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To hold and to discipline : a Winnicottian and Foucauldian examination of adolescent athletics through the case of Friday night lights

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical study examined the impact of organized team sports participation on adolescent psychosocial functioning and development. Theoretical concepts were illustrated with examples present in the high school football themed television series, *Friday Night Lights*. Winnicottian theories were used to explain how athletics could facilitate adolescent development and be psychologically reparative for adolescents who experienced early childhood caregiver failures. In contrast, Foucauldian concepts were applied to demonstrate how disciplinary mechanisms in sports may augment the effects of internalized oppression for adolescents of color and economically marginalized adolescents. The study explored the possible impact of sports-based interventions for youth, cautioning social workers to consider the holding and disciplinary mechanisms that may occur in sports contexts when working with adolescent athletes or making referrals to sports programs, especially when in practice with adolescents from oppressed populations.

TO HOLD AND TO DISCIPLINE:

A WINNICOTTIAN AND FOUCAULDIAN EXAMINATION OF ADOLESCENT

ATHLETICS THROUGH THE CASE OF *FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS*

A project based upon an independent investigation,
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

In an episode of the hit television series about a high school football team, *Friday Night Lights* character Brian 'Smash' Williams leads his teammates in a chant before an important game. He shouts, "Whose house?" and the team members shout back, "Our house!" (Carpenter & Harris, Episode 15, 2007). The message is clear, the team serves a powerful function in the lives of the players, potentially as a supplement to other sites for socialization and development (i.e. the family, the school). Yet, it is unclear from current literature why some adolescents experience positive effects and some experience negative effects as a result of their sports participation. This study asks the question: what are the conceptual reasons for positive and negative effects on adolescent development as a result of organized sports participation? Additionally, how can social work practitioners understand the origins of these effects and create best practices for working with adolescent clients in and out athletic contexts?

To explore these questions further, this study will analyze the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation through two contrasting theoretical lenses. While not previously utilized in this area of research, the psychological concepts put forth by Donald Winnicott will be applied to adolescent athletics. Specifically, the Winnicottian concepts of the *holding environment* and the *potential space* for *transitional phenomena* will be shown to be useful in understanding how sports participation may aid and facilitate adolescent psychosocial development.

In contrast to the theoretical justification for sport's benefits for adolescents, Michel Foucault's concepts of *disciplinary matrices* and their production of *docile bodies* will be demonstrated in the athletic context. With these theories, the study will explore how discipline within sports may contribute to adolescents' automatic docility and internalized oppression for marginalized youth. In the following chapters, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation will be examined through these two lenses, using case material examples from the fictional high school football television show, *Friday Night Lights.*

Social work values dictate that considering individuals systemically is key to a comprehensive understanding of their biopsychosocial contexts, which is a prerequisite for providing appropriate support and enabling individual empowerment (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). In keeping with these social work values, when assessing an adolescent in their environment, considering the consequences of athletic participation may be useful for case formulation. Questions of the nature and impact of sports participation on development must be addressed for clinical social workers in practice with the adolescent population.

Recent data on youth athletic participation indicates that the majority of adolescents in the U.S. play sports. One study demonstrates that 58% of adolescents participated in at least one team sport in 2011 and that sports participation has risen steadily since 1999 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Another study found that 3 in 4 adolescents are involved in team sports (Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, 2011). In the U.S. there are roughly 35 million youth under age 18 who are involved in organized athletics (Micheli & Purcell, 2007). Considering the ubiquitous presence of team sports in U.S. high schools, examining therapeutic effects, negative consequences, socialization, and identity development associated with sports participation is highly relevant to any clinical social work practice with adolescents.

The messages concerning athletic participation and its impact on adolescents are varied. Advocates of sports programs have proposed, "[T]hat sports are an excellent medium to engage youth and foster positive youth development" (Perkins & Noam, 2007, p. 76). Critiquing this stance, sports sociologist Jay Coakley (2011) writes, "This neoliberal approach to development is perpetuated by anecdotes and unsystematic observations that uncritically support the evangelistic promise that sport participation produces positive development among young people" (p. 306). Whatever the perspective on their value, it cannot be disputed that sports have a large presence in U.S. society and within this society's youth culture. Discussing the role athletics play in American life, Edwards (1973) writes, "[S]port is a social institution which has primary functions in disseminating and reinforcing the values regulating behavior and goal attainment and determining acceptable solutions to problems in the secular sphere of life" (p. 90).

Considering the prevalence of adolescent sports participation and its place within American culture, it would behoove social work practitioners to examine sport's impact on adolescents being served. Yet, there is a dearth of social work literature touching upon sports participation and its impact on adolescent psychosocial functioning and development. A reasonable review of the literature has indicated that the fields of psychology and sociology have examined this issue primarily. While a great deal of literature exists attempting to quantify various positive and negative effects of sports participation, there has been little attention paid to the theoretical underpinnings of adolescent sports participation (Busseri, Costain, Campbell, Rose-Krasnor, & Evans, 2011; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011; Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012; Snyder, Martinez, Bay, Parsons, Sauers, & McLeod, 2010).

In working with adolescents, social workers are likely to encounter the topic of sports, either in relation to their client or to those in their client's social environment. Some studies have indicated that involvement in sports has the potential therapeutic effects of vigorous exercise, peer supports, positive adult role models (coaches and involved parents), increased feelings of competency, and structure for leisure time (Busseri et al., 2011; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012; Snyder, Martinez, Bay, Parsons, Sauers, & McLeod, 2010). A study by Busseri et al. (2011) of late adolescents demonstrated that those who participated in sports had higher levels of interpersonal identity achievement than non-athletes of the same age. Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) explored what adolescents learn through organized youth activities. The results indicated that adolescents who participated in sports scored higher on measures of self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skills than adolescents who participated in non-athletic activities. Riley and Anderson-Butcher (2012) interviewed parents of youth who participated in sports-based youth development programs and the interviewees reported positive changes in their child's affect, increases in pro-social behaviors, and improved family dynamics. Snyder et al. (2010) studied the physical and emotional health outcomes of adolescent athletes in contrast to non-athletes. They discovered that the athletes scored higher on scales for sport and physical functioning, social functioning, mental health, happiness, and emotional well-being.

With these possible therapeutic effects of athletic involvement, it is alluring to encourage athletics as a coping behavior for adolescent clients. Yet, empirical data has shown potential negative effects from sports participation such as increased stress, injury, aggression, binge drinking, peer harassment, as well as the restrictive effects of social control and gender

socialization associated with sports (Denham, 2010; Huang, Cherek, & Lane, 1999; Miller et al, 2005, 2006, 2007).

In a series of studies (2005, 2006, 2007), Miller et al. explored the negative side of sports participation, finding increased delinquency, binge drinking, and violence in those athletes who identified as "jocks." Huang, Cherek, and Lane (1999) studied aggression in athletes, discovering increased aggressive response in those who played high-contact sports over those who played low-contact sports. These studies were unable to explain where violent or aggressive behavior in athletes originates. Miller proposed that these negative effects had more to do with a "jock" identity, which was aligned with hegemonic masculinity, than with actual sports participation. After a reasonable review of the literature, the empirical findings have been mixed and theoretical perspectives underpinning these studies have not been fully examined.

This study seeks to contribute to the current literature by exploring adolescent sports participation through contrasting theoretical lenses with the hope of furthering understanding of the psychological mechanisms that cause sports participation to create positive or negative outcomes for individual adolescents. The next chapter will present the methodology for this study, exploring the strengths, weaknesses, and biases inherent in the design. Following this, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation will be examined in depth, using current empirical and theoretical literature on the topic. Next, Winnicottian and Foucauldian theories will be explored and their relevance to adolescent sports participation will be addressed. Finally, the contrasting theoretical lenses will be applied to the phenomenon and recommendations will be made for social work practice and further research.

CHAPTER II

Methodology

This study is concerned with the conceptual reasons for positive and negative effects on adolescent development as a result of organized sports participation. An additional aim of the study is to address how social work practitioners can understand the origins of these effects and create best practices for working with adolescent clients inside and outside of athletic contexts. This chapter will outline the methodological approach of the study, beginning with an overview of each theoretical conceptualization employed and an explanation of how these theories will be applied. Next, brief definitions of terms used will be presented. In addition, the use and justification of this study's case material will be explored. Following the presentation of theoretical orientation, this chapter will address potential author biases, as well as strengths and limitations of the methodological design.

Conceptual Frameworks

Within the current literature on adolescent sports participation, the theoretical frameworks informing research have been inconsistently addressed. Perhaps due to the specificity of the topic, there is no 'theory of adolescent athletics' that emerges in the literature. Some studies utilize sociological theories that are present in sports studies scholarship (Cole, 1996; Dagkas & Quarmby, 2012; Mennesson, 2012; Messner, 2011; Miller, 2009; Pike, 2007; Pringle & Hickey, 2010) and some use adolescent developmental theory or psychological theory to explore the adolescents involved in their research (Busseri et al., 2011; Caldwell, Kleiber, &

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Shaw, 1995; Denham, 2009; Houle, Brewer, & Kluck, 2010; Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). Theoretical orientation can shape the design of research and current research primarily displays two unconnected theoretical orientations (adolescent psychology and sociology of sport). Therefore, it is understandable that the literature has produced varied and inconsistent findings, considering the differing theoretical frameworks of these studies. In applying concepts from each school of thought, this study aims to deepen the theoretical understanding of adolescent development in an organized team sport context.

This study intends to use a social theorist often incorporated into sociological studies and a psychodynamic theorist not previously applied to this topic in combination in order to develop a stronger foundation for future social work research regarding adolescents in athletic contexts. The selected social theorist is Michel Foucault, whose work has contributed greatly to a plethora of academic fields including sociology, political science, philosophy, psychology, and social work (Bevir, 2011; Brennan, 2009; Garrity, 2010; Power, 2011).

Foucauldian theories. While Foucault's work encompasses a range of ideas concerning power, knowledge, modernity, oppression, and discourse, for this study the focus will be on salient concepts described in *Discipline & Punish* (1975). In this work, Foucault analyzes the use of discipline and punishment as a means of controlling the populace. He follows the history of punishment of deviants by the sovereign in early societies as an overt display of power. Later, Foucault explains the evolution of power in modern societies from public punishment as a way to enforce obedience to controlling people through the instillation of discipline in social institutions. Foucault uses examples of discipline evident in monastic life, factories, schools, and the military (Foucault, 1975). These examples are social institutions, the definition of which can be extended to include sports. Given this understanding of sport as a social institution, the

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athletic context will be examined as a potential site for disciplinary matrices, defined as techniques of control and regimentation that exist within social institutions.

The second Foucauldian concept to be utilized is the *docile body*, a self-supervising subject who has introjected the disciplining of their mind and body via social institutions and has become equally productive and obedient. Foucault explains that those with power (i.e. political and economic leaders) do not have to enforce their power through pre-modern spectacles of punishment as the disciplinary mechanisms of social institutions (i.e. schools, the military, and churches) train people to maintain their own obedience and docility (Foucault, 1975). This concept will be applied to an adolescent athletic context to explore how disciplinary matrices in organized team sports may hinder adolescent development by creating docile bodies.

Winnicottian theories. Contrasting and complementing the social theory, this study will use the psychological theories of D.W. Winnicott. Known as an eminent thinker in the psychological field of Object Relations, Winnicott contributed greatly to modern psychodynamic theory with his understanding of infancy, the importance of the parent-child dyad, and how early childhood experiences affect an individual's capacity to develop as an adult (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Flanagan (2008) writes, "Winnicott was especially interested in the capacity to be together as a prerequisite for the ability to be alone and to enjoy solitude" (p. 129). This study will use Winnicott's concepts of the *holding environment* and the *transitional phenomena* as it applies to organized team sports. Winnicott originally defined these concepts as key factors in infant development, emerging in the therapist and client dyad as well. For this study, these concepts will be used outside of their original contexts relating to infant development (Winnicott, 1971).

The term *holding environment* refers to the protective experience that a caregiver provides for an infant so that this emerging person may develop an initial sense of safety and security (Winnicott, 1971). Mitchell and Black (1995) write that a holding environment is, "[A] physical and psychical space within which the infant is protected without knowing he is protected, so that very obliviousness can set the stage for the next spontaneously arising experience" (p. 126). Winnicott also believed that this *holding environment* should be reproduced in therapy so that the client may experience a sense of safety and security, which facilitates therapeutic work (Flanagan, 2008). In this study, the term is applied to a sports context, specifically locating possible *holding environments* in the sports team, the stadium, the locker room, the rules and structure of the game. In each of these aspects of organized team sports there is the potential for physical or psychical holding.

