

“GIRLS JUST AREN’T INTERESTED”: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INTEREST IN GIRLS’ SPORT

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ABSTRACT: *Given the significant increase in the number of women and girls participating in sport, it is now a commonly held belief that girls have ample opportunities to participate in sport and, consequently, that girls who do not participate choose to do so because they simply lack interest in sport. Using qualitative methodologies and the sociology of accounts, the author examines a recreational sport program for low-income minority girls in the metropolitan Los Angeles area. Applying Giddens’s theory of structuration to emergent themes from participant observations and interviews, the findings illustrate how structures, as they are embodied through the everyday interactions of their participants, simultaneously constrain certain forms of agency while enabling other forms. This study advances sociology’s disciplinary understanding of social construction by illustrating how social structure and cultural discourses interact in shaping everyday social interactions.*

Keywords: structure and agency; sport; adolescent girls; social construction; gender

“Girls just aren’t interested in sport.”

—Coach Andre, Centerville Girls Play Los Angeles (GPLA)

A dominant American ideology posits that creating new structures of opportunity or expanding existing structures, such that they are inclusive of minorities, will increase the number of unrepresented groups in those structures. This ideology, frequently reproduced in girls’ sport (Cooky and McDonald 2005; Shakib and Dunbar 2002), echoes the tenets of liberal political philosophy. However, increased structures of opportunity do not necessarily lead to an increased acceptance of minorities among dominant groups (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Messner 2002). Where this strategy fails is in its inability to alter persisting sexist and/or racist ideologies that often serve to legitimate institutional discrimination (Bonilla-Silva 2003).

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Sport has been, and continues to be, a contested terrain wherein real and symbolic boundaries have been drawn to limit access for racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and other disadvantaged members of society (Dworkin and Messner 2002). Historically, girls and women have encountered resistance to their participation (Cahn 1994; Hargreaves 1994). Resistance against women's presence in sport continues today as a result of sport's historical foundation to teach boys and men hegemonic masculinity during a time when their lives were becoming increasingly "feminized"—an outcome of the dramatic changes in work, family, and leisure during the twentieth century (Burstyn 1999). For example, in their research on male and female high school sport participation, Shakib and Dunbar (2002) found that high school students viewed girls' basketball as "less than" boys' basketball and that girls' basketball had lower social value, even though the girls' team ranked higher than the boys' team at this particular high school. Based on these findings, the authors rightfully question the potential for girls' sport participation to challenge the gender order (Shakib and Dunbar 2002).

As a result of the significant increase in the number of women and girls participating in sports over the past thirty-six years, it is now a commonly held belief that girls and women have ample opportunities to participate in sport and, consequently, that girls and women who do not participate choose to do so because they simply lack interest in sport. While statistics demonstrate that girls are participating in sport in greater numbers than ever before (Carpenter and Acosta 2005), there are still many girls who do not participate because of limited opportunities, structural barriers, and gender ideologies (Messner 2002). As Messner (2002:xx) argues, despite the growth of women's sports in recent years, there remains a "contested, but still powerful 'center' of sport." This sport center continues to be constructed by and for men (Messner 2002). In this article, I argue that in order to assess the degree to which structures of opportunity have impacted gender equality, researchers must not simply consider the inclusion of girls and women into the structure of sport but must more importantly consider *how* women and girls are included in those structures.

Girls' participation in the institution of sport is of significant concern for sociologists, feminists, educators, and girl advocacy groups, such as Girls Inc. and Girl Scouts of America. This is because girls' sport participation is linked to positive social outcomes—for example, improved academic performance and self-esteem. Sport can also empower girls. Indeed, youth sport groups such as the Afghan Youth Sport Exchange encourage Afghani girls to play sport in order to empower their lives and to challenge the oppressive gender proscriptions of the Taliban regime. Moreover, in the United States, the naturalization of gender difference has historically served as a justification for gendered inequality in access and opportunity (Hargreaves 1994). Sport, as a bodily performance, is one of the few remaining social institutions in our society where the ostensibly natural differences between men and women are reproduced (Dowling 2000). Thus, girls' and women's participation in sport can potentially be empowering because it challenges the very foundations upon which gender inequality is based (Messner 2002). An understanding of the social structure of sport, and the social processes that occur in that social institution with respect to girls' participation, has implications not only for

those who study sport but also for sociologists concerned with social equality and social change, for feminists concerned with gender equality, and for educators and advocates who wish to improve the lives of girls.

Access to sport opportunities is necessary for young girls to participate. However, many young girls, especially girls of color and girls from low-income communities, have limited sport opportunities (Sabo et al. 2004). This lack of opportunity is based on a number of factors, including lack of transportation to and from sport activities; lack of funds to pay for equipment and registration fees; lack of organizations that provide sport to girls in urban communities; lack of space and facilities in urban communities; societal gender roles, which often confine girls to the home or limit their mobility outside the home; and societal ideologies that conflate athleticism with masculinity (Sabo et al. 2004). In their summary of current research on physical activity and sport in the lives of American girls, Sabo et al. note that a significant barrier to girls' full participation in sport is the sociocultural assumption that girls "*naturally*" lack interest in sport (Sabo et al. 2004, emphasis added). For girls of color, because of race, gender, and class inequalities, the essentialist assumption that girls "just aren't interested" in sport serves as an additional constraint.

Sport is a primary site for the study of classic sociological and feminist concerns regarding agency and structural constraint (Dworkin and Messner 2002). As a significant social and cultural institution, sport allows sociologists to uncover the ways in which ostensibly "objective" understandings of gender differences are socially constructed through the complex array of dynamics between structures, cultural ideologies, and agency. More broadly, this article will explore the social processes by which interest is socially constructed, specifically how cultural ideologies shape social structure, how formal and informal social structures can enable and constrain social actors, and how social actors enact various forms of agency that can be either reproductive of, or resistant to, social structure and constraint. Qualitative analysis of a girls' sport program for low-income, minority girls reveals the complex dynamic between structure and culture that socially constructs girls' interest in sport in everyday social interactions. Based on participant observations and interviews, girls' interest in sport is constructed, contextualized, and understood through this complex interplay of structure, agency, and culture. Thus, this study sheds light on the structural dynamics in sport, which will provide researchers, advocates, and educators with a thorough understanding of the potential and limitations of liberal strategies to bring about social change.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN SPORT

Theoretical debates regarding the relationship between structure and agency have been central to the discipline of sociology since its inception. Giddens's theories of structuration provide linkages between structure and agency such that there is a recursive relationship rather than a unidirectional cause and effect dynamic (Gieryn 2000). Most sociologists today recognize the need to consider structure, culture, and agency in our understandings of social life (Hays 1994; Messner 2002). Indeed, debates regarding the primacy of structure or agency in sociological theory

are rendered insignificant when one considers how individuals constitute and are constituted by social structure (Gieryn 2000). Fine (1992) argued for the importance of moving beyond binary theoretical discussions of structure or agency to link structure and agency in interactionist theories—what he calls “synthetic interaction.” Fine (1992:101) writes, “I suggest that we can make interactional sense of agents and their structures by recognizing that people act in situations on the basis of the meanings that previous contexts of behavior have provided. These contexts are shaped by structural forces, and, as a consequence, structures are embedded in the meanings that contexts generate.” In other words, structures do not exist outside of human interaction, nor do individuals act outside of structural forces and institutions (Giddens 1984; Hays 1994; Messner 2002). Instead, structures are constituted through ongoing collective social action, while the experiences of social actors are constituted through structures of opportunity and constraint (Connell 1987; Hays 1994).

Giddens (1984) recognized how power is integral in understanding the relationship between structure and agency. He argued that “dialectic of control” exists where all individuals have some degree of power given that they are able to transform, change, or alter the circumstances in which they find themselves (Sugden and Tomlinson 2002). Even subordinate groups have some degree of agency to counter dominant groups (Giddens 1984). On the surface it may appear that Giddens suggests agency is always transformative or resistant. However, as Hays (1994) argues, agency can also be reproductive of social structures. Therefore, it is useful to conceptualize agency along a continuum that ranges from transformative/resistant to reproductive of social structures.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

As part of a larger research project, I conducted fieldwork on the Girls Play Los Angeles (GPLA) recreation sport program for one sport season at two different Los Angeles recreation centers. Field observations at each recreation center began in January 2004 and ended in April 2004, the end of the sport season (fieldwork was conducted concurrently at both centers). The GPLA program offered basketball in the winter/spring and softball in the summer. The fieldwork focused primarily on the basketball season.

In December 2003, I met with the Director of Gender Equity, who is responsible for the oversight of the GPLA program, to discuss my research and to receive permission to conduct observations of the program. The Director of Gender Equity chose each center to “provide an adequate representation of the GPLA program.” Throughout the article, I refer to the two centers by the pseudonyms “Fairview” and “Centerville.” At the Fairview recreation center, I observed three basketball teams of eight to ten girls. Of the three Fairview teams I observed, two held practice once a week for one hour. The other team held practice once a week for two hours. Each team had a competitive game scheduled once a week for one hour. I spent at least sixty hours at the Fairview GPLA (the actual number of hours is higher than this estimate because I also conducted observations before and after games and practices, as well as other GPLA events). Most of the girls on the

Fairview GPLA teams were Latina; several were first generation. The race of the participants in the GPLA program was determined based on last names, informal conversations with the girls and their parents, and in some cases, the girls' own racial and ethnic identification.

At the Centerville recreation center, I observed three basketball teams in order to mirror the Fairview sample. Several teams were omitted from selection based on their practice schedule because it overlapped with the Fairview schedule. Of the three Centerville GPLA teams chosen, two of the teams had practice twice a week for an hour. The other team had practice four times a week for an hour. Each team also played approximately two games a week. Each game was an hour in length. I spent approximately 100 hours observing the Centerville GPLA program. Most of the girls at the Centerville GPLA were Latina (similar to Fairview). However, there were several white, Asian/Pacific Islander, and South Asian/Indian girls in the league. For reasons to be discussed later, most of the observations of the Centerville recreation center are from the games, rather than both games and practices.

In addition to fieldwork, I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with thirteen girls (eleven from Fairview, two from Centerville) at the end of the season about their sport experiences (for a detailed analysis of the interviews, see Cooky 2006). While an equal number of girls were recruited from both sites, there was a low response rate at the Centerville site. This was due to several factors, including the girls' inconsistent attendance at practice and games, which made scheduling interviews difficult; the eventual high drop-out rate in the program; girls' failure to show up to scheduled interviews and the last-minute cancellation of practices by coaches and staff, which negatively impacted my ability to establish trust and rapport with the girls.

Each girl was asked questions on her sport background, why she chose to participate in the GPLA program, her likes and dislikes of the program and of sport, her thoughts on and experiences in the program and with sport, and her thoughts on how the program might be changed or improved. Other interviews were conducted with the Director of Gender Equity for Los Angeles Parks and Recreation regarding the GPLA program, the senior staff attorney at the California Women's Law Center regarding the *Baca v. City of Los Angeles* case, the site directors at Centerville and Fairview about their park and GPLA programs, and two coaches at Fairview regarding their experiences and coaching philosophies. Informal discussions with coaches, girls, and parents were also included in field notes and subsequently analyzed.

Fieldwork and interviews were collected and analyzed using qualitative research methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). While qualitative methods have multiple traditions, contemporary qualitative methods emphasize that social understandings, experiences, and structures are socially constructed (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). Comparing two parks located in two different geographical locations (Centerville and Fairview) and studying the GPLA program, the experiences of coaches, girl participants, and program administrators was not done to provide a "comparative wedge" (Gieryn 2000). Instead, studying two sites highlights the ways knowledge of the social world is constructed through social interactions and shaped by wider social structures.

The “sociology of accounts” is a useful theoretical and methodological concept that sociologists can employ in qualitative research to understand how individuals experience and identify with meanings and their social world (Orbach 1997). Emerging out of Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis, accounts are ways individuals socially construct their performance of self. According to Orbach (1997), for scholars who are interested in narratives or accounts, there is not an “objective reality” that can be studied through research methods. Instead, the narratives themselves become “real,” as presented to the researcher. The sociology of accounts allows narrative scholars to “highlight the idea that subjective explanations develop and evolve in the context of cultural and social factors” (Orbach 1997:467). The sociology of accounts is also relevant to this study, for it emphasizes the importance of culture in individuals’ construction of narratives and the way that culture may serve as a constraint to individual behavior (Orbach 1997). Given this study’s focus on structure, culture, and agency, the sociology of accounts is a useful lens through which to analyze interviews and observations. Based on field notes and interviews, girls’ interest in sport is socially constructed but becomes understood by social actors as part of an “objective reality” through the social contexts and places in which girls’ sports occur.

Originally my goal was to study the social construction of gender and the ways adolescent girls negotiated femininity in recreational sport contexts. With qualitative methods, research objectives are data-driven. An emergent theme from my observations was not how girls negotiated gender but rather the ways in which seemingly “objective” realities were socially constructed through the complex processes of interactions between structure, agency, and culture. It was these differences in the everyday interactions, despite the same formal structure of the program, that led me to explore how place becomes space (Gieryn 2000) in ways that enable and constrain girls’ interest in sport. Thus, considerations of place as space allow researchers to examine the dynamic, recursive relationship between structure and agency.

BACA V. CITY OF LOS ANGELES: CAN GIRLS PLAY IN L.A.?

In 1998, five years prior to the start of my fieldwork, the California Women’s Law Center worked with the American Civil Liberties Union to represent the West Valley Girls’ Softball League in a case against the City of Los Angeles, *Baca v. City of Los Angeles*. The plaintiffs sued the City of Los Angeles contending the city did not comply with California’s Equal Protection Clause and had violated the civil rights of girls by denying the team equal access to the city-owned ball fields, which were dominated by male teams. *Baca v. City of Los Angeles* was settled out of court in 1999. As part of this settlement, the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks was required to implement a girls-only sports league. This league was called “Girls Play Los Angeles” (GPLA), a year-round, gender-specific sports league program for “at-risk” girls, ages thirteen to fifteen. According to the Director of Gender Equity for the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (a position also required as part of the settlement), the department defined “at-risk” girls as those from low-income families who live in particular

residential communities in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. Although it was never explicitly stated what girls were "at-risk" for, based on conversations with staff, coaches, and participants, girls were understood to be "at-risk" for teen sex, pregnancy, and gang involvement. Another factor girls were "at-risk" for was early drop-out from sport. While boys' and girls' sport and physical activity participation decreases once they reach adolescence (Dwyer et al. 2006), the drop-out rate for girls is almost six times that of boys (Garrett 2004). Girls in this age group (thirteen to fifteen), particularly Latina girls (Denner and Dunbar 2004; Jamieson 2005), struggle with the pressure to conform to dominant notions of femininity that often conflict with sport participation (Malcolm 2003). The GPLA program addressed these risk factors by targeting the program to girls transitioning into adolescence.

Sport and physical activity have been, and continue to be, viewed as a panacea for girls' physical and psychosocial problems. Research has found positive correlations between (some) girls' sport participation and academic performance (Miller et al. 2005; Videon 2002), self-esteem (Tracy and Erkut 2002), and body image (Crissey and Honea 2006). Research has also found a negative correlation between sport participation and the risk of teen pregnancy (Miller et al. 1999). This body of research provided empirical support for women's sport advocates, who vociferously fought for Title IX and for continued support of girls' sport programs. During the 1990s, many school and recreation sport programs were developed to increase opportunities for girls to play sport, given the correlation between sport participation and pro-social outcomes.

The discussion of the broader structure from which the GPLA program emerged illustrates how cultural ideologies impacted the origination of the GPLA program. Ideologies of individualism and liberal discourses of equality reinforce the belief that girls have the right to participate in sport and that social institutions are obligated to create structures of opportunity for girls to participate. These ideologies and discourses also provide a social context for which the girls and parents of the West Valley Girls' Softball League felt entitled, and within their legal rights, to pursue more equitable treatment for girl athletes. In addition, ideologies of gender equity shaped the formal structure of the GPLA program. The program is based on the notion that all girls, regardless of race or class background, should have access to sport opportunities. Research in the social sciences linking sport participation with increased levels of self-esteem, academic performance, decreased sexual activity, and other socially valued characteristics contributed to a cultural understanding that sport is good for the overall health and well-being of girls. Thus, girls' participation in sport should be socially supported and encouraged (Messner 2002).

JUST LET THEM PLAY: TITLE IX THIRTY-SIX YEARS LATER

Title IX states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." This legislation, passed thirty-six years ago, continues to be credited

for the significant strides toward gender equity in sport. Unfortunately, the significant changes in women's sports have created a commonsense cultural belief that girls and women now have ample opportunities to participate. Although structures of opportunity in women's sport exist more so than at any point in history, the Women's Sport Foundation (2007) estimates that 80 percent of universities and colleges are not in compliance with Title IX. Moreover, in popular culture, the sport experiences of white middle-class girls and women have come to serve as the representation of all girls and women. This representation obscures the complex ways in which race, class, and gender intersect to constitute girls' sport experiences and opportunities (Cooky in press). The argument that Title IX has passed, opportunities have increased, and therefore Title IX is no longer necessary is analogous to the argument that affirmative action has passed, women and minorities are now in colleges and the workplace, and therefore affirmative action legislation is no longer necessary. Yet as sociologists consistently find, the gender wage gap continues, sexual harassment is still an issue in many workplaces, and women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in management and overrepresented in entry-level positions.

As with affirmative action legislation, throughout Title IX's history conservatives have challenged the law (Dworkin and Messner 2002) and have debated on how universities should prove compliance. Within the law, one way to prove compliance is by demonstrating that a given university's athletic program meets the interests of the underrepresented sex. The most recent controversy (as of May 2007) centers on the use of e-mail interest surveys to measure female students' interest in intercollegiate athletics. Many believe that if college women are not participating in sport, it is because they are not interested (Gavora 2002). However, as Messner and Solomon (2007) argue, merely asking girls and women if they are interested in sport erases the complex dynamics of history, ideology, culture, and structure that shape girls' experiences and their interest in sport participation.

While Title IX does not apply to recreational sport programs, only educational institutions that receive federal funding, it has an indirect impact on recreational programs by shaping cultural ideologies of girls' and women's right to play sport and by reproducing ideologies of gender equality. In the post-Title IX era (here the "post" is used chronologically and not to suggest Title IX is no longer necessary), girls and women playing sport permeate our cultural imagery and challenge conventional gender ideologies that conflate femininity with weakness, frailty, submissiveness, and passivity (Dowling 2000; Messner 2002). The female athlete as a "cultural icon" expands cultural notions of femininity and female athleticism (Heywood and Dworkin 2003) and may positively impact girls' participation in sport by providing girls with female athletic role models. Despite contemporary American culture's embracing of female athletic competition, hegemonic ideologies of individualism, meritocracy, and competition, which are reproduced in sport (Garrett 2004; Sage 1998), reinforce the dominant belief that interest in sport stems from individually based desire or motivation. In the following sections, I discuss how discourses of interest in sport, as shaped by wider debates and controversies, were incorporated into the formal and informal structures of the GPLA program.

HOW DO WE KNOW IF GIRLS ARE INTERESTED?

Through my research it became apparent that Title IX and ideologies of gender equality impacted the formal structure of the GPLA program. The Director of Gender Equity emphasized that Los Angeles was the only city to keep track of recreational sport participation rates by gender. This was done to assure equal opportunities for both boys and girls. In *Baca v. City of Los Angeles*, the City Council stated that the "Raise the Bar" program (of which GPLA is a part) should increase the participation of girls in recreational youth sports by a minimum of 10 percent after year one (1999) and a minimum of 25 percent after year two (2000). The report also cautioned that eventually girls' participation rates would plateau.

In response, the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks conducted its own "interest survey" with boys ($n = 247$) and girls ($n = 294$), ages six to fifteen, at local middle schools, high schools, and recreation centers. The survey included three questions that asked respondents how often they went to recreation centers, whether they registered for an activity at the recreation center, and when they came to the park, what activities they were most interested in overall. When I spoke to the Director and the "Youth Sports Czar," their interpretation of the findings was that girls were not interested in sport. More boys, whether they were surveyed either at a school (44 percent of boys vs. 21 percent of girls) or at a recreation center (67 percent of boys vs. 47 percent of girls), reported sport as their main interest. Because girls in both groups reported a lower level of interest in playing sports, the administrators interpreted the data as evidence that girls were just not as interested in sport. When discussing their interpretations, the administrators admitted they had limited knowledge of statistics and were looking to hire someone with expertise in statistical analysis but were limited by their budget. Thus, their interpretations were constrained by a lack of knowledge and resources.

If we consider the context in which the surveys were administered, important observations can be made regarding the social construction of interest. Both girls and boys surveyed at the parks reported higher levels of interest in sport compared to their counterparts surveyed at school. The administrators interpreted the data as evidence that categorically *all* girls are not as interested in sport as *all* boys are. Yet the surveys could also be interpreted as demonstrating that *some* girls (those surveyed at the park) are more interested in sport than other girls (at the school) and *some* boys (those surveyed at the park) are more interested in sport than other boys (at the school). This illustrates how structures of opportunity construct girls' interest in sport. Girls at the schools composed the group least likely to report interest in sport, possibly because they were the least likely to have experience in and exposure to sport programs. Indeed, many of the girls I interviewed mentioned that a number of boys' sports teams were offered at their middle school, while there were a few, if any, sports offered for girls.

The Department's use of interest surveys to determine the level of interest in sport among girls sheds light on how interest in sport is socially constructed through the structurally reproductive agency of the Park administrators. The use of the "interest survey" demonstrates how discourses regarding gender equality and Title IX shape the social construction of girls' interest in sport. It also

points to the ways that gender difference is socially constructed through objective measures.

MAKING SPACE A PLACE: ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES AT GPLA

When sociologists conduct qualitative research, space is an inherent part of the research context (Gieryn 2000). However, Gieryn (2000) makes an important conceptual distinction between space and place. He notes that, unlike space, place is not the physical geography in which social life occurs. The places of our research are not just the backdrop; rather, they are an "agentic player in the game" (Gieryn 2000:466). Physical spaces become "place" when space is rendered with individuals' "interpretations, representations, and identifications" of that physical space (Gieryn 2000). Following Gieryn's theoretical conceptualization of "place," the GPLA program becomes place as the program is constructed through actors' interpretations of girls' interest in sport. The structure of the GPLA program took shape through the everyday social interactions at the centers where the program was offered to girls. In the sections below, I discuss how the GPLA program is constituted through the meanings ascribed to the actions that occur in and through the centers. Girls' interest in sport was socially constructed through three main organizational practices: the scheduling of games and practices, the marketing of the program and recruitment of girl participants, and the organization of awards ceremonies and "outside" events. These organizational practices illustrate how the informal structure, and the agency enacted to construct the informal structure, played a significant role in enabling girls' interest in sport.

THE FAIRVIEW GPLA PROGRAM: ENABLING GIRLS' INTEREST IN SPORT

Scheduling of Practice and Games: Together, on Time

The scheduling of games and practices can enable or constrain girls' interest in sport. A consistent and reliable schedule of practices and games was crucial to participation as girls relied on parents or other caregivers for transportation to and from the park. If games and practices were scheduled during a parent's typical work hours or during times when girls may have other responsibilities (such as taking care of younger siblings), girls would be less likely to attend and thus less likely to develop an interest in sport. Scheduling was also important in the construction of interest because girls had familial and school responsibilities that impacted their ability to play. In addition, the surrounding neighborhoods were not deemed safe for young girls, so scheduling of games and practices late in the evenings served as a barrier to girls' participation. For girls who were already "at risk" of dropping out of sport and/or who did not typically play sport (as was true for most girls in the GPLA program), desirable and consistent scheduling of games enabled their participation.

At Fairview, practices for all three teams were held on Friday evenings between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Games were scheduled on Sunday afternoons. The

Fairview center's practices and games were consistently held at their scheduled time. Coaches always attended practices and games, except for one game when a coach did not show up because he "wrote down the wrong start time on [his] calendar." He arrived at the gym just as the GPLA game had ended. Despite his absence, another volunteer coach was available to coach the team. The majority of girls regularly attended practices and games. There were some girls who missed a practice or game. However, they typically informed the coach in advance of their absence. On those occasions, girls were absent because of family obligations, birthday parties, quinceañeras, or family vacations. Only one girl, out of approximately thirty, dropped out of the program. According to some of the girls interviewed, she dropped out because her father would not allow her to play. He feared she would get hurt when another girl at the park (not in the GPLA program) threatened to beat her up. The rest of the girls regularly attended games and practices and finished the entire season.

Parents at the Fairview GPLA program also attended practices and games, which was one way that parents demonstrated their support of, and interest in, their daughter's participation. Indeed, when I asked girls if their parents supported their participation, and if so how, all of the girls interviewed responded that their parents supported their participation. Every girl said they knew this because their parent/s attended games and practices and cheered for them during the game. Yvette (all names are pseudonyms) said her parents support her playing because they come to her games, "and when I win or lost [sic], they would tell me, 'Good job, you can do it next time.'" Liz discussed the importance of parents enabling their daughter's sport participation. "They bring me to all the practices, which helps me a lot 'cause if not, I couldn't come."

When asked why girls might not play sport, eight of the thirteen girls interviewed (PBJ, Rosa, Caroline, Jessica, Laurie, Jamie, Diane, and Isabel) mentioned parents as a significant factor in whether girls play sport (other responses included physical disabilities or girls not wanting to play). Jessica (Fairview) thought girls might not play sport because "they live far and their parents don't have time to drive them or they don't care what they want." Isabel explains, "They (parents) don't like sports or they don't like their girls playing sports. There's a lot of parents that just think that it's not good for their girls to play sports."

Recruitment and Marketing: Girls Play Here

The second way coaches and staff constructed girls' interest in sport was through recruitment and marketing. It is apparent that marketing and publicizing the program was especially important for girls who typically do not participate in sport. Girls' interest in sport would be negatively impacted if girls were not made aware that a low-cost recreational sport program existed in their neighborhood. Recruiting girls in school, or as they walked home from school, enabled girls' interest in sport. Conversely, in the absence of marketing and recruitment, the potential to develop girls' interest in sport was constrained.

At the level of the formal structure of the program, the City of Los Angeles's Raise the Bar initiative required the individual park district sites to market the

GPLA program in several ways: by hanging "GPLA: Girls Play Here" banners outside the facilities, by displaying a girls-only bulletin board, by including the Raise the Bar motto ("Achieving Gender Equity through a Continuous Commitment to Girls and Women in Sports") on all brochures and flyers distributed to the public, and by promoting girls sports to the media. Although this was mandated in the formal structure of the GPLA program, adult organizers' agency shaped the implementation of the informal structure of the program.

Fairview displayed its GPLA banners on every outside wall of the main building. People who attended the park for other activities or passersby could see the banners from the street and from other areas of the park. Inside the gymnasium, a girls-only poster board included information about the GPLA program, practice and game schedules, as well as pictures cut from magazines of professional female basketball, soccer, gymnastics, and track and field athletes. The board also included magazine clippings of inspirational quotes. The quotes celebrated female athletic participation. The site director asked if I could bring in posters from my university's women's sport teams, which were later posted on the board. At Fairview, every practice schedule, game schedule, and all other materials printed for GPLA, including reminders for team picture day and off-site events like a field trip to a Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim game, included the Raise the Bar motto.

Jennifer, the Fairview center director, articulated a strong commitment to the GPLA program and to increasing the number of girls who participate. Besides the mandated marketing of the program, site directors and staff were responsible for the recruitment of new girls to the program. In order to increase participation, Jennifer told me she recruited girls from the neighborhood and actively approached girls who came to the park. Indeed, Caroline mentioned in her interview that she found out about GPLA from Jennifer. Jennifer approached girls hanging out at the park and told girls about the park activities, the GPLA program, and other sports that were offered to girls. She also recruited players from several neighboring middle schools by sending staff to talk to girls about the GPLA program. Fairview mailed out flyers to the families who had children participating in other recreation center activities.

In her interview, Jennifer highlighted the importance of getting girls involved in sport, citing the benefits girls receive when they participate—for example, increased self-esteem and a decreased chance of getting involved in gangs or getting pregnant. She mentioned that some of the girls at the park were known to date gang members. She thought informing them of the GPLA program might prevent them from "getting into trouble." Jennifer's accounts (Orbach 1997) are informed by gender ideologies that position sport as a key site for the empowerment of young girls (Cooky in press). Her accounts are also informed by social science research that links sport participation to addressing the social problems of "at-risk" youth.

Jennifer articulated that girls' sport participation could improve the lives of girls. Her accounts of her commitment to girls' sport participation were embodied in the structurally transformative organizational practices implemented in Fairview's GPLA program. This empirical finding is evidence that researchers must recognize

the ways in which structure and agency intersect at the level of social interactions. It is also of use for those in public policy to demonstrate the importance of transformative agency in structures designed to address forms of social inequality and access to opportunity.

Awards Ceremonies and Non-Competitive Events: Celebrating Girls' Sport

The third way that adult organizers of the GPLA program constructed interest in sport was in the organization of the end-of-the-season award ceremony and the opportunity, or lack thereof, to participate in other non-competitive events. Non-competitive events were activities that were open to girls who registered for the GPLA program that did not involve girls' sport participation. At Fairview this included a team photo shoot and a trip to a Los Angeles Angles of Anaheim baseball game. In the previous season, the Fairview GPLA girls went to a University of Southern California women's basketball game. These events fostered interest in the GPLA program and women's sports, celebrated the girls' achievements, and awarded the girls' participation. They also provided opportunities for girls to get to know one another outside the program. These events were especially important for the many girls whose first exposure to sport was the GPLA program. Adult organizers developed and enabled girls' interest in sport by exposing them to other sports.

Jennifer said she had planned the award ceremony in advance and contacted parents to coordinate which families would bring what type of food. She also told me she allocated funds in her budget to supply drinks and cake to everyone, as well as for decorations. The day of the ceremony, Jennifer decorated the entire gym with colorful streamers and balloons. Tables were covered with colored paper tablecloths and every team had food on its table. The girls invited me to their table, and their parents offered food to everyone, passing plates of rice, enchiladas, and tamales. Rather than joining their parents in the traditional home-cooked dishes, the girls instead chose to eat Pizza Hut Pizza and KFC chicken and wings. While we ate, Jennifer went to each table offering refills of juice and soda. She also cut slices of cake and personally made certain everyone received a piece. Turntables and speakers were rented for the event. One of the coaches, Hector, spun records after the awards were announced. The girls danced with each other to the latest hip-hop songs. A few girls even performed choreographed routines for the crowd. Everyone watched the dance performances and cheered with claps, whistles, hoots, and hollers.

Toward the end of the season, Jennifer organized a "team picture day." All the girls in the GPLA league were scheduled to have their pictures taken by a professional photographer with their teammates and coaches. Girls could also choose to have an individual photo taken. During the awards ceremony, each girl took home a frame with her team photo and individual photo. The team photo day brought the girls together and gave value to their experience in the program. Girls appreciated the award ceremony and said they proudly displayed their trophies in their bedrooms. Jennifer was responsible for hiring the photographer and contacting the parents and coaches. She also coordinated the event to ensure

that each team had its picture taken and that enough girls were available that day for a team photo.

THE CENTERVILLE GPLA: CONSTRAINING GIRLS' INTEREST IN SPORT

I opened the discussion of the analysis on Fairview, given the richer data that emerged from observations at that site. It is my contention that the "lack of data" gleaned from the Centerville site is in itself evidence of the constraints imposed upon girls' interest in sport. Despite my spending almost twice as many hours at the Centerville site, I had fewer field notes to analyze. I frequently left Centerville with little to no observations. As I discuss below, practices and games at Centerville were often cancelled, relocated, or rescheduled without much notice. Coaches frequently missed games and practices. Many girls either attended events sporadically or dropped out of the program. At the beginning of the season, approximately sixty girls enrolled. Only twenty girls attended the championship game. About half of those girls went to the award ceremony.

At one point during the season, I asked Coach Andre, who was a basketball coach and staff member of the Centerville center, why more girls did not come to games and practices. He responded, "Girls just aren't interested in sport." He contrasted the Centerville GPLA program with the number of boys who participated in the Centerville boys' basketball league. Coach Andre understood the difference between the dwindling participation rates in the GPLA program and the high rates in the boys' junior league (approximately the same age range as the GPLA program, thirteen to sixteen) through natural differences in boys' and girls' interest in sport. The low enrollment frustrated Coach Andre to the point where he suggested that Centerville "not bother having a GPLA program next year."

In the process of telling a colleague, Charles (also a sociologist), about my research, I discovered he grew up near the Centerville site and spent most of his youth playing recreational sports there. I asked if he would participate in an informal interview to discuss his experiences and observations of Centerville and the GPLA program. At the time I was conducting my fieldwork, he was coaching one of the boys' basketball teams. When I shared some of my initial observations, he said, like GPLA, the boys' junior leagues also suffered from low enrollment. In his experience, coaches typically attributed the low enrollment in the junior boys' league to the myriad interests competing for teenage boys' time, such as cars, work, and girls. Yet Charles said he never heard the same explanations for the low enrollment in the Centerville GPLA program. Instead, according to Charles, many coaches believed that girls did not participate because "girls just aren't interested." Charles's accounts may be surprising to some, especially given the ways that female athletes are represented in popular culture and the media. In this "post-Title IX" moment when girl athletes and girls' sports are openly embraced in a market-driven culture (Cooky in press), when Nike tells girls to "just do it," and the female athlete is a "cultural icon" (Heywood and Dworkin 2003), it may seem antiquated to suggest that people continue to embrace the conventional gender ideologies that link athleticism with masculinity (Burstyn 1999). Yet this was confirmed by

my observations, conversations I had with the Centerville coaches and staff, along with Charles's accounts of Centerville.

Scheduling of Games and Practices: "They (Don't) Pay to Play"

The Centerville GPLA program had what women's sport advocates would consider an undesirable scheduling of practices and games. According to a senior staff attorney at the California Women's Law Center, scheduling is a common form of gender discrimination in sport. Girls' teams typically receive the least desirable time spots to practice and play, while the boys' teams receive the most desirable time slots. At Centerville, the GPLA games were scheduled at 7:30 and 8:30 p.m. on school nights and at 7 and 8 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. The boys' games were held earlier in the evenings at 5 and 6 p.m. At the Centerville site, the boys' league end-of-the-season trophy ceremony was scheduled at 7 p.m., immediately after the boys' championship game. The GPLA league's ceremony was at 8 p.m.

While it may appear that the later start times are more desirable given the long work day of many families, for the girls of the Centerville GPLA program, the late schedule time constrained girls from attending the games. One reason was the neighborhood was deemed unsafe at night. PBJ was one of two girls from the Centerville site I interviewed. When asked about the "bad things" about the Centerville GPLA program, she replied, "I have to walk to the park every day 'cause my mom and dad are working. My parents are a little worried about me going by myself. I try to stay on the streets with the signal lights where there's lots of people going by." Moreover, many of the late games took place during week-nights, when many girls had curfew for the next school day. A game that started at 8:30 p.m. would not end until 9:30 p.m. Although I did not interview parents in the study, part of the interview with Isabel (Fairview) highlights the importance of the scheduling of practices. She explains, "My dad . . . doesn't like it 'cause we have to practice late. He's worried about us." Isabel participated in the Fairview program, where the practices were held much earlier in the evening (6 p.m. versus 8:30 p.m.). It is reasonable to assume that other parents had similar reservations with the late scheduling at the Centerville site.

Another way girls' participation and interest was constrained was in the unreliable and unpredictable scheduling of games and practices. Often, staff would cancel practices and/or games without advance notice due to the lack of participants or an absent coach. Most coaches at both sites were unpaid volunteers, young men who worked and/or attended college. Since the coaches were frequently absent for games, at times either Coach Andre or the site director, Tiffany, would substitute. Despite not having any coaching experience or formal knowledge on how to play basketball, I was asked to substitute coach twice during the Centerville's GPLA season.

Girls' interest in sport was also constrained at Centerville because of the staff's relocation of practices to the middle school as a result of schedule conflicts. This happened frequently and prevented the girls from regularly attending practices and games. Often, girls were not informed in advance of the cancellation or relocation. One day I arrived for practice surprised to find there were no girls at the gym.

Instead, a team from the boys' league was practicing. Confused, I asked at the front desk and the staff employee said the GPLA practice had been relocated to the middle school to accommodate the boys' practice. As I walked toward my car to drive to the middle school, I noticed a girl in the GPLA program getting dropped off. She ran inside the building as the car drove away. She never showed up later that day for practice.

On another occasion the Centerville center site director, Tiffany, inadvertently scheduled a minors' league game (a league for girls ages eight to ten whose parents pay the full registration fee of \$65) in the same time slot as a GPLA game. The mistake was not noticed until minutes before the game. Girls from both the minors' teams and the GPLA teams had congregated in the stands and outside the gymnasium waiting for the boys' game to end. Tiffany made the decision to cancel the GPLA game. Many GPLA players showed up to the game in uniform and ready to play. They were quite upset when they found out that the game was cancelled and the minors' teams would play instead. Several of the girls had been dropped off by their parents and now had to wait an hour to be picked up. As we stood outside the gym, many girls expressed their anger and frustration, telling me "it isn't fair!" They explained that since they were older, they should be allowed to play. Upon hearing the news of the cancelled game, Angelica, one of the GPLA players, exclaimed, "Big girls should go first! We should get a petition that says that!"

Upon subsequent informal conversations with the Centerville coaches and staff, I learned why the GPLA game was cancelled: "They (the minors and major leagues) pay to play," Tiffany explained. The parents of the eight- to ten-year-old girls pay a significant amount of money for their girls to play. One main objective of the GPLA program is to increase sport opportunities for girls in low-income communities who would otherwise not participate in sport. While girls who resided in the same communities and participated in non-GPLA sports leagues at the Los Angeles Parks and Recreation centers pay anywhere from \$65 to \$120 to register for one sport, girls eligible for the GPLA program pay only \$10. This fee includes the cost of registration, a uniform (jersey and shorts), and a trophy at the end of the season for all GPLA participants.

In their accounts (Orbach 1997) of girls' lack of interest in sport, the Centerville staff said that since the minor and major league parents have more invested in the game, the younger girls should be given priority in scheduling. At several points during the season, the Centerville coaches and staff explained the lack of participation in the GPLA league as a result of the low registration fee. In response to the low attendance rate, one coach reasoned that if the older girls who participated in the GPLA league had to pay \$65 to participate, their parents would make sure they went to games and practices. During my first visit to the Centerville center, both Tiffany and Coach Andre stated that because the girls get a uniform regardless of their participation, many girls sign up to get a pair of shorts and a jersey. According to Tiffany, this "is cheaper than you would pay for a pair of shorts and jersey at Sports Chalet" (a discount retail sports store). Coach Andre's frustration was rooted in his desire to get girls participating in basketball. His team was the only team that held practices four times a week. However, he combined his minor

girls' (eight to ten years old) team practice with his GPLA girls' (thirteen to fifteen years old) practice. This inadvertently constrained, rather than enabled, girls' participation. I heard several girls on GPLA teams say they did not like playing with "little girls."

For the Centerville coaches and staff, there was "empirical evidence" to suggest that their accounts were an accurate assessment of girls' lack of interest in sport. At Centerville there were higher attendance rates for the major and minor girls' leagues, at both practices and games. In addition, more parents attended games and practices for the major and minor leagues. There were approximately thirty to forty people in the stands for the girls' major and minor league games I attended and only about twenty to twenty-five in the stands at the GPLA games. The majority of people in the stands were GPLA participants who finished a game or were waiting for a game to begin.

Recruitment and Marketing: "Lost Causes"

The Centerville site displayed the GPLA banner inside the gymnasium, which could only be viewed by those who were already at the center. It was only until the middle of the season that the banner was moved outdoors above the main entrance. The girls-only poster board was constructed simply and decorated sparsely. Practice and game schedules were stapled to the board and were surrounded by construction paper stars with the team names of the GPLA, major, and minor girls' league written in black marker. The Raise the Bar motto was not included on practice or game schedules.

I had informal conversations with Coach Andre regarding recruitment. He said he went to the middle schools in the area to recruit ten- to twelve-year-old girls. I asked if he ever went to the high schools to recruit, given that the GPLA program is for girls thirteen to fifteen. He flatly responded, "No." He explained, "If they aren't already involved in basketball by high school it is difficult to get them interested in the program." Coach Andre said most of the girls in the GPLA program are "lost causes." "They get interested in boys and then they don't want to play sports. They don't have the motivation." Instead, he explained that he recruits the younger girls from the major and minor leagues. He thought this would be a more effective way of recruiting.

Awards Ceremony and Outside Events: Separate But Not Equal

At the Centerville site, the only non-competitive event was the end-of-the-season award ceremony. The GPLA award ceremony was scheduled for the same time as the girls' minor and major leagues' award ceremony. After the games, several of the girls went home and returned dressed in fashionable jeans and sweaters, wearing make-up, and had their hair styled. Some of the girls remained at the Centerville center after the game. They hung out with friends or watched the next game until the ceremony began. In the auditorium adjacent to the gym, there were several folding tables that were decorated by the parents of the girls in the major and minor leagues. These tables had streamers, brightly colored paper tablecloths,

and balloons and were covered with food, treats, cakes, and cookies. One table had an ice cream cake from Baskin Robbins. A mother stood over the cake, cutting pieces for girls who were clamoring to get a slice. Another table had several boxes of KFC, while the adjacent table was covered with pizzas from Domino's. Girls from the major and minor leagues laughed and giggled with one another or talked animatedly with parents about the championship game they just played. All the chairs were full. Parents had even pulled chairs from other tables to accommodate all of the players, friends, siblings, and parents in attendance.

The minor and major leagues' tables were in stark contrast to the tables where the GPLA girls sat. Most girls from GPLA did not attend the award ceremony. The GPLA girls were sparsely distributed at their tables, with only several girls from a team sitting at a table. A few girls came with their parents, several were with friends, but most had arrived alone. The tables were not decorated, nor had the girls brought food. Tiffany provided drinks and snacks for all the girls. I stood next to her while she prepared snacks and opened two-liter soda bottles. She said she was upset that none of the GPLA girls had bought their own food to share. Visibly frustrated, she told me this had been a problem in the past. As the GPLA girls stood in line, she instructed that they were limited to one Twinkie, a handful of chips, and one drink. While we were waiting for the award ceremony to begin, the girls sat in silence, eating quietly. The GPLA girls left shortly after they received their awards. The minor and major league girls stayed well after the awards were distributed, celebrating with family and friends.

Coach Andre, Tiffany, and other adult organizers articulated that girls' were just not interested in sport. Their accounts of girls' sport participation were embodied in the structurally reproductive organizational practices implemented in Centerville's GPLA program. This empirical finding is evidence that researchers must recognize the ways in which agency is not only freedom from constraint but also freedom to constrain. In other words, agency can be reproductive of structural constraints and inequalities. Discussed in more detail below, these findings are of import to those in public policy because they illustrate how reproductive agency can be a constraint when enacted in structures designed to address forms of social inequality and access to opportunity.

Girls' Experiences in the GPLA Program: "It's Not All About Winning"

The reasons girls participated in the GPLA program differed from what some of the coaches and staff thought their reasons were. In many cases, coaches and staff at the Centerville site applied what Coakley (2006) refers to as the "performance-model" of sport to girls' participation. In the performance model of sport, demonstrating interest in sport is predicated on dedication, hard work, competition, desire to win at any cost, intensity, and an aggressive pursuit of athletic superiority as demonstrated through winning. When girls did not live up to these standards, the Centerville coaches and staff interpreted this as a lack of interest. One Centerville coach, frustrated that his team "refused" to play zone defense, decided to quit near the end of the season and did not attend his team's championship game. I spoke with Sabrina, one of the girls on the team about Coach Jose's absence. She

explained that the reason the girls did not play zone was because most of them did not know how, either because they had not attended enough practices or because this was a skill they had yet to master.

From the interviews with girls and informal discussions, girls *were* interested in playing sport. For the girls of this study, the reasons and desires for participating did not coincide with the hegemonic definition of interest in sport. Rather, their reasons for participating centered on what Coakley (2006) refers to as the "participation-model" of sport. The participation-model of sport emphasizes participation for play, enjoyment, connections to others, and competing *with* someone, rather than *against* someone.

Most of the girls interviewed registered for the program to be with friends, not necessarily to learn how to play the game of basketball or to win. Lizbeth, from the Centerville GPLA program, told me she was very competitive when she played basketball for her high school team. However, when asked about the bad things about the Centerville GPLA program, Lizbeth felt that some people take it too seriously: "It's just a game. Some people care about winning so much that they forget how to have fun. It's not all about winning." Lizbeth understood that the GPLA program should embody the participation-model of sport. Although she constructed her "self" as a very competitive person, she participated in GPLA to "have fun."

The reasons girls participate in the GPLA program reflects the participation-model, wherein sport provides an opportunity to connect with others and to foster relationships. In the girls' accounts, many said they enrolled in the program because either a friend or family member encouraged them to join. Ana (Fairview) said, "It's fun to be around people that you meet and stuff and you try to get to know them and you play with them . . . and it's fun 'cause you get to do something that you like to do." Rosa (Fairview) said she got involved in sports because "my friends told me to get into sports." For Rosa what makes playing sports fun is "you get to be with your friends." When asked what she would do if there was no GPLA, Ana said, "I'd be at home doing nothing." Besides her motivation to play sports because she likes to "exercise and work," Lizbeth (Centerville) plays sports "to keep me busy and like not to be bored at home. You know, you're bored at home and you could be doing something good and probably getting better (at basketball)." For these girls, having fun was based not on competition or winning but on meeting new girls, spending time with friends, and getting out of the house.

Most of the girls in the program did not seem to mind too much if their team won or lost. If a team won a game, the girls would cheer and celebrate, but quickly the "high" wore off. Regardless of whether a team won or lost, the girls typically ran to the bench to get snacks and juice; talked about what they were going to do next; found their parents, family members, or friends in the stands; and headed home. Girls often celebrated individual accomplishments on the court rather than team wins. During a game at Fairview where the "slaughter rule" had been imposed (the rule states that if the point differential is more than twenty, the scoreboard goes to 0-0 and score is no longer kept for the remainder of the game), Isabel and Trina cheered for their teammate Diane. Diane had struggled all season with her shooting. After her shot went successfully through the hoop, all three girls cheered

and celebrated, despite the team losing by more than twenty points. When they returned to the bench, they celebrated their teammate's individual improvement.

In the girls' accounts, the reasons the girls said they participated in the program, what they thought was fun about the program, and the experiences through which they derived a sense of accomplishment and enjoyment were more reflective of the principles of the "participation-model" of sport. This was also in line with the formal structure of the GPLA program, in which participation was given priority and winning and competition was deemphasized. This finding illustrates how the social construction of interest was co-constructed among the girls. The girls of this study are interested in sport but in ways that challenge hegemonic sport structures.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study illustrate how structures, as they are embodied through the everyday interactions of their participants, simultaneously constrain certain *forms* of agency while enabling others. The research presents empirical data to demonstrate the ways in which agency is both reproductive of social structures as well as resistant to those very same structures. The study's findings point to the importance of social theories that simultaneously engage in multiple levels of analysis. The findings also expose the limitations of binary theoretical frameworks (structure versus agency) or conceptualizations of core theoretical concepts (agency as freedom from constraint). Building upon classical and contemporary theoretical frameworks on structure and agency, this study empirically advances the theoretical argument that dynamic interactions exist between structure, culture, and agency. It illustrates the importance of theories of structuration (Giddens 1984) to assist in our understanding of social life, social interactions, and social meanings. The relationship between structure and agency is not binary (Fine 1992; Gieryn 2000), nor does structure solely operate as a constraint to agency. The empirical evidence presented demonstrates that agency is simultaneously constrained and enabled by social structures, while social structures are reproduced and transformed through individual and collective agency in the context of social interactions.

Implications for Conceptual Understandings of Gender and Social Construction

In applying the sociology of accounts (Orbach 1997), the research demonstrates how social realities are constructed through the complex process of interactions between structure, culture, and agency. As Orbach (1997) notes, accounts often reflect culturally normative explanations. Although each GPLA program differed in whether it was transformative (Fairview) or reproductive (Centerville) of broader forms of structural gender inequality, the adult organizers at both sites engaged in accounts that reflected "culturally embedded normative explanations" (Orbach

1997:455). In doing so, each site either enabled or constrained girls' interest in sport. This illustrates the power of individual and collective agency in shaping social interactions.

The Director of Gender Equity and the "Youth Sports Czar" socially constructed an account of girls' sport that reflected the normative explanation that girls do not have the same level of interest as boys. The accounts of the adult organizers at the Fairview GPLA program reflected the cultural discourses regarding sport as a site for empowerment of girls. They incorporated the formal structural philosophy of the program (which was also informed by cultural discourses) to advocate for girls in sport. The adult organizers at the Centerville program engaged in cultural discourses that positioned girls' sport participation in conflict with girls' "natural" interests. This account of the GPLA program is also constructed in a social context wherein adult organizers encounter difficulty enabling interest in sport, given the predominance of the "if you build it, they will come" philosophy that drives societal understandings of social inequality. The adult organizers at both leagues were given resources to address one structural barrier to girls' participation in sport (lack of opportunity due to access and money), but they lacked resources to address the myriad structural constraints that operate in their own lives and in the lives of the girls the program targets.

The sociology of accounts cautions against assuming what people say about the meanings they ascribe to their social experiences and interactions is valid. Instead, as researchers we should question why a group represents others in a particular way and in doing so represents itself (Orbach 1997). When considering the organization and implementation of girls' recreation sport programs, fieldwork and interviews highlight the ways in which girls and adult organizers co-constructed interest in sport. Researchers should consider how accounts co-create and construct social interactions and understandings of social life in ways that manifest as natural or as common sense.

Promises and Limitations of Liberal Strategies to Address Inequality

The major emergent theme from my observations was the stark contrast between two seemingly similar centers. At Fairview, the adult organizers expressed commitment to girls' sport and accepted cultural ideologies that sport was a site for girls' equality and empowerment. At Fairview, adult agency was transformative of sport structures that had previously constrained girls' experiences at the Los Angeles recreation centers (as evidenced in the *Baca v. City of Los Angeles* case). Fairview represented the informal structural embodiment of the philosophical principles of the GPLA program (as constructed in the formal structure of the GPLA program). At Fairview, the transformative agency of the adults and the rejection of the belief that "girls just aren't interested in sport" helped to give life to everyday social practices wherein girls' sport experiences were enabled. The adult organizers and coaches valued the GPLA program and recognized the importance of the program in the lives of the girl participants.

At Centerville, GPLA girls' lack of participation, sporadic attendance, and high drop-out rate served to co-construct the gender ideology that "girls just aren't

interested in sport." The informal structure at the Centerville site was emblematic of a larger problem that had plagued the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks in the past: the unequal allocation of resources. Although the formal structure of the GPLA program had opened opportunities for girls to play sport with its low fees and accessibility to all girls regardless of skill or talent, the informal structure of the program, as enacted through the collective agency of adult organizers, constrained girls' participation.

While Title IX, Civil Rights legislation, and other forms of legislation are necessary for girls to assert their right to participate in sport and in other social institutions such as education and work, this study illustrates the importance of considering how structural opportunities become embodied through agency as enacted through social interactions. While the girls in the Centerville GPLA program, because of the complex social dynamics between culture and structure, did drop out or attend sporadically, this is not evidence to support the elimination of the GPLA program, nor is it evidence that girls "just aren't interested in sport." Instead, the success of the Fairview program sheds light on the importance of adult organizers and organizational practices for socially constructing experiences in sport. The adult organizers socially construct narratives. These narratives then become a part of an "objective reality" that frames subsequent agency, which for the Fairview program was resistant/transformational but for the Centerville program was reproductive of broader forms of gender inequality. Thus, the social construction of interest is thus the process by which social actors' understandings of their social worlds come to inform their perceptions of the groups with which they interact.

The everyday organizational practices that served to reproduce structures of inequality point to the limitations of liberal strategies to increase opportunities for girls to play sport. Simply put, if you build it, they might not want to come. It is not enough to expand structures of opportunities and allocate resources. The findings illustrate the importance of agency in the implementation of sport programs. When adult agency is reproductive, as at the Centerville GPLA program, girls' interest is constrained; when adult agency is transformational, as at the Fairview GPLA program, girls' interest is enabled.

Implications for Social Change and Public Policy

The study provides empirical evidence to support the argument that increasing structures of opportunity alone is not enough to achieve equality. This is because structures are imbued with meaning in part by the agency of the participants within those structures. In addition, structure is intricately linked with ideology, and ideology shapes the ways in which social actors interpret and make sense of their worlds. Ideological interpretations then influence how we come to "see" and experience our social worlds (Lorber 1994).

This study also exemplifies issues that transcend sport that have relevance to other institutions where similar issues and dynamics occur. As one example, Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal funding. While Title IX has had a significant impact on interscholastic and

intercollegiate sport, it applies to other educational programs as well. According to an article in *The New York Times*, Congress ordered agencies to begin Title IX compliance reviews in 2006 (Tierney 2008). Universities are also under investigation for discriminating against women in science. The National Science Foundation, as well as other governmental agencies, has established programs to investigate discrimination in physics, engineering, and other science disciplines (Tierney 2008). Critics against the "Title Nining" of university science departments argue that the gender gap in science is the result of differences in men's and women's *interest* in science (emphasis added), rather than any institutional or structural form of discrimination. Research on gender inequality and science, engineering, and technology suggests that "equal opportunities politics" has been unsuccessful in addressing the "structures of gendered disadvantage" (Phipps 2007).

The results and findings of this study may have broader implications to those working for positive social change in other social institutions such as race- and class-based efforts to eliminate educational inequalities and affirmative action programs to address gender and race inequality in the workplace and in the science disciplines. Public policy is one step in the direction of addressing the problem of social inequality. However, strategies for broad-based change must also consider the power of agency to be both structurally transformative as well as structurally reproductive as influenced by cultural ideologies.

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