an increasing number of women have been participating in sports. Research suggests that soccer is a sport that is played almost equally by women and men. While there is much research on the experiences of adolescents in sports, knowledge about how women over the age of 18 experience sport is relatively limited. In particular, there is very little research on women's experiences playing co-gender soccer, despite the popularity of this organizational format. Additional research is needed to understand what participation in this sport context is like for women. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore women's experiences playing co-gender soccer.

This study will focus on what it is like for women to play soccer with men. How and if women participate in co-gender soccer is influenced by their unique history and experiences. As you are a participant in a co-gender soccer league that is governed by a unique set of rules, your experiences in this league would provide valuable insight into the female sporting experience. Therefore, I would like to include you as a participant in my study. Given your experience as a player on a co-gender soccer team I would like to know what it is like to play soccer with men, what challenges are involved in playing soccer with male team mates, and what the benefits of co-ed soccer are.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 3 years in a locked office in my supervisor's office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive a \$10 Tim Horton's gift card. The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes.



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519-888-4567 | ahs.uwaterloo.ca

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at [fwagler@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:fwagler@uwaterloo.ca). You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Diana Parry at 519-888-4567 ext. 33468 or email [dcparry@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dcparry@uwaterloo.ca).

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or [maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca).

I hope that the results of my study will be of benefit to those organizations directly involved in the study, other voluntary recreation organizations not directly involved in the study, as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Faith-Anne Wagler

---

### CONSENT FORM

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

---

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Faith-Anne Wagler of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo and supervised by Professor Diana Parry. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure



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an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES  NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES  NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES  NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