The second Winnicottian concept used in this study is *transitional phenomena.* This term references the slow interweaving of objective reality with subjective omnipotence for the developing infant. In this protected space, the child could explore the world and still retain some of the sense that they are omnipotent (Winnicott, 1971). Mitchell and Black (1995) write, "To the child's experience of subjective omnipotence is eventually added an experience of objective reality. The latter does not replace the former, but rather exists alongside or in dialectical relation to it" (p. 127). In this study the concept of *transitional phenomena* is extended to encompass organized team sports. As Winnicott originally defined this concept as a bridge between the real and unreal, sports becomes another form of this in which games can be a transitional space to play with subjective omnipotence and objective reality. Preparation, practice, and the actions contained in sports are analogous to adult experiences of work, warfare, and societal participation, yet they do not exist in a purely symbolic realm. It is an experience

that is both real and unreal. In the following chapters, it will be argued that the transitional phenomena in sports contexts facilitate psychological growth for adolescents, allowing a play space for the adolescent to move towards maturity and adulthood.

In this theory, Winnicott also introduces the term *object usage* in which the child uses the object (the caregiver) and in learning that the object survives this usage and is not destroyed, the child begins to understand the existence of others, the limits of their own omnipotence, and comes to tolerate their own aggressive feelings (Winnicott, 1971). Within the *transitional phenomena* of sports, the destruction of the competitor does not result in any actual permanent destruction. The defeated player survives their defeat much like the caregiver survives being used by the infant and thus the player's destructive impulses can be titrated.

Winnicott's concepts will be applied to the phenomena of adolescent organized sports in order to illustrate the potential therapeutic effects of sports on adolescent development. Foucault's theories of discipline will be used in contrast to Winnicott as a critique of sports as a hegemonic force, instilling consent to domination through sport's techniques of disciplining the body.

Definition of Terms

Adolescence. As this study aims to examine the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation, it is essential to provide definitions of adolescence and sports participation as they are used in this inquiry. For the purposes of this study, *adolescent* refers a person between childhood and adulthood and is limited to the ages of thirteen to nineteen, corresponding roughly to the years in which a person typically attends high school in the United States. Definitions of adolescence vary, with wider or narrower age ranges depending upon the source (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). The Oxford English Dictionary describes adolescence as, "The period

following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult" (OED Online, 2013). The biological, psychological, and sociological aspects of adolescence will be explored further in the following chapter.

Sports participation. In this study the phrase *sports participation* will be used interchangeably with the terms *athletics*, *organized sports,* and *team sports*. Broadly, sports may be defined as, "physical contests pursued for the goals and challenges they entail" (Guttmann, Maguire, Rowe, & Thompson, 2013, p. 1). This study uses a narrower definition of sports participation, where the use of the term implies that the adolescent involved is participating in organized team sports. The specificity of this term is due in part to the psychological mechanisms discussed in this study. An adolescent who participates in sports that are not organized (i.e. pick-up basketball game among friends) or not team oriented (i.e. golf) may not experience the same beneficial and negative psychological effects as an adolescent who participates in organized team sports (i.e. interscholastic baseball). Without an adult coach and peer teammates, the adolescent is not exposed to the same *holding environment* and *disciplinary matrices* as an adolescent engaged in organized team sports.

Social institutions. This term will be used throughout the study as underpinning the argument that organized sports may create *docile bodies*, obedient and productive subjects, is the assertion that sport is a social institution. Seumas Miller (2012) explains, "[C]ontemporary sociologists use the term to refer to complex social forms that reproduce themselves such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems" (p.1). Social institutions have rules, norms, rituals, and organizational systems embedded within them (Edwards, 1973). Adolescent team sports as an example of a social institution will be discussed more completely in the next chapter.

Case Material

In the following chapters, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation will be examined through the theoretical lenses of the Winnicottian *holding environment* and *transitional phenomena* as well as the Foucauldian concepts of *disciplinary practices* and the production of *docile bodies*. These theoretical concepts will be further illustrated through the case material present in the popular narratives of the television show *Friday Night Lights*. This show depicts life in a small town in Texas where high school football is central to the economic and social culture. The five season television series is based off of a movie and non-fiction book of the same name. The show received critical accolades, multiple Emmy awards, and a small but devoted fan base, averaging 6.1 million viewers in the first season (ABC Medianet, 2008; NBC Universal, 2012).

While the show is a work of fiction based off of fact, its ethnographic style provides the opportunity to clarify concepts examined in this study. The original ethnography, which the show is based upon, was produced by a journalist studying the culture of high school football (Bissinger, 2001). This style remains in the show's emphasis on a group of individuals from a third person observer perspective (Berg et al., 2006-2011). The show follows the adolescents on and off the field, incorporating some of the original stories from the non-fiction book. While it is impossible to measure how realistic the show's characters and scenarios are, the un-narrated third person style and connection to non-fiction roots make this fictional television series useful as case material.

An additional reason for selecting *Friday Night Lights* as case material is its depiction of the culturally ubiquitous tropes of high school football. This sport was chosen due to its high status and popularity among adolescents, particularly males (Lebovitz, 2006; Miller, 2009). The

focus on narratives of football is based on the belief that the popularity of these narratives creates influence in most other arenas of high school sports and thus, can be generalized in a somewhat limited way. The following chapters will use selected anecdotes from the case material to elucidate the theoretical constructs presented.

Author Biases

The potential biases inherent in this study reside primarily in my social identity, cultural lens, and experience with organized team sports. As a White American, I have little knowledge of how sports functions outside of the United States. Media exposure has shaped my cultural lens that sees primarily American organized team sports, which are male dominated. This shapes my choice to use *Friday Night Lights* as case material as it depicts the culturally ubiquitous tropes of high school football. I was not an adolescent athlete and my recent exposure to student athletes has been mostly through my clinical internship in a high school. While having an outsider perspective may be helpful, it also means that my knowledge is less personal and nuanced than a researcher with an athletic background.

Strengths and Limitations of the Methodological Design

The proposed study has various strengths and limitations, many of which have been touched on previously. The theoretical design of the study allows for an analysis of conceptual frameworks that have shaped the direction of previous research as well as creating a space for reflection on possible empirical designs in future research. As social work is a field that draws from multiple disciplines to form its knowledge base, a strength of this design is the incorporation of psychological and social theory in an attempt to add to the current discourse with the uniquely social work lens of clinical mindedness within an understanding of larger social systems (Reamer, 2006). While there are strengths to this design, the study is limited by

its theoretical nature, which does not allow for generalizability. This limitation may be understandable when one considers the need to reassess current empirical trends in order to form new theoretical frameworks before pursuing new empirical data. A final limitation of this study is that the case material utilized refers to male adolescent experience only. Many previous and current researchers have studied gender differences and female experiences in sports contexts (Caldwell, Kleiber, & Shaw, 1995; Dishman et al., 2006; Malcom, 2006; Mennesson, 2012; Messner, 2011; Miller et al, 2006; Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). This line of inquiry is so complex that it can be understood to be its own field within sport studies. Unfortunately, this study is limited in its scope and thus will not be attending to gendered aspects of sports participation.

The intention of this study is to further the depth of theoretical conceptions of adolescents in sports contexts. Due to the vast range of experiences adolescents may have in athletic environments, this study does not expect produce definitive conclusions that can be universally applied to the topic. Rather, it is expected that the study will illuminate potentially therapeutic as well as harmful aspects of sports participation outside of what has been previously studied. It is with these potential results that the study aims to develop suggestions for further inquiries as well as theoretical perspectives to guide practice with adolescents.

Currently, this study hypothesizes that there are certain beneficial and therapeutic effects available for adolescent athletes through the psychological factors of the athletic experience of a *holding environment* as well as a space for *transitional phenomena.* While the potentially therapeutic effects of these factors are hypothesized to be race and gender-blind, the deleterious effects of sports discipline's creation of *docile bodies* affect adolescents who already experience oppression as a multiplier of that oppression. Literature exists that promotes the concept that

sports provide cultural and social capital for athletes of color (Levine, 2010). This study

hypothesizes that the potential gain in capital exists within a framework of further subjugation

via the socializing factors of sports discipline. As discussed in Cole's (1996) study of sports-

based youth development programs being used as a deterrent for crime and delinquency, there is

a presupposition on the part of advocates for these programs that a dangerous racial other exists

who must be channeled into a disciplined institution such as athletics in order to protect

dominant society. What non-dominant youth may gain in capital by way of sports participation

may be tempered by the effects of sport's creation of *docile bodies*, subjects who have been

trained to accept subjugation.

In the following chapter, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation will be

examined in depth. Adolescence and organized sports will be explored further, with a review

and critique of recent literature concerning the effects of athletic participation on adolescent

development.

CHAPTER III

Phenomenon

Developing an understanding of adolescents in the context of organized sports requires an examination of adolescence and athletics separately prior to assessing how these two factors combine. There is a great deal of research into these respective areas, with journals dedicated to studies on adolescence and studies on sport. While less literature concerning adolescent athletes exists, many authors have tackled aspects of sport's effects on adolescents from a broad range of angles. This chapter will first explore adolescence, physiological components of development, and psychosocial theories of the American adolescent experience. The second portion of this chapter will examine sports, its effects of mental health, and the sociology of American athletics. The third section of this chapter will address adolescent sports participation through recent empirical studies and theoretical literature. In the final part of this chapter, popular narrative case material to be used illustratively in the following chapters will be presented.

Adolescence

The time period in life known as adolescence can be defined in many ways, chronologically, biologically, culturally, and psychologically. Yet, much like old age, the definitions may shift, can be understood subjectively, and cannot be conclusively categorized. For the purpose of this study, adolescence will be examined through the lens of American culture. This transitional age between childhood and adulthood is characterized by pubertal physiological changes, brain development, identity formation, and psychological processes

related to individuation, identification with others, and changes in social role (Adams &

Berzonsky, 2003). These characteristics vary in chronological onset, but for the purposes of this

study the years of adolescence range from thirteen to nineteen, corresponding with average ages

of high school attendance (Psychology Today, 2012).

   Physiological development. The biological component of adolescence involves shifts in

hormonal makeup, sexual maturation, overall growth, and brain development (Archibald,

Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Bradshaw, Goldweber, Fishbein, & Greenberg, 2012). The

timeline for physiological development is variable, with the inevitable end result of adult bodies,

fully formed brains, and the capacity for reproduction. In the mean time, adolescence's

trademark turbulence may be partially explained by biological changes. Synaptic growth and

neural plasticity are typical of this stage of development. Bradshaw et al. (2012) write:

> Changes in structural and functional connectivity, as well as increased dopaminergic
>
> activity in pathways linking limbic, striatal, and prefrontal areas, have been associated
>
> with changes in reward-directed neural activity. Developmental shifts in the activity of
>
> reward systems relative to cognitive controls during adolescence have implications for
>
> increases in risk taking (p. S42).

Discussing the neurocognitive aspects of the adolescent experience, Spear (2000) notes

that during adolescence, the neocortex undergoes overproduction and subsequent pruning of

synapses. Spear hypothesizes that this pruning is evolved as a way to adapt to one's specific

environmental stressors. This specialization on a neurocognitive level may produce the negative

outcome of reducing options in the future as this is the "use it or lose it" time of synaptic

development.

In addition to rapid brain development, adolescents undergo a myriad of physical changes as a result of puberty. Hormonal shifts, development of secondary sex characteristics, increases in height and weight, and attainment of reproductive capacity all occur during this time period. Studies of the effects of hormonal changes have indicated that they are partially responsible for increases in negative affect, expressions of anger, and variance in emotions for adolescents. Aside from the psychological effects of hormonal alterations, adolescents must also cope with their physical maturation in a social context. This may include ridicule or praise by peers based on pace of pubertal development as well as changing social roles when adolescents begin to physically resemble adults and are treated accordingly (Archibald, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Psychological theories of adolescence. Early theorists of adolescent psychology focused on the sexual and aggressive drives and their recapitulation during puberty. Sigmund Freud labeled this stage of development as the *genital phase*, when earlier conflicts would re-emerge with the physically developed body of the adolescent. Anna Freud refined this theory with her own suppositions that the adolescent has a very strong id and must develop new ego defenses in order to maintain the balance. Additionally, she viewed adolescence as a time in which the conflicts and desires of the first five years of life are revisited (Frankel, 1998).

Building off earlier psychoanalytic theories, Erik Erikson created his model of life stage development in which each section of life had a developmental task to be completed. During adolescence, the psychological task is labeled *identity vs. identity diffusion*. Erikson theorized that the child who developed many identifications with others must now compile, prune, and resynthesize these identifications into a composite identity. Erikson (1975) discusses how this process of developing an ego identity takes place:

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Whether or not a given adolescent's newly acquired capacities are drawn back into infantile conflict depends to a significant extent on the quality of the opportunities and rewards available to him in his peer clique, as well as on the more formal ways in which society at large invites a transition from social play to work experimentation, and from rituals of transit to final commitments: all of which must be based on an implicit mutual contract between the individual and society. (p. 192)

This stage of development was elaborated upon by James Marcia (1980), who created the identity status model. This model espouses that there are four identity statuses adolescents may occupy: *diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium*, and *achievement*. Identity *diffusion* is a state in which one has not explored any alternatives to roles, beliefs, and behaviors modeled in their upbringing, nor has one made any commitments to particular beliefs, lifestyles, or roles. *Foreclosure* is the state in which one has made commitments to an identity but one has not explored alternatives. *Moratorium* refers to a state of exploration without any commitments. *Achievement* occurs after one has explored alternatives and then made commitments to particular aspects of one's identity. Adolescents may move between these statuses, ideally ending in identity achievement. Understanding the biological, psychological, and social flux of adolescence is imperative when considering the effects of other factors, such as sports participation.

Sports

The organized athletic contest, commonly known as sport, occupies a large section of American culture. Television channels, magazines, radio stations, and countless other forms of media are devoted to sports. Industry, academic field, and national obsession, the topic of

athletics is sprawling and vast. Scholars of sports studies have attempted to understand the sociological implications of the cultural dominance of sports.

Beisser (1977) writes of the psychosocial context of sports, claiming that in U.S. society, we have lost the majority of our rituals and thus create ritual in sports. Through formal and informal rules, specialized costumes, dates for play and rest, and interaction of audience and performers, sport becomes a ritualized spectacle. Edwards, another sports scholar, theorizes that sport is a social institution, explaining, "[I]nstitutions 'define problems and approved solutions' and thereby 'channelize' human experiences along certain lines while ignoring or prohibiting other possibilities" (1973, p. 84). Alderman (1974) discussing the original theory put forth by John Loy in 1968, emphasizes how sport as a social institution contributes to societal control. He writes, "[Social institutions] have the function of organizing, facilitating, and regulating human behavior along those directions which the society at-large deems desirable" (1974, p. 62). As a social institution, Edwards posits that sports assist in this social control by expressing the values and mores of society. These values intrinsic in sports are discipline, competition, fortitude, physical fitness, mental fitness, character, loyalty, altruism, religiosity, and nationalism. Edwards claims that these values are conveyed through ritual, ceremony, and symbolism, resulting in a, "secular, quasi-religious institution" (1973, p. 90).

Contemporary social theorists also explore this concept of the secularized religion of sports. Yamane, Mellies, and Blake (2010), discuss the idea of *Muscular Christianity* in which athleticism became intertwined with Christianity in the U.S as a means to convert more people to the religion. Incorporating athletic facilities into the YMCA was one of these early efforts. This practice of using sports as a hook to entice people into programs with other agendas still occurs

today in the form of sports-based youth development programs (Coakley, 2011; Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003; Perkins & Noam, 2007).

In addition to sport's power as a ritual, a social institution, a secular religion, and a medium for carrying larger messages, a good deal of literature has investigated the effects sports can have on mental health. Dunn, Madhukar, and O'Neal (2001) systematically reviewed studies of the effect of physical activity on symptoms of depression and anxiety. Their review of thirty-seven empirical studies indicates that physical exercise is linked to a reduction in depression and anxiety. Asztalos et al. (2009) attempted to explore differences in types of physical activity and its associations with stress and well-being. The data indicated that recreational sports were inversely related to participants' reported level of stress and distress, more so than any other physical activity. Winjndaele et al. (2007) produced similar results in their cluster analysis of physical activity, social support, stress, and coping in Flemish adults. The analysis demonstrated a link between sports participation, lower stress, and higher social support, which was not replicated with other types of physical activity. These studies indicate a positive correlation between emotional well-being and sports participation, but they do not prove causality.

The exact mechanisms that may create psychological benefits through sport have been continually debated. Some authors point to the neurobiological effects of physical activity, such as the release of endorphins and increases in the neurotransmitters serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine (Donaghy, 2007; ten Have, de Graaf, & Monshouwer, 2011). Other research has focused on the psychological mechanisms of sport's effect on mental health. Carless and Douglas (2008) interviewed men with mental illness who were engaged in sports programs. They discovered narrative themes around taking action, a sense of achievement, and creating social connection in these men's stories of sports participation. They argued that these new

positive narratives contributed to the participants' recoveries by helping them re-story their lives away from the dominant illness narrative. In a similar study, Crone and Guy (2008) conducted a focus group of mental health service users who participated in sports therapy, seeking their perspectives on how sports therapy affected their mental health. The service users reported perceived benefits in the form of improved self-esteem, mood, energy, and alertness. They acknowledged that it helped with anxiety and that they were motivated to participate for both physiological and social reasons. The social aspects of sports participation may be a crucial factor in understanding what separates sports from other types of physical activity, such as solo exercise, household chores, or manual labor. The literature on adolescent athletics further illuminates these factors.

Adolescent Athletes

Quantifying adolescent sports participation proves to be difficult, with numbers varying depending on the source. A recent study indicates that three million females and four million males play sports in high school (Clark, 2011). U.S. Census data from 2010 estimate the adolescent population (ages 15-19) to be roughly twenty-one million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Danish, Taylor, and Fazio (2003) report that twelve percent of adolescents participate in interscholastic sports. A recent survey of American team sport participation reports that three out of four adolescents play an organized team sport (Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, 2011). Snyder et al (2010) state that roughly thirty million youth participate in sports yearly. Other estimates for youth sports are higher, with thirty-five million participants reported (Micheli & Purcell, 2007). While the numbers show variation, it can be understood that adolescent sports participation is a widespread and significant phenomenon.

Literature on adolescent athletic participation has primarily focused on positive and negative effects of sports and how sports are used as an intervention in youth programs. The findings of current research have often been mixed, sometimes contradictory and are rarely able to determine causality. Given the gravity of sport's cultural domain and the turbulence of adolescent development, the complexity of the discourse is understandable.

Potential outcomes of sports participation. The positive and negative effects of sports participation for adolescents have been debated, with some areas showing general consistency across empirical literature. Higher self-esteem and self-concept has been demonstrated in athletes versus non-athletes (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997; Dishman et al., 2006; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011; Riley & Anderson-Butcher, 2012; Snyder et al., 2010). Thus far, it has not been possible to clarify the nature of the relationship between self-esteem and sports, whether sports participation increases self-esteem or those with higher self-esteem select sports as their activity of choice.

Researchers have put forth various theories concerning the mechanism of sport's effect on adolescent self-esteem. Brandl-Bredenbeck and Brettschneider (1997) hypothesize that their findings regarding higher self-concept in American athletes versus German athletes or non-athletes of either nationality was due in part to American societal ideals of *Muscular Christianity* translating to a favoring of athletics. Thus, as the ethos of *Muscular Christianity* became internalized on national level, the choice to participate in sports became the good, morally right choice, possibly leading to higher self-concept for those who chose it.

Dishman et al. (2006) propose that sports participation enhances self-esteem through the mediating factor of increased physical self-concept. They define physical self-concept as, "[A] hierarchical construct comprised of related subcomponents such as strength, body fat,

endurance/fitness, sports competence, coordination, health, appearance, and flexibility" (2006, p. 397). Theoretically, physical activity enhances endurance, coordination, health, strength, and other subcomponents, leading to higher physical self-concept, which then improves self-esteem.

Kort-Butler and Hagewen (2011) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects of extracurricular activity involvement on adolescent self-esteem. Those who participated in sports had higher self-esteem than adolescents who participated in non-athletic clubs only or no extracurricular activities. They report that this higher self-esteem may be due to having multiple domains in which to increase feelings of competence outside of the academic environment. The authors explain, "By implication, if an adolescent has fewer contexts in which to validate specific self-concepts, general self-esteem may be more vulnerable to negative appraisals" (p. 570). Interestingly, while athletes showed high self-esteem at the start of the study, non-athletes and non-participants in any activities achieved relatively similar levels of self-esteem by young adulthood, discounting the theory that sport's potential effect on self-esteem has long-term value (Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011).

In addition to research into self-esteem, multiple studies have shown positive associations between athletic participation, academic achievement, and school attachment (Browne & Francis, 1993; Crosnoe, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Levine, 2010). While causality has not been proven in any of these studies, researchers have hypothesized that greater school attachment and academic achievement is facilitated by the rules requiring academic achievement to participate in sports (Miller, 2005), the college trajectory introduced by potential athletic scholarships (Levine, 2010), or through peer-group supports (Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Aside from self-esteem and academic achievement, authors have reported associations between sports and other positive outcomes, though these have not been as consistently

replicated. Snyder et al. (2010) studied adolescent athletes in comparison to non-athletes, producing data that indicated the athletes had higher physical and social functioning, higher mental health scores, and higher reported happiness than non-athletes. Shakib et al. (2011) researched perceptions of social status in relation to athletic participation, finding that regardless of race, gender or socio-economic status, athletes were more likely to rate themselves as popular than non-athletes. Additionally, athletes and non-athletes both reported that sports participation was the primary factor in social status for males. Hansen, Larson and Dworkin (2003) assessed adolescents' self-reports of their experiences in organized activities. The adolescents involved in sports reported higher rates of learning experiences, self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and opportunities to develop physical skills in comparison to participants of other activities. Finally, while causality remains unclear, a negative correlation between sports participation and depressed mood was demonstrated in a study of adolescent girls (Gore, Farrell, & Gordon, 2001).

While research has indicated that there may be positive outcomes related to sports participation, negative factors are also associated with athletics. Multiple studies have demonstrated that athletes reported more binge drinking and substance abuse than non-athletes (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Jerry-Szpak & Brown, 1994; Terry-McElrath, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2011). Pike (2007) theorizes that this increase in substance use develops because of the collective risk-taking of the athletic context. She argues:

> Rather than serving as a space which is 'safe' for young people to engage in activities consistent with adult notions of childhood, it can become one where adolescents may subvert the imposed adult culture of innocence and where (underage) drinking and sexual activity can occur. Indeed, the possibility that sport offers excitement does not mean that

young people who value thrills will no longer be interested in alternative activities if they are involved in sport and they may even be encouraged by the potential excitement of collective risk taking in sporting environments. (p. 315)

Researchers have demonstrated associations between sport and higher rates of over-use injuries (Clark, 2011), physical pain and discomfort (Snyder et al., 2010), peer pressure and pressure from adults (Hansen, Larson & Dworkin, 2003), materialist and consumerist attitudes (Denham, 2009), and physical aggression outside of sports contexts (Huang, Cherek, & Lane, 1999; Kreager, 2007). Kleiber and Kirshnit (1991) claim that athletic involvement may lead to *identity foreclosure* due to the need for the adolescent athlete to make identity commitments at an early age. They also link this *identity foreclosure* to studies that show athletes to score higher on measures of conservatism and authoritarianism. However, research has been contradictory on this front. Caldwell, Kleiber, and Shaw (1995) demonstrated a positive association between athletic participation and identity development in adolescent athletes, but this was only for females and similar results were not produced with males. In addition, the data from a recent study by Busseri et al. (2011) seem to indicate that athletes are not more immature in their identity formation than non-athletes.

Sports sociologist, Kathleen Miller has explored these associated positive and negative factors by breaking down sports participation and identity. Miller's research has indicated that the negative factors appear to be aligned with a "jock" identity and the positive factors aligned with athletic involvement without a "jock" identity. Miller and her colleagues have demonstrated a positive correlation between jock identity and interpersonal violence (Miller et al., 2006), delinquency (Miller et al., 2007), risk of suicide attempt (Miller & Hoffman, 2009), and lower academic performance (Miller et al., 2005). While it may be helpful to understand the

different athletic experiences and their associations with positive or negative outcomes, how one becomes a "jock" or an athletic participant has not been studied. Therefore, as Pike (2007) writes, "[S]ports may be morally neutral, and may even provide a context and environment for deviancy and negative social values" (p. 313). It is possible that the neutrality of sports means that other factors may be involved in creating sports-based identities that are associated with negative or positive outcomes.

Sports-based interventions. While much of the literature concerning adolescent sports participation focuses on the effects of sports on participants, many authors have explored what happens when sports are harnessed for some particular use, namely sports-based youth development and sports-based crime prevention. Perkins and Noam define development programs as such, "Sports-based youth development programs are out-of-school-time programs that use a particular sport (for example, tennis, soccer, squash, baseball, or basketball) to facilitate learning and life skill development in youth" (2007, p. 75). Inherent in the design of these programs is the assumption that sports helps to build character (Coakley, 2011). The good character of an athlete has been described as one who shows courage, self-control, dignity, gallantry, and integrity (Chandler & Goldberg, 1990).

Coakley (2011) describes the believed mechanisms of sports-based development as either the 'fertilizer effect,' in which young people learn valuable life lessons through sport and then mature in socially desirable ways; the 'car wash effect,' in which at-risk youth have their poor character cleansed by the salutary sports experiences; or the 'guardian angel effect,' in which sports programs inspire youth and provide them with social capital with which to exceed their original circumstances. In Riley and Anderson-Butcher's (2012) study of parents' perceptions of the effects of their child's participation in a sports-based youth development program, the parents

reported that their children had increased pro-social behaviors (fertilizer effect), difficulties in family communication had decreased (car wash effect), and they were now exposed to college and would possibly be inspired by this exposure (guardian angel effect).

There have been many claims that sport-based programs can be effective ways to reach at-risk youth (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003; Gerber, 1999; Perkins & Noam, 2007). However, current research into the efficacy of these programs has produced mixed results, with studies showing beneficial effects having a high-risk of bias (Lubans, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2012). Contrary to claims that sports programs provide social capital for at-risk youth to increase their upward mobility, Coakley points to how the programs create social bonding without social bridging, meaning that demographically homogeneous youth bond with one another and do not create social capital by creating more diverse social networks (2011). Pike (2007) critiques the theoretical backing for policies that advocate sports-based programs to decrease adolescent involvement in sexual activity and other risk factors. She writes, "[I]t appears that there may be a tension between young peoples' search for self-actualization and attempts to regulate their behavior in the interests of social normality" (p. 315). While advocates of these programs emphasize the positive development over the regulatory nature of the intervention, the program design is meant to facilitate socially acceptable behaviors in a structured environment (Perkins & Noam, 2007). Pike (2007) elaborates on this critique:

> Recommendations for sport as an 'intervention' to reduce teenage sexual activity therefore appear to be consistent with an ongoing trend of 'healthism,' viewing participation in sport as a marker of an individual's capacity for valued self-control over their body, akin to a modern work ethic. (p. 316)

Webb (1969) studies how child's sport becomes professionalized as the young person ages and skill becomes valued over fairness. Much like Pike's (2007) analogy of self-mastery in sport as a modern work ethic, Webb proposes that the professionalization of play prepares the adolescent for economic productivity. He writes of moving from an emphasis on fairness and participation to a focus on skills and victory in sports, "[I]t is precisely this change which makes possible later effective participation in the economy" (1969, p. 163). This process is at work in sports-based youth development programs, fostering an emphasis on individual achievement that is translatable into capitalist economic structures (Coakley, 2011).

Sports-based youth development is the current terminology, with previous funding and policies focused on sports-based crime reduction interventions. Popular in the 1980s and 1990s, sports-based interventions were advocated as ways to reduce urban youth crime through structured, adult supervised activities. A prime example of this intervention was the Midnight Basketball programs that sought to reduce crime by allowing urban adolescents a safe (and policed) environment to play basketball at night, hypothetically creating an alternative to street crime behavior (Hartmann, 2012). What was not overtly stated was the implicit racial codification of these campaigns. Cole (1996) analyzes the racial imagery of Nike's P.L.A.Y. program, targeting urban youth through sports-based interventions. She explains that using the figure of basketball star Michael Jordan in contrast to urban gang violence helped reify existing racial constructions of African American males as either athletes or criminals and ignored the larger structural issues that contribute to these limited options. Cole writes:

In other words, the material conditions that shape the lives of urban youth and the African American inner-city communities (the effects of transnationalization, joblessness, and the defunding of social programs) are reterritorialized through *somatic identities*

classified, visualized, and essentialized (though always relational, contingent, and performative) through the practices of sport and gangs. (1996, p. 371)

Cole explains how the rise of sports interventions became popular due to the dominant cultural narrative of pathological African American families. She writes, "Sport is narrated as indispensable to community production and well-being as the figure of the coach is made to represent the sanctioned nurturing father-child relationship depicted as unavailable in the African American community" (1996, p. 370).

Coakley (2011) explores how the narrative of sports-based interventions differs depending upon the implicit racial target of the program. He explains that advocates for programs directed at youth of color tended to emphasize the inculcation of discipline and control in the participants. In contrast to this, Coakley writes:

Narratives used to support programs for young people from upper-middle income, predominantly White families were based on different ideas about positive development. Instead of emphasizing control and discipline, they highlighted achievement and upward mobility as developmental outcomes. (2011, p. 313)

In summary, the effects of sports participation on adolescent development are complicated, varied, and not entirely understood. Given the complexity of physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors related to athletic involvement in different contexts, the interplay with adolescent biological and psychosocial development may be especially volatile. Of particular interest is the use of sports in achieving specific developmental outcomes for adolescents, what are the purported reasons for these interventions, and what are the consequences for the adolescents involved. In considering adolescent sports participation throughout the following chapters, there will be continued emphasis on the differential impact of

sport's mechanisms on populations that experience racial and socioeconomic oppression in

contrast to those of the dominant group.

CHAPTER IV

Winnicottian Theories

This chapter will explore the psychological concepts of Donald Winnicott as they relate to adolescent sports participation, using case material examples present in *Friday Night Lights*. First, it is vital to the understanding of these concepts that the historical context and biographical information of Winnicott be reviewed. Following this brief overview, the reasoning for using Winnicottian theories will be presented. Lastly, the chapter will explore the key concepts of the *holding environment, transitional phenomena,* and *object usage* as they pertain to the psychological aspects of adolescent athletics, illustrating each concept with relevant case material.

Winnicott, His Context, and His Work

Donald Winnicott, a major contributor to the British Object Relations School of psychology, began his career as a pediatrician (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Winnicott's medical work provided him information on normal development in children and this helped shape his later contributions to psychoanalytic theory concerning the parent-infant dyad and the psychological effects of its functioning (Goldman, 1993). Following his curiosity about child development, Winnicott began the study of psychology in the 1920s (Phillips, 1988). Winnicott worked as a psychoanalyst throughout his life, practicing with children and adults, while maintaining consistent work as a pediatrician. These concurrent careers helped inform each other and developed his major psychological theories. Goldman (1993) writes of the influence

of his medical work, "Pediatric practice allowed Winnicott to carefully observe the somatic processes of children interacting with caretakers. This was the basis of his conclusion that mother and infant were a single unit" (p. xvi).

D.W. Winnicott developed as a psychoanalyst with the influences of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and his contemporaries, yet formed his own distinctive concepts apart from Freudian and Kleinian schools of thought (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Winnicott considered himself a Freudian and was trained by Klein, but differed greatly in his views on the child's psyche. Where Freud and Klein emphasized unconscious drives and fantasies in the child, Winnicott focused on the realities of the child's environment and presence of nurturing others who could facilitate the child's development (Goldman, 1993). Philips (1988) writes of the contrasts between Freud and Winnicott:

> In Freud's view man is divided and driven, by contradictions of his desire, into frustrating involvement with others. In Winnicott man can only find himself in relation with others, and in the independence gained through acknowledgement of dependence. For Freud, in short, man was the ambivalent animal; for Winnicott he would be the dependent animal, for whom development – the only 'given' of his existence – was the attempt to become 'isolated without being insulated.' (p. 7)

While Winnicott received tutelage from Melanie Klein, he differed from her in his insistence that real life interactions between the infant and the parent affected the infant's development. Whereas Klein was concerned with the fantasy world of the infant, Winnicott was interested in the dyad between infant and parent and how nurturance in this dyad promoted growth (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Winnicott remained unique in his theoretical constructions and did not align himself with either faction of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, instead

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belonging to the Middle Group, which did not follow Anna Freud or Melanie Klein (Rudnytsky, 1993). This lack of allegiance made Winnicott's career a difficult one, with teaching appointments denied and his work largely ignored until more recent decades (Goldman, 1993).

Why Winnicottian Theories?

In the previous chapter, the current literature on adolescent sports participation was reviewed. The phenomenon of adolescent athletic participation has been addressed by a wide range of authors hoping to understand sport's effects on adolescents. While a great deal of data exists concerning physical, academic, social, psychological, and cultural outcomes associated with adolescent sports participation, it remains important to address the theoretical underpinnings of these associations between participation and various outcomes. Brandl-Bredenbeck and Brettschneider (1997) discuss the need for theory:

> General theories provide a framework for observing, comparing and recording phenomena, and for classifying findings. They supply the criteria that allow common features and differences to be detected and interpreted. If a study does not have a concept based soundly on a specific theory, it is all but impossible to obtain more than purely chance results, descriptive observations and speculative interpretations. (p. 360)

While many of the studies reviewed in the previous chapter referenced theorists in their conceptualizations, Winnicott was not utilized by any of these authors. It is unclear why his concepts have not been applied to this area of study, but it is possible that Winnicott's emphasis on early childhood causes him to be overlooked when considering adolescent experience (Frankel, 1998). Regardless of the reasoning, Winnicott's absence from this realm of literature is unfortunate as his concepts are useful to the understanding of how the athletic environment may facilitate growth and positive development for the adolescent. Specifically, Winnicott's

theoretical constructions of the *holding environment*, the *potential space* for *transitional phenomena*, and *object usage* may be helpful in understanding how adolescent athletes experience beneficial psychological outcomes due to their sports participation.

Sport as a *Holding Environment*

Winnicott proposed that at the beginning of an infant's life, there is only the infant-parent dyad (Mitchell & Black, 1995). This is the state of absolute dependence that the child will slowly emerge from over time. Winnicott believed that for healthy development to take place, infants must have their needs met with an almost perfect adaptation by the parent in order to establish a sense of safety and trust. He stated that this nurturing primarily took place through holding and handling of the infant (Flanagan, 2008).

From this original conception of holding, Winnicott drew connections to the psychoanalytic space. Here, the therapist must hold the client in order to reestablish the client's sense of safety and security. This holding is not physical but is expressed in words, affect, and actions. Winnicott states that the act of holding, "often takes the form of conveying in words at the appropriate moment something that shows that the analyst knows and understands the deepest anxiety that is being experienced" (1965, p. 240). From these original concepts of the infant-parent and client-therapist dyads, the term *holding environment* emerges. Phillips (1988) writes, "For Winnicott, and those who were influenced by his work, psychoanalytic treatment was not exclusively interpretative, but first and foremost the provision of a congenial milieu, a 'holding environment' analogous to maternal care" (p. 11). The holding environment is one in which safety is created for the individual by another person (originally the caretaker or therapist). Modell (1993) notes that this safety is not simply external:

The holding environment suggests not only protection from the dangers without, but also

protection from the dangers within. For holding implies restraint, a capacity to hold the

child having a temper tantrum so that his aggressive impulses do not prove destructive to

either himself or the caretaker. (p. 276)

While this theory was developed for the settings of childhood and psychoanalysis, it can

be argued that the ameliorative effects of holding environments may be found elsewhere

(Mitchell & Black, 1995). In the context of sports, the adolescent may experience this

nurturance through multiple mechanisms. The possibility of holding is dependent on a number

of factors, but in optimal circumstances holding could occur in the relationship between the

player and the coach, within the larger team, and more abstractly, in the rules and structure of the

game.

The player and the coach. In an organized athletic context, there is always at least one

coach. The coach is an adult who typically trains the athletes, attempts to motivate them to

perform at their peak, provides strategy for play, and takes responsibility for the players (Boren,

2009).   The coach can create a holding environment for his players by being reliable,

maintaining safety, having consistent expectations, and showing kindness and care towards the

individuals he coaches, much as a parent does with a child (Mitchell & Black, 1995). This

possibility of holding is determined by the quality of the coach-player dyad.

In *Friday Night Lights*, the character of Coach Taylor is a capable and caring individual,

displaying optimal behavior for creating a holding environment. Coach Taylor expresses care

for his players through actions such as assisting them with college recruiters, advocating for

them when they have legal problems, visiting them in the hospital, giving rides, and dispensing

wisdom (Berg et al., 2006-2011). This care is rarely verbalized but the reliability and nurturance

is expressed in the coach's statement to his quarterback who was having family issues. Coach Taylor tells the player, "Listen to me. We're all family here. I'll do anything a can for you, you know that" (Heldens, Episode 11, 2007).

While the coach must provide nurturance and care towards his players, the safety of the holding environment requires restraint of the subject's destructive behaviors as well (Modell, 1993). The coach can provide this safety by setting standards of conduct and being attuned to players' aggressive drives. Coach Taylor exemplifies this in a speech to his team following the vandalism of their locker room by a rival team:

> I got to tell y'all something: I'm pissed at these boys from Arnett Mead. I know you're pissed too, but let's get one thing straight right now. This ends here. There's not going to be any retaliation. There's going to be no getting back. Rivalry week ends now. Tell you what we're going to do. We're going to take this energy we have and we're going to take this anger that we have and we're going to use it to kick their ass where it counts: on the field. (Ehrin, Episode 4, 2006)

The figure of the coach can create a holding environment for adolescent athletes if there is reliability, care, and the creation of internal and external safety. Transposing this concept originally designed for infant-parent and client-therapist dyads is perhaps understandable given the similarity of role and power dynamic inherent in the player-coach dyad (Boren, 2009). However, there is another potential mechanism for creating a holding environment in an athletic context and this mechanism does not possess the same inherent power dynamic of the previously mentioned dyads. This second mechanism is the team itself.

The player and the team. In the context of organized team sports, the individual player enters a larger association of players who are working together towards the same goal, namely

playing well and winning. The nature of the team creates the possibility of a holding

environment for the individual as mutual cooperation, shared identity, and the ensuring of each

other's safety can help the team as a whole while having beneficial effects for its individual

members (Carron & Shapcott, 2010). Winnicott (1971) writes of alternatives to family support

for adolescents:

> If the family is still there to be used it is used in a big way; and if the family is no longer
>
> there to be used, or to be set aside (negative use), then small social units need to be
>
> provided to contain the adolescent growth process. (p. 144)

The small social unit of the sports team has the possibility of creating a holding

environment to facilitate adolescent development if it can provide safety for the individual

player. In *Friday Night Lights*, multiple characters have family issues that require them to seek

support elsewhere, and for some that comes from the team. The team holds the individual by

creating a safe and mutually supportive environment where the individual is a part of a larger

whole and feels protected by his teammates (Berg et al., 2006-2011). During a practice, Coach

Taylor emphasizes this mutual protection in a speech to the players while they do an exercise of

carrying other players on their backs, "Let's go! Strength and stamina. One of your teammates

gets hurt, gets tired out there, you step in. You carry the weight. You give him a hand"

(Carpenter & Harris, Episode 15, 2007).

The players echo Coach Taylor's sentiment when quarterback Jason Street is injured and

the team rallies around him. After Jason is brought to the hospital, fellow team captain Smash

Williams leads the team in a prayer:

> Right now it's not really about who wins or loses, Father. We just all want to be with
>
> Street right now, God. We know that you work in mysterious ways and we just want to

send our spirit, our presence, our love just to heal him in whatever way, Lord. (Berg, Episode 1, 2006)

Prior to an important game, the coach and all the players come to visit Jason in the rehabilitation center. Smash Williams tells Jason, "Hey man, look, we just came by to say we love you. We're going to win for you" (Massett & Zinman, Episode 5, 2006). In a later episode when Jason is betrayed by a friend, the team tries to support him again. Jason's teammate tells him, "If there's one thing we don't allow, it's for someone to hit our quarterback. You know me and the guys always got your back. We're going to take care of this, man" (Thomas, Episode 9, 2006). Time after time, the emphasis is placed on the team as a cooperative unit. When Smash tells Coach Taylor he is going to just take care of himself and not ask anything of the team, the coach replies, "No, that's not what I want you to do. That's not what football is all about. You want to fly solo, you go run track" (Hudgins, Episode 14, 2007).

Winnicott theorized that the original site of the holding environment was within the family (Winnicott, 1971). Part of what makes the team a useful context for holding is that its construction is somewhat analogous to a family. The team emphasizes its shared identity with a team name, uniforms, motto, and designated spaces (locker room, practice area, stadium etc.) (Carron & Shapcott, 2010). Additionally, there are roles within a team (goalie, point guard, quarterback etc.) much like in a family. Insularity, team pride, and mutual protection have familial qualities as well.

In *Friday Night Lights*, the team displays all the previously mentioned qualities that have familial equivalents. The family bond between players is invoked in a speech by fullback Tim Riggins after the team wins a game:

Coach is always talking about one team and one heart. To be honest with you, I thought

it was stupid. Fact is, he's right. He's right. Everybody in this room knows where we

get our heart from (points at Jason Street). He's sitting right there. This ball belongs to

you. Please take it. I love you like a brother, like a brother. (Hudgins, Episode 7, 2006)

Considering that many families function with somewhat hierarchical roles, the question

of who takes care of whom arises in a sports team comprised of peers. The coach can take on a

parental role due to the nature of the coaching relationship and the age difference between an

adult and an adolescent (Boren, 2009). Yet, there is also the opportunity for parental roles within

the similarly aged players on the team. Organized teams often have captains, or designated

leaders amongst the players whose tasks may include motivating, supporting, and mentoring

other players (Beauchamp & Morton, 2011). As team co-captain, Matt Saracen says in one

episode, "I'm supposed to lead this team. They are dependent on me" (Harris, Episode 6, 2006).

When fullback Tim Riggins is promoted to captain, the coach reprimands him for yelling at his

fellow players and explains the role of the team captain:

What the hell are you doing? I need a leader out there. You're the team captain. I need

you to lead. You understand me? I don't need you breaking these guys down. I need

you to set the tone and be the example. (Massett & Zinman, Episode 16, 2007)

The parallels to family life pervade the team sports environment. Even the metaphor of

the home is invoked when team co-captain Smash Williams leads the team in a chant of "Whose

house? Our house!" (Carpenter & Harris, Episode 15, 2007). The familial aspects of the team

make it a natural context for creating a holding environment. However, given that holding

environments require trust, safety, and the meeting of an individual's needs, the efficacy of

holding is dependent upon the team's ability to meet these requirements for its individual players (Winnicott, 1971).

The player and the structure of the game. Aside from the potential holding environments created by the coach or the team, a third factor may increase the individual's experience of being held. The actual structure and rules of organized sports have the possibility of creating safety and security for the individual player. In contrast to amateur sports, organized athletics have established guidelines, roles, consequences to breaking rules, and structures to enforce these rules (Gawrysiak, 2011). The reliability of these structures may create a sense of safety for the players, facilitating their growth via an expectable environment.

The structure of the game can provide physical as well as emotional safety for the player. Rules against aggressive actions that are deemed dangerous to the players are designed to keep the player safe from bodily harm (Carron & Shapcott, 2010). Remembering that holding protects the individual from both external and internal dangers, the rules restrain the individual's aggressive drives and provide protection from oneself (Modell, 1993). In addition to rules concerning physical harm, there are ethical standards regarding fair play, the violation of which is referred to as cheating (Krizek, 2011). These standards may provide a sense of predictability, the security of knowing what is expected, what is ethical, and what is fair. This predictability can be augmented through the rituals and traditions of sports. The athlete may derive comfort from knowing what anthems are typically sung by fans, how long one can dribble a ball before the shot clock runs out, or that penalties would be awarded if a rival team member endangered one's bodily integrity.

Writing about Winnicott's definition of the holding environment, Margaret Little (1993) states, "'Holding,' of which 'management' was always a part, meant taking responsibility,

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supplying whatever ego strength a patient could not find in himself, and withdrawing it gradually as the patient could take over on his own" (p. 125). In the context of organized team sports, the adolescent athlete has the potential to experience the therapeutic effects of holding through the coach-player dyad, the peer support of the team, or the predictability of the game structure. The creation of a holding environment is dependent upon these aspects' ability to maintain safety for the individual player, meaning that one cannot assume that sports can necessarily guarantee the provision of a holding environment. The factors described in this section are ideal circumstances, but regardless, it may be reasonable to assume that players experience beneficial holding effects in a 'good-enough' sports context (Winnicott, 1989).

Sport as a *Potential Space* for *Transitional Phenomena*

In the gradual process of moving from dependence to relative independence, Winnicott envisioned a middle ground in which the child begins to understand the external world in relation to the self. This is the realm of *transitional phenomena*, where one holds both the illusion of omnipotent control and realization of an objective world outside one's control (Winnicott, 1971). Phillips (1988) describes transitional phenomena as such, "What Winnicott called Transitional Phenomena made possible for the child these early fundamental transitions from subjectivity to objectivity, from being merged in with the mother to being also separate from her" (p. 114).

Winnicott explained this move from absolute dependence beginning with the first 'not-me' possession. This could be an object such as a teddy bear or a piece of string. The child has the illusion of having created the object, yet also experiences it as external to oneself. The illusion-disillusion can be played out with the object as an intermediate area between the self and the outside world. Gradually, the child begins to relate to other objects and accept external

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reality (Winnicott, 1971). This is not an entirely linear process with a designated ideal end result. Winnicott (1971) writes:

> It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.) This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is 'lost' in play. (p. 13)

The transitional phenomena, which begin in early childhood, are revisited throughout the lifespan as a process of continually exploring the bounds between inner and outer reality. Winnicott denotes these experiences as evolving from transitional object use to play and later to cultural experience. These three terms may be viewed on a spectrum, yet they share the same essential function of assisting the subject in relating to the objective world (Winnicott, 1971). It is in this realm of playing that the adolescent may experience positive growth through athletic participation.

Winnicott viewed adolescence as a continuation of the developmental processes that began in infancy, albeit with some unique challenges. He states:

> In the time of adolescent growth boys and girls awkwardly and erratically emerge out of childhood and away from dependence, and grope towards adult status. Growth is not just a matter of inherited tendency, it is also a matter of highly complex interweaving with the facilitating environment. (1971, p. 144)

The previously discussed holding mechanisms are part of what creates a facilitating environment, an atmosphere of trust and safety. Yet, it is equally important that there be space for the individual to experiment with external reality while retaining the feeling of security. The

adolescent plays in the area between dependence and independence and this facilitates growth towards adulthood (Winnicott, 1971).

Winnicott defined this area of transitional phenomena, play, and cultural experience as the *potential space*. Kahane (1993) describes the potential space as, "that intermediate area between the subjective and objective, in which all creative and spontaneous gestures are initiated" (p. 278). Winnicott proposed that the first potential space is between the infant and the caregiver and that it gradually evolves into larger spheres of relating as the child grows. Essential to maintaining a potential space for transitional phenomena is a sense of safety and security. Winnicott (1971) states, "The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust" (p. 103). Provided that there exists the capacity for safety and holding, the athletic environment has the possibility of becoming a potential space for the adolescent to use in their growth process.

Organized team sports are variable in presentation but tend to possess certain universal characteristics. Namely, they are comprised of groups of individuals who participate in physical competition against rival groups of individuals through a structured game (Carron & Shapcott, 2010). For adolescents participating in interscholastic sports, there are no monetary rewards for participation, which distinguishes it from the adult realm of career work (Gawrysiak, 2011). This is not to say that sports are without real world implications as participation during adolescence may be associated with a myriad of consequences in adulthood, such as physical activity levels, identity achievement, social capital, irreparable injuries, or eventual financial benefits through professional sports (Busseri et al., 2011; Clark, 2011; Levine, 2010; Lubans, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2012; Snyder et al., 2010).

The sports environment displays similarities with the adult environments of military experience and work. The athletic contest is analogous to war without the intended consequence of death or physical destruction. The rival teams, like armies, attempt to defeat each other through the mechanism of the game, using strategy and physical skills (Edwards, 1973). These parallels are most visible in contact sports such as football or rugby. In *Friday Night Lights,* the language of war is often invoked. Athletes are encouraged to think in terms of victory, defeat, destruction, pain, and territorialism (Berg et al., 2006-2011). Revving up the team in a highly competitive game, team captain Smash Williams shouts, "This ain't their house, this is my house! My field! My blood is in this house! We're taking this house back tonight!" (Thomas, Episode 9, 2006). In a later episode, former quarterback Jason Street reflects on his thought process during the football game in which he was injured, "The only thing going through my head was that I wanted to obliterate [the rival player])" (Heldens, Episode 17, 2007).

In addition to parallels between sports and war, there are also similarities with the adult work experience. Athletes have roles with specialized duties to perform, within a generally hierarchical organization (Carron & Shapcott, 2010). The athlete is constantly encouraged to train hard, to increase productivity, to be obedient to the power structure, and in return to be rewarded with the prestige of winning (Edwards, 1973). The language of work is used frequently in *Friday Night Lights.* The coach often uses work metaphors such as, "I need you to work a little harder" (Katims, Episode 2, 2006), "Champions give 200%! You're not champions until you've earned it!" (Heldens, Episode 3, 2006), and "You've got a job to do" (Katims, Episode 2, 2006). The work metaphor becomes internalized by the athletes themselves. When Smash Williams is disciplined and has to put in extra effort during practices, his mother becomes concerned that he is tiring himself out and asks him to slow down. He responds:

Mama, I don't have any time! You know what it's like over there? It's like blood in the

water! I mean, I've got Baxter trying to steal my job and coach watching me like a hawk.

So no, I'm not going to slow down. (Hudgins, Episode 14, 2007)

This statement appears reminiscent of the stresses of a cutthroat workplace. The

pervasive resemblances to work have led sport sociologists to postulate that sport is a preparation

for participation in capitalist economies (Beisser, 1977; Edwards, 1973; Webb, 1969).

With the relative security of the organizational structure of high school sports, the

parallels with adult experiences of war and work, and the possibility of real world consequences,

the athletic context can serve as a potential space. Here in this potential space, the adolescent

may develop through play (Winnicott, 1971). The nature of the athletic environment blurs the

line between dependence and independence, the inner world and the real world.

What makes play possible is the subject's partial illusion of omnipotent control.

Winnicott (1971) writes, "The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay

of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects" (p. 47). In sports

there is the possibility for this partial illusion. The use of symbols and rituals associated with

luck are evidence of this illusion of control. Reports have indicated that most athletes participate

in some form of superstitious behavior prior to athletic competitions (Brevers, Dan, Noel, &

Nils, 2011). Whether it is voicing a team mantra, stepping into the batter's box in a particular

way, or wearing one's lucky socks, the belief that one has control over the game through these

actions remains consistent.

This sense of omnipotence is conveyed in *Friday Night Lights* through a speech made by

the coach to the team, "Right now, y'all are in control of your destiny. You remember that. Last

week we waited to see if Arnett-Mead would lose and they lost. We are in control" (Katims,

Episode 13, 2007). The partial illusion of omnipotence allows the adolescent to play in the potential space, to take chances and begin to integrate the external world with their internal sense of self. Sometimes the external reality and the inner sense of omnipotence collide harshly, such as when play results in bodily injury. In *Friday Night Lights*, a player's mother conveys this in her statement to the coach, "These kids think they're invincible" (Katims, Episode 13, 2007). This sense of invincibility, which is created by a safe environment, is vital to the efficacy of the potential space. Winnicott (1971) writes of this element when discussing the first potential space children experience:

> Every baby has his or her own favourable or unfavourable experience here. Dependence is maximal. The potential space happens only *in relation to a feeling of confidence* on the part of the baby, that is, confidence related to the dependability of the mother-figure or environmental elements, confidence being the evidence of dependability that is becoming introjected. (p. 100)

Organized team sports have the possibility of serving as a potential space for adolescents due to the safety and holding mechanisms of the structured, protective environment, the parallels with adult experiences of war and work, the association with real world (non-athletic, long term) consequences, and pervasiveness of omnipotence fantasies. These factors allow for transitional phenomena to develop in the interplay between inner and outer worlds (Winnicott, 1971). Under ideal conditions, the adolescent athlete may feel safe enough to play and through this, experience psychological growth. As Winnicott (1971) states, "[I]t is play that is the universal, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships" (p. 41).

***Object Usage* within Sport**

A third pillar of Winnicott's theoretical construction of infant development involved the

child's capacity to use an object. Here object is defined as a person external to the subject, such

as a parent. Winnicott cautions that *object usage* does not mean exploitation of the object,

simply it is the interaction with an object that is real and external to the subject. Prior to this

stage of development, he states that there is *object relating*. In this stage the infant interacts with

the object but does not fully understand it to be real and external yet (Winnicott, 1971).

Winnicott describes the difference between relating and usage as such:

> Object-relating is an experience of the subject that can be described in terms of the
>
> subject as an isolate. [T]he object, if it is to be used, must necessarily be real in the sense
>
> of being part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections. It is this, I think, that makes
>
> for the world of difference that there is between relating and usage. (1971, p. 88)

In other words, a baby emerges from an isolated experience first by relating to others

only as what the baby projects onto them with a fantasy of omnipotent control. Later, the child

begins to understand that others are external to the baby and beyond their control. Winnicott

theorizes that one moves from object relating to object usage by attempting to destroy the object

and the object's survival of that destruction. He writes that, "the destruction plays its part in

making the reality, placing the object outside the self" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 91). Winnicott

explains that this aggressive drive is instinctual but not angry. An example would be the baby

that slaps and kicks the parent or the client who is hostile towards their therapist. If the parent

and the therapist can survive these attacks and not retaliate or collapse, then they become real

because they survived the subject's destruction and are beyond the subject's omnipotent control.

Winnicott described this as a normal developmental process that infants undergo with the help of

a facilitating environment (Winnicott, 1971). Frustrations in this process may occur if objects do not survive usage, and the subject retains a sense of omnipotent control. These individuals may fear the effects of their aggressive instincts if destruction of the object results in the object's retaliation or collapse (Mitchell & Black, 1995).

Winnicott described the process in which the subject develops *object usage* with regards to infants and their caretakers as well as clients and their therapists (Winnicott, 1971). Outside of these contexts, there may be other possibilities for this process to unfold. Athletics, and specifically contact sports, may provide an environment for the individual to practice *object usage*. In this context the player attempts to destroy the member of the opposing team. Yet, unlike a more violent context such as a battleground, the object does not die or become severely wounded. The structure of the athletic environment allows the subject to destroy the object and for the object to survive destruction in almost all cases.

The language of destruction is ever present in the competitive team sport context. In one of the many pep talks that the coach gives his players in *Friday Night Lights*, the language of destruction is invoked:

> Are we not clear that in five days a group of men are going to be coming down here and trying to destroy you? These same men are coming down here and they're going to use everything they have to hurt you! (Berg, Episode 1, 2006)

In a later episode the coach talks to his players about a talented player from a rival team and the language is similar:

> We're not going to run from this guy. We're going to go through this bum. We're going to punch a hole right through the heart of this Eagles defense. You understand me?

(Players: Yes, sir!) It is going to be a war and we're going to make a statement that leads

us all the way to State! (Thomas, Episode 9, 2006)

The key to this destruction is that the object survives; the players do not die or experience

severe injury. In contrast, the actual destruction of the object is disorienting and painful to the

subject. In the first episode of *Friday Night Lights*, the star quarterback, Jason Street, tackles a

rival player incorrectly and incurs a paralyzing injury that results in quadriplegia. The players

and the townspeople experience great shock and go into a state of mourning following Jason's

injury. Jason's best friend, fullback Tim Riggins, expresses guilt and shame that he did not

prevent the injury. The actual destruction of the object challenges all involved (Berg et al.,

2006-2011).

While this theory was originally designed for children beginning to understand that they

have a self in relation to others, the processes of titrating aggression are not limited to early

childhood. Winnicott describes the adolescent process as being similar, but with higher stakes.

He writes of the differences between childhood and adolescence as such:

> If, in the fantasy of early growth, there is contained *death*, then at adolescence there is
>
> contained *murder*. Even when growth at the period of puberty goes ahead without major
>
> crises, one may need to deal with acute problems of management because growing up
>
> means taking the parent's place. *It really does*. In the unconscious fantasy, growing up
>
> is inherently an aggressive act. And the child is now no longer child-size. (Winnicott,
>
> 1971, p. 144)

Considering that object usage is not limited to early childhood and that with physical

development comes more serious consequences associated with the aggressive drive, the creation

of a protected setting such as the sports environment may assist the adolescent in surviving their

destructive impulses and increasing their capacity to relate to the external environment.

Winnicott (1971) describes how destruction through object usage facilitates the subject's growth:

> Study of this problem involves a statement of the positive value of destructiveness. The destructiveness, plus the object's survival of the destruction, places the object outside the area of objects set up by the subject's projective mental mechanisms. In this way a world of shared reality is created which the subject can use and which can feed back other-than-me substance into the subject. (p. 94)

If sports participation facilitates adolescent development and provides psychological benefits, it may be due in part to the mechanisms D.W. Winnicott defined as the *holding environment*, the *potential space* for *transitional phenomena*, and *object usage*. Understanding the theoretical explanations for these effects can assist social workers in examining why a particular adolescent may experience growth and psychological healing in an athletic environment. However, as reviewed in the previous chapter, literature on adolescent sports participation displays both positive and negative outcomes for the adolescents involved (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997; Coakley, 2011; Crosnoe, 2002; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Snyder et al., 2010). In the following chapter, concepts produced by the social theorist, Michel Foucault will be utilized to examine potential negative effects for adolescents as a result of their sports participation.

CHAPTER V

Foucauldian Theories

In the previous chapter, Winnicottian theories were used in the examination of beneficial effects of sports participation on adolescent psychological development. This chapter will depart from psychological theory. Instead, concepts defined by the social theorist, Michel Foucault will be applied to better understand adolescent sports participation and its relationship to power. This analysis begins with a brief review of Foucault's life, work, and context. Following the overview, Foucault's relevance to social work research and the topic of adolescent sports participation in particular will be addressed. Finally, the Foucauldian concepts of *disciplinary matrices,* systems of control and training in social institutions, and their use in the production of *docile bodies,* economically productive and obedient subjects, will be utilized in order to better comprehend the potential for negative outcomes for adolescents who participate in the disciplinary environment of organized team sports. These concepts will be further illustrated with case material present within *Friday Night Lights*.

Foucault, His Context, and His Work

Born in 1926, Michel Foucault was a prolific French philosopher and social theorist, contributing to the academic field until his death in 1984 (Gutting, 2012). Foucault's work is often referenced, difficult to define, and unceasingly controversial. Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) write, "His erudition is not only wide-ranging; it is also at times bewildering, contradictory, and antithetical" (p. 42). Foucault employed a combination of historical analysis,

social critique, and philosophy in his investigations into psychological, medical, scientific, penal, and governmental institutions (Gutting, 2012). While the breadth of his subjects was wide, Foucault's analysis centered on a particular theme. Fink-Eitel (1992) states, "The focus of Foucault's investigation is 'power.' It is his conviction that power is the principle of development and integration within our society" (p. 1). Sometimes described as a Nietzschean, a Marxist, a poststructuralist, or a postmodernist, Foucault rejected the confinements of these academic identifications and pursued his inquiries into power in his own unique manner. Fink-Eitel (1992) continues, "Foucault was constantly a social theoretician and historian who was concerned with a microview of concrete problems in our social, historical, political and cultural reality" (p. 2).

While Foucault's many theoretical constructions have relevance in any inquiry, the complexity and contradictory nature of his body of work makes it difficult to synthesize one coherent Foucauldian theory. Therefore, in this analysis the focus will center on concepts within Foucault's 1975 work titled *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Here Foucault investigates the history of society's move from violent punishment as a means of social control to modern forms of disciplinary control, including surveillance and the conditioning of bodies into productive subjects (Foucault, 1975). Earlier forms of punishment were physical spectacles (i.e. public executions) to remind the subject of the power of the sovereign. As societies evolved into modern non-autocratic power structures, the forms of discipline and control evolved too. Cole, Giardina, and Andrews (2004) write of Foucault's central thesis in *Discipline & Punish*:

> [W]e are still preoccupied with imagining power as if it were concentrated in one space or as if it were personified or possessed by a specific individual. Moreover, he contends that administrative operations of power have evolved: modern power is more efficient,

productive, and cooperative than its predecessor through its very dispersal from a central "possessor." Unlike the power associated with the king, modern power operates invisibly but is visible in its effects. (p. 210)

The invisibility of modern power is expressed through techniques of control, namely confinement and exclusion of those determined to be asocial or deviant and constant surveillance of the subject. Foucault cites the examples of prisons, mental asylums, and hospitals as institutions in which those who are socially undesirable are excluded, confined, transformed, and used as a threat against aberrant behavior in others. Aside from these ways of deterring deviance, Foucault theorized that modern power also promoted economic productivity in its subjects, which in turn increased the power of the modern state. This was achieved through the socialization of subjects into productive and obedient *docile bodies,* produced via *disciplinary matrices*, systems of control and regimentation within institutions (i.e. educational, occupational, medical, or religious) (Foucault, 1975). As to be elaborated upon further, the social institution of organized sports appears to possess all the disciplinary qualities Foucault attributed to the production of docile bodies.

In contrast to earlier autocratic societies that had clear connections between those in power and those who were their subjects, modern society's use of power through discipline allows a separation between those in power and the subject. The task of controlling subjects becomes outsourced to disciplinary matrices within social institutions so that those in power do not have to exert overt control over the subjects whose labor and obedience they benefit from (Foucault, 1975).

Political and economic leaders in today's society do not need to display their authority in order to maintain productivity and obedience in the people they control and profit from, as the

modern individual has been trained in automatic docility in nearly every social institution they interact with. The CEO does not have to physically punish anyone in order to ensure that his workers labor as efficiently as possible. The worker has already learned to be self-disciplined in school, in the military, in church, or on the playing field (Sargiacomo, 2009).

Why Foucauldian Theories?

The impact of Michel Foucault's philosophy is felt across a wide range of discourses. His concepts have been applied in fields such as sociology, political science, psychology, and social work (Bevir, 2011; Brennan, 2009; Garrity, 2010; Power, 2011). Fink-Eitel (1992) writes of Foucault's legacy, "Of all philosophies, no other contemporary theory has ignited the sparks of such a discursive controversy and no other system of thought has better succeeded in capturing our age and our understanding of humanity" (p. 2).

Among the many academic usages of Foucauldian perspectives, there have been ample references to Foucault in sport studies. With his emphasis on the body and its connection to modern power, Foucault finds understandable relevance in the sociological study of sports (Rail & Harvey, 1995). Cole, Giardina, and Andrews (2004) write:

Given Foucault's generative role in intellectual thought – evidenced most especially by extensive citation and frequent discussion of his work – serious scholars of sport cannot avoid Foucault's formulations. Indeed, an increasing number of academics studying sport have turned to Foucault to "think through" sport's relevance on one hand, and for rethinking what is relevant to their work on the other. (p. 207)

While Foucauldian concepts are increasingly used in sports studies, there is a surprising lack of attention to Foucault's perspective in the current literature on adolescent sports participation. Studies of adolescent sports participation have displayed a variety of theoretical

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orientations, but with few references to Foucauldian ideas. This chapter aims to incorporate Foucauldian social critiques into an understanding of how adolescent team sports functions as a force of normalization, creating the productive and obedient subject through a disciplining of the body.

Disciplinary Matrices in Adolescent Sports

In Foucault's (1975) *Discipline and Punish*, power is analyzed first through its use by a sovereign who controls the population through the public spectacle of punishment. With the start of modernity, this power to punish aberrant individuals evolves through exclusion, confinement and finally surveillance. These techniques punish 'deviant' others and thus reinforce socially acceptable norms. Foucault's analysis then moves beyond punishment to the ways in which social institutions developed methods to use power productively, to create the self-disciplining subject whose labor increases the power of the modern state (Foucault, 1975). He writes:

> The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. (Foucault, 1975, p. 137)

Foucault explains that the simultaneously useful and obedient subject was produced via *disciplinary matrices*, systems of control and regimentation that were incorporated into social institutions such as the monastery, the factory, the military and the school. When Foucault writes of the art of the human body, he is referencing the physical nature of this disciplining, that regulation of the body led to an internalized self-regulation by the individual. Thus, it was no longer necessary for those in power to maintain control of their subjects through brute force as

the training of subjects' bodies through the disciplinary matrices of social institutions made them self-supervising, productive, and docile (Foucault, 1975). Discussing discipline in contrast to other forms of power, Rail and Harvey (1995) write:

> Disciplines constitute concrete and distinct forms of power that are tools for the domination of bodies. These forms of power are distinct and new because they use normalization rather than repression to "invest" bodies. They more or less represent techniques and technologies of internalized norms. (p. 165)

Foucault posited that disciplinary matrices had certain characteristics, namely a partitioned and somewhat enclosed spatial organization, the fragmentation of time into maximally useful intervals, the ascription of individuals into specialized and hierarchical roles, and the emphasis on precise bodily control in movements. All these factors allow discipline to become internalized by the subject who then reproduces their productive obedience outside of the original disciplinary environment (Foucault, 1975). As to be discussed further, all of these disciplinary characteristics are present in adolescent organized team sports.

Disciplinary spatial organization. Foucault theorized that one characteristic of disciplinary matrices is the partitioned and enclosed spaces that bodies occupy. He illustrates this concept with the early disciplinary matrices found in monastic life, specifically the spatial design of individual cells for each monk. During more modern times, this disciplinary space extends to the partitioning of factories, the design of educational institutions, and the spatial arrangements of military barracks. Partitioned and enclosed spaces enhance disciplinary techniques by separating masses into individuals with certain functions in the bureaucracy of their institution. Those with a vested interest in institutional productivity maintain obedience and discipline through division and classification of space and therefore people (Foucault, 1975).

Foucault believed that disciplinary space had a particular goal of controlling bodies. Writing about disciplinary spatial organization, he states:

> Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering and using. (Foucault, 1975, p. 143)

In the context of sports, partitioned and enclosed spaces are a feature of athletic spatial design. The locker room is one arena that evokes spatial parallels to the design of the monasteries, military barracks, and factories presented in Foucault's analysis (Foucault, 1975). Each player has their own locker within the enclosed space of the locker room. The locker individuates the player but the open area of the larger locker room does not afford privacy. They are separated but with the lack of privacy, constantly under surveillance. Thus the players become individuals without real agency. They are contained within the protected space of the locker room, which for high school organized athletics, may be enclosed within the disciplinary space of the school building.

The partitioning of athletic space extends to the playing arena in the form of a boundaried field, court, or stadium in which each player has a position to inhabit based on their role within the team. Whether delineated by lines, physical structures, or colors, the partitioned playing area creates a physical cue that reinforces disciplinary mechanisms inherent in organized sports. The spatial design of disciplinary matrices is tied to the idea of each individual having a role and a place within a hierarchy of power. For example, in baseball each player has a position to play (i.e. pitcher, catcher, first baseman, or batter) and simultaneously a position on the playing field

to occupy (i.e. pitcher's mound, home plate, first base, or batter's box). In addition to the players' positions on the field, there are areas specified for coaches, umpires, replacement players, and spectators (Major League Baseball, 2012). Each space is reserved for particular individuals who are ascribed certain levels of power over the play. Seating for spectators also functions hierarchically, with certain seats garnering more value. Foucault (1975) writes of the link between disciplinary spatial design and the roles of those assigned to each partitioned space, "In organizing 'cells,' 'places' and 'ranks,' the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional, and hierarchical" (p. 148). In an organized team sports context, the spatial design of the athletic environment displays these disciplinary qualities of functionalism and hierarchy in its architecture.

Fragmentation of time. A second aspect of discipline espoused by Foucault was the division of time into intervals. Each interval is measured in order to achieve maximum utility. Foucault proposed that this "totally useful time," in which the individual's productivity is enhanced through monitoring their behavior in hours, minutes, and seconds, originated in monastic timetables and was elaborated on in military, industrial, and educational institutions (1975, p. 150). Through precise schedules and constant supervision to maintain these timetables, the individual could be made to become more and more productive (Foucault, 1975).

The fragmentation of time is ever present within the athletic context. Not only are there time schedules for games, practices, and days of rest, each player is trained to be as useful as possible within a given interval of time. Players are measured for speed and ability to execute maneuvers within a particular timeframe. In *Friday Night Lights*, the coach and the assistant coach watch Smash Williams running sprints:

Coach: Hey, what was that number?

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Assistant Coach: Four something.

Coach: What?!

Assistant Coach: 4.46

Coach: Let me see that. Either they're getting slower or he's getting faster.

Assistant Coach: Must be eating his Wheaties.

Coach: Whatever he's eating, let's make sure he keeps eating it. That's nice, Smash!

(Miller, Episode 10, 2006)

Dividing time into tenths of a second pushes the athlete to perform with maximum

efficiency. If each fraction of a second is measured, there is greater pressure to be productive

than if only larger intervals of time are recorded. Foucault writes, "Time measured and paid

must also be a time without impurities or defects; a time of good quality throughout which the

body is constantly applied to its exercise. Precision and application are, with regularity, the

fundamental virtues of disciplinary time" (1975, p. 151). This Foucauldian concept of the

pursuit of a perfect use of time is ever present in an organized sports context, with a constant

focus on the measurement of time during athletic training.

Specialized and hierarchical roles. A third factor of disciplinary matrices is the

ascription of individuals into specialized functions with a graduated succession of rank in each

role (Foucault, 1975). Organizing individuals in this manner allows for their usefulness to be

evaluated constantly and for their productivity in each level of their specialized role to be

maximal. Describing this disciplinary attribute in the example of the military, Foucault (1975)

writes:

Draw up series of series; lay down for each individual, according to his level, his

seniority, his rank, the exercises that are suited to him . . . At the end of each series,

others begin, branch off and subdivide in turn. Thus each individual is caught up in a

temporal series which specifically defines his level or his rank. (p. 158)

In an athletic context, the disciplinary mechanism of specialized roles is articulated

through the different positions played within team sports. *Friday Night Lights* features a typical

high school football team with players assigned roles such as quarterback, wide receiver, running

back, safety, and linebacker. Individuals are trained to their specific function and do not

generally deviate from their role. When a lawyer interviews paralyzed quarterback, Jason Street

about Jason's game injury, he asks if Jason was ever trained in proper tackling maneuvers.

Jason: Me personally? Tackling drills? I was the quarterback.

Lawyer: Yeah, I realize that but I was wondering if at any time during practice or

scrimmage, or really any time at all before you got hurt in that game did Coach Taylor

ever personally instruct you, Jason Street on how to make a tackle?

Jason: He didn't have to (pause) because I was the quarterback. (Miller, Episode 10,

2006)

In addition to the specialized function each player inhabits, there is also a hierarchy with

successive ranks present within the athletic environment. This hierarchy provides a clear

graduated training protocol in which each individual is disciplined to their greatest utility

(Foucault, 1975). In *Friday Night Lights*, the hierarchical system is expressed when movement

occurs between ranks. Following the paralyzing injury of first-string quarterback, Jason Street,

second-string quarterback, Matt Saracen is promoted to the starting position (Katims, Episode 2,

2006). In a later episode, junior varsity players are hastily promoted to varsity status in order to

fill empty positions when the African American players strike (Massett & Zinman, Episode 16,

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2007). In both of these examples, the efficiency of the disciplinary rank system is demonstrated as individuals in lower ranks are trained as usable replacements for those in higher ranks.

Precise bodily control. A final attribute of disciplinary matrices is the precise control of bodily movements in performing certain tasks. Foucault provides the examples of educational instruction in handwriting and military maneuvers in which the individual is trained to control each aspect of their body in relation to the object they are manipulating (i.e. pencil or rifle). This 'instrumental coding of the body' is tied to the idea of creating 'totally useful' individuals, whose bodies function as efficiently as possible (Foucault, 1975, p. 153).

Organized sports feature an ever-present instrumental coding of the body, as individuals are trained to control the tenseness of muscles, length of gait, width of stance, positioning of fingers, erectness of posture, and countless other aspects of their bodies while performing athletic feats (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004). Not only are there intricate procedures for training the body of an athlete, there are rules governing official technique and what bodily movements are acceptable during play. Consider the example of Major League Baseball and a selection on their official rules of baseball pitching technique:

> The pitcher shall stand facing the batter, his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and the other foot free. From this position any natural movement associated with his delivery of the ball to the batter commits him to the pitch without interruption or alteration. He shall not raise either foot from the ground, except that in his actual delivery of the ball to the batter, he may take one step backward, and one step forward with his free foot. When a pitcher holds the ball with both hands in front of his body, with his pivot foot in contact with the pitcher's plate and his other foot free, he will be considered in the Windup Position. (2013, p. 1)

In *Friday Night Lights*, the coach enforces the disciplinary technique of instrumental

coding of the body through constant repetition of training regimens for his players. In one scene,

he confronts a player who is failing to demonstrate effective tackling technique during a practice:

Keep digging your legs. Keep your head up. Keep digging. Get over here! I don't see

you preparing for this game, son. You go hard or you go home. Come on now, you're

out here, you give 110% like everybody else. You give 110% all the time, not just when

you feel like it. Now come on, son, do it again. Let's do it again! (Heldens, Episode 3,

2006)

While this use of repetitive physical exercises as a disciplinary technique can demonstrate

the power relations between the coach and the player under his supervision, it eventually

becomes internalized by the subjects of discipline themselves. In a later episode, former

quarterback Jason Street displays this internalization as he instructs his replacement, Matt

Saracen:

Saracen, listen to me. When you're doing your drop, you look off to the weak side

safety. That means you keep your head left, okay? Soon as Riggins makes his break,

you open your body up. You let the ball go. On the break. High and outside. (Katims,

Episode 19, 2007)

Foucault argues that breaking down tasks into precise bodily movements allows for

greater control of the individual and the assurance of maximal productivity. Each aspect of the

gesture is evaluated and therefore becomes as efficient as possible (Foucault, 1975). He

proposes that through the introduction of power, the body and the object it is manipulating

become fused and a "body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" is created (Foucault,

1975, p. 153). The regulation of bodily movements becomes ascribed to particular roles within a

hierarchical ranking system and these functions are articulated on (fragmented) time and (partitioned) space. Fink-Eitel (1992) summarizes how these disciplinary mechanisms first originated:

> In cloisters, theological colleges and barracks the rooms were divided, parceled, organized and controlled; the individual bodies were divided into individual movements, gestures, attitudes and energies, in order to be able to train them individually, organize them differently and finally to integrate them into a total body that comprised the many individual bodies. (p. 51)

In the realm of adolescent organized sports, spatial design of the locker room and arena of play is partitioned and partially enclosed so that "[e]ach individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault, 1975, p. 143). Athletic time is fragmented into fractions of a second and each interval of time is supervised for maximal utility. The organized team sport contains specialized roles with hierarchical functioning in the form of team positions and ranks based on skill level. Finally, athletic training features the 'instrumental coding of the body' in which every aspect of the athletic gesture is controlled in the body of the athlete. The adolescent athlete exists within a world of disciplinary matrices, and how this discipline may influence the athlete will be examined next.

Team Sports' Production of Docile Bodies

The disciplining of the individual through controlled bodily exercises, specialized ranks, partitioned space, and fragmented time eventually becomes internalized by the individual so that self-control and productivity no longer need to be enforced by an outside power. Fink-Eitel (1992) writes of the historical move away from an external power to the disciplinary techniques that created the self-supervising subject, "Economic strategies of normalization and inner

disciplining appeared now in place of public authority with its extravagant demonstration of power" (p. 49). The introduction of disciplinary matrices into social institutions meant that the power to prevent deviance became linked to the power to increase the productivity of the individual. Foucault (1975) writes, "[D]iscipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (p. 138).

Foucault theorized that the disciplinary matrices within institutions produced *docile bodies*, individuals who internalized obedience and efficiency through the disciplining of their physical selves (Cole, Giardina, & Andrews, 2004). Foucault defines docility as such, "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1975, p. 136). He proposed that discipline bred automatic docility, making the self-supervising subject more obedient outside of the original disciplinary environment. Thus, an individual who has been trained in productive obedience via one social institution is more likely to display these qualities in other institutions. A well-trained student internalizes discipline and becomes a more malleable and efficient soldier, worker, or citizen of the state (Foucault, 1975). This is the heart of hegemonic power, institutional molding of individuals into docile bodies, not only compliant to the source of power but reproducing of that power through their productivity and self-surveillance.

The adolescent athlete is immersed in a culture of discipline. As discussed in a previous chapter, sociologists have defined sports as a social institution. The athlete exists within the larger institution of organized sports with its codified rituals, goals, ethics, and behavioral norms (Beisser, 1977; Edwards, 1973). The institution of organized team sports displays the disciplinary mechanisms of spatial partitioning and enclosure, fragmentation and exhaustive use

of time, hierarchical and specialized functions, and precise bodily control in movements. What may emerge from this disciplinary environment is the production of docile bodies.

Remembering that adolescence is a time of neural plasticity, the adolescent's athletic experiences could possibly be formative for the internalization of self-disciplinary behaviors in the future (Spear, 2000). In addition to the neuroscience of adolescence, previously mentioned psychological theories of adolescent identity development are relevant when considering the impact of sports' disciplinary mechanisms. Erikson's explanation of adolescence as a time of synthesizing all previous ego identifications into a core identity is useful for understanding how this time period may be especially vulnerable to the creation of the docile body (Erikson, 1975). The biological, psychological, and social functioning of adolescence prime the individual adolescent for experiencing the disciplinary matrices of the sports environment in ways that may engender future 'automatic docility' in one's identity.

In the locker room of *Friday Night Lights*, a poster hangs on the wall stating "Football: Training for the rest of your life" (Berg et al., 2006-2011). While the instillation of disciplinary values through athletic participation occurs frequently in *Friday Night Lights*, the character of Matt Saracen is a strong demonstration of how sports can produce docile bodies. When Matt is suddenly promoted from second-string to first-string quarterback, the coach directs all efforts into his training. Note the disciplinary mechanisms inherent in the coach's pep talk to Matt:

> I need you to work a little bit harder. You need to know this offense, son. You need to know this offense in your mind, in your body. You need to know this offense so well that your children are going to know it in their DNA. You understand me? (Yes, sir) I don't want you thinking out there. I want you to throw the ball. (Katims, Episode 2, 2006)

Later in this episode, the coach brings Matt out for an individual training session. Towards the end of the training, Matt's progress in internalizing disciplinary techniques is demonstrated when the coach shouts questions at Matt and he shouts back:

Coach: What's your name?

Matt: Matt Saracen!

Coach: What do you play?

Matt: QB1!

Coach: How do you play it?

Matt: Perfectly!

Coach: Who do you play for?

Matt: Dillon Panthers!

Coach: How much do you want it?

Matt: I want it! (Katims, Episode 2, 2006)

The character continues to express this automatic docility through deference to authority, enforcement of group norms, and efforts to be self-supervising in ensuring his maximal productivity on and off the playing field (Berg et al., 2006-2011). The show depicts Matt's struggles with automatic docility when ethical issues arise. When he witnesses a fellow team member assaulting someone, he is reticent to report it due to fearing the loss of the player's contribution to the team. Matt states, "Reyes is a crazy son of a bitch but he's the key to our defense. We're relying on him" (Harris, Episode 6, 2006).   This is the internalization of discipline, that the productivity of the team must be valued above all else. When Matt eventually decides to report what he witnessed, he conveys his wrestling with automatic docility, "I think I

might've been confused between what was right for the team and what was right" (Harris, Episode 6, 2006).

Foucault's concept of disciplinary mechanisms and their production of docile bodies has not been examined in the current literature on adolescent sports participation, perhaps due to the ideological justification of athletics present in American culture. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) write, "While many sporting discourses continue to emphasise sport's 'functional' role as an agent of 'normalisation', a force for 'good', Foucault's work alerts us to the fragility and contingency of such conceptualisations" (p. 45). The following chapter aims to explore ideologies present in sports-based interventions for adolescents, how Winnicottian and Foucauldian understandings of adolescent athletic participation explain positive and negative effects on adolescent psychosocial functioning, differential effects on adolescents athletes from oppressed populations, and implications for social work practice.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

In earlier chapters, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation was examined through the literature on adolescent development, the sociology of sport, and studies of organized athletics' effects on adolescent developmental outcomes. Following this, the Winnicottian theories of the *holding environment* and *transitional phenomena* were discussed in relation to adolescent athletics. In the most recent chapter, the Foucauldian concept of *disciplinary matrices* was applied to the social institution of adolescent sports, exploring how this athletic disciplining results in the production of *docile bodies*.

This chapter aims to synthesize these concepts and present the implications for social work practice. First, Winnicottian and Foucauldian theories will be applied to the current literature on adolescent sports participation. Next, the disciplinary mechanisms of adolescent sports will be discussed in relation to differential effects for oppressed populations. Following this will be an examination of how these concepts relate to sports-based interventions as a therapeutic practice. Strengths and weaknesses of the methodological design of the study will be revisited. Finally, implications for social work practice will be addressed.

Winnicottian and Foucauldian Theories in Application

As discussed in chapter two, the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation has been studied from varied theoretical lenses, primarily psychological and sociological approaches. Psychological theories of development, especially concepts created by Erikson (Busseri et al.,

2011), Piaget (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991), and Marcia (Caldwell, Kleiber, & Shaw, 1995) have been applied to studies of adolescent sports participation. Sociological theories by Bourdieu (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschneider, 1997; Levine, 2010), Mead (Miller, 2009), and Goffman (Pike, 2007), also appear in the conceptualizations of adolescent sports participation. The contributions of Winnicott and Foucault have been largely absent from this discourse. These theoretical orientations may be useful for understanding potential positive and negative effects of sports participation on adolescent development. As explored in previous chapters, Winnicott's psychological conceptions of the *holding environment* and *transitional phenomena* may assist in clarifying why sports can be beneficial to normal adolescent development as well as reparative for adolescents who have experienced trauma, neglect, or misattunement in their early caregiver interactions.

   Therapeutic effects through a Winnicottian lens. Explaining his theory of normal child development through the relationship to the caregiver, Winnicott (1971) writes:

> The good-enough 'mother' (not necessarily the infant's own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration. (p. 10)

This "active adaptation" to a child's needs creates the *holding environment*, a physical and emotional space that can provide nurturance for the child and allow them to develop a sense of safety. As Winnicott has noted, the holding environment is not restricted to the infant-caregiver dyad, but that this is the original location for holding. He has written of the presence of the holding environment in the client-therapist dyad and that this psychological holding by the therapist is necessary for the client to experience beneficial effects in therapy (Winnicott, 1971).

Outside of these original sites for the holding environment, it may be possible to find holding in other areas such as organized team sports. As discussed in previous chapters, the adolescent may experience holding via the relationship with the coach, the team, or the rules and structure of the game. However, these potential sites for holding are dependent upon multiple factors. The coach or the team must be attuned to the player and be able to make active adaptations to the adolescent's needs in order to produce the internal sense of safety of the holding environment. A misattuned coach provides inadequate holding much like the misattuned parent.

If a coach or team can provide a sense of safety and reliability for the individual player, the adolescent may internalize that holding and experience a feeling of security. This can facilitate normal adolescent development as well as be potentially reparative for adolescents who experienced caregiver failures in early life. In *Friday Night Lights*, adolescents lacking in caring and attuned parental figures are often held by the coach or the team. The character of Tim Riggins, who has been abandoned by both parents and raised by his brother, begins the series with substance abuse issues, low school performance, and an inability to form healthy romantic relationships. As the series progresses, Tim continually finds support in the team and the coach, eventually developing into a caring and ethical young man (Berg et al., 2006-2011). Much like the therapeutic effects of creating a holding environment in the counseling room, the potential holding mechanisms of organized team sports may contribute to adolescents repairing deficits and disruptions in their early childhood experiences of being held.

In addition to therapeutic holding mechanisms that may emerge in an organized team sports context, adolescent growth and reparative developmental experiences can be facilitated through the *potential space* for *transitional phenomena* in athletics. Remembering that the

potential space is a facilitating location in which an individual can experience *transitional phenomena*, healthy developmental play in between subjective and objective reality, organized sports can be a site for this psychological growth (Kahane, 1993; Winnicott, 1971). While Winnicott described transitional phenomena as originally occurring in early childhood, he emphasized that the task of resolving the tension between inner and outer reality as never being fully completed (Winnicott, 1971). Thus, this process may be enacted in adolescence, through the potential space of organized team sports.

As elaborated upon in a previous chapter, organized sports can serve as a potential space for transitional phenomena due to the analogies with adult experiences of war and work (Beisser, 1977; Edwards, 1973; Webb, 1969), the relative safety of a structured and rule-bound game (Carron & Shapcott, 2010; Gawrysiak, 2011), and the reality of short and long term consequences (i.e. physical effects of sports participation, negative consequences of rule-breaking, or social capital accumulation) (Busseri et al., 2011; Clark, 2011; Levine, 2010). Adolescent sports can be both real and unreal, just a game in its playfulness and relative safety, and much more than a game in its analogues to adulthood (war and work) and the presence of real world consequences.

The potential space within an organized sports environment may facilitate psychological development for the adolescent. Winnicott viewed transitional phenomena as healthy and spaces that can provide for an individual to play are by extension extremely useful. However, these beneficial effects are reliant upon the athletic context being an adequate potential space. Winnicott cautioned that transitional phenomena could only exist in an environment that is facilitating of this kind of play. Namely, it must be safe and predictable while not overly impinging (Winnicott, 1971). Reliable adult figures (i.e. the coach), structure (i.e. consistent

application of rules), protection from harm (i.e. major physical injuries), and the freedom to be creative (i.e. not overly restrictive of play) are essential elements of the potential space for transitional phenomena (Kahane, 1993; Winnicott, 1971). In ideal circumstances, organized team sports may serve as a potential space for healthy developmental growth through transitional phenomena.

The final aspect of sport's potential psychological benefits through a Winnicottian lens is the concept of *object usage*. This theory postulates that children develop an understanding of themselves in relation to the outside world through the process of using an object. The 'object' is a person that the child attempts to destroy due to natural aggressive impulses. This object must survive being 'used' or 'destroyed' by the infant, which leads to the infant comprehending the limitations of their subjective omnipotence and realizing the object exists in the external world of objective reality. The process of object usage is part of healthy developmental growth (Winnicott, 1971).

It can be argued that adolescent athletics has the potential to serve as a site that reinforces this healthy process of object usage. The player seeks to 'destroy' the rival, who survives this destruction due to the rules that create relative physical safety for the players. Thus, the adolescent's aggressive instincts are titrated and emotional regulation is promoted. As Winnicott has noted, the key to object usage is that the object survives the aggressive impulses of the child without retaliating or collapsing. If the caregiver is abusive, neglectful, emotionally absent, or otherwise misattuned, the child does not experience the object as surviving their usage and may come to have difficulties with their own aggressive instincts and emotional regulation (Winnicott, 1971). The adolescent who has experienced caregiver failures in responding adequately to object usage may find these needs fulfilled in the organized sports environment.

Depending upon the athletic environment's ability to facilitate this healthy object usage (i.e. not replicating the adolescent's early childhood experiences of objects retaliating or collapsing), there is the potential for sports to be reparative and therapeutic for the adolescent who has not had these needs met previously.

In summary, the organized team sports environment has the potential to be beneficial for normal adolescent development as well as reparative for adolescents who have experienced early childhood caregiver failures. This is accomplished through the provision of a *holding environment*, the creation of a *potential space* for *transitional phenomena*, and the allowance for *object usage*. These psychological processes are dependent upon the athletic context being adequate in these arenas. Namely, it must be reliable, safe, not overly impinging, with attuned figures for object relating. If the adult figures and peers are grossly misattuned, if there is violence or trauma, if the environment is overly restrictive and discourages creativity and play, or if there is inconsistency and a lack of reliability in the structure, then the sports environment will not provide these therapeutic benefits (Winnicott, 1971). However, in ideal circumstances an adolescent may experience athletics as facilitating one's natural growth and reparative of early object-relations deficits.

Negative effects through a Foucauldian lens. As Winnicottian theories were helpful for conceptualizing how an adolescent may experience beneficial and therapeutic processes as a result of sports participation, Foucauldian theories assist in illuminating potential negative effects of athletics on adolescent development. Discussed in depth in the previous chapter, Foucault's concepts of *disciplinary matrices* and their production of *docile bodies* can be applied to the context of adolescent organized team sports.

Foucault defines *disciplinary matrices* as mechanisms inherent in the design of social institutions that regulate the bodies of individuals, instilling these individuals with a self-disciplining way of being that makes them obedient to authority and productive in their labors. He explains that these disciplinary matrices consist of partitioned and enclosed spatial organization, the fragmentation of time into maximally useful intervals, specialized and hierarchical roles, and control over minute physical movements in tasks. These matrices exist within social institutions such as schools, churches, the military, criminal justice systems, and the medical establishment (Foucault, 1975). It can be argued that youth sports are also a social institution and within the design of this institution are inherent disciplinary matrices (Beisser, 1977; Edwards, 1973). Through partitioned spatial organization (i.e. the locker room or the playing field), fragmented time (i.e. deci-seconds on the shot clock), specialized and hierarchized roles (i.e. first string vs. second string, pitcher vs. batter), and instrumental coding of the body (i.e. exercises to train the quarterback how to throw precisely), the institution of organized team sports shows evidence of disciplinary matrices.

Foucault argues that disciplinary matrices create *docile bodies*, self-supervising individuals who are as obedient to authority as they are efficiently productive. He states that participation in social institutions that feature disciplinary matrices may engender automatic docility in the student, soldier, or worker involved (Foucault, 1975). As explored previously, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to experiencing the impact of these negative influences in a long-term manner due to their developmental stage. Adolescents are undergoing major physical and psychological shifts during this time period including neural plasticity (Spear, 2000), pubertal physiological changes (Archibald, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), social role transition (Adams & Berzonsky, 2003), and identity formation (Erikson, 1975). Perhaps

more so than in adulthood, adolescence is a time in which the impact of disciplinary matrices may be long lasting.

Training individuals to be obedient to authority, to be a docile body, runs counter to the social work value of empowering individuals and communities to have agency (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Using a Winnicottian lens, in ideal circumstances there may be therapeutic benefits to sports participation for adolescents. However, using a Foucauldian lens, the disciplinary matrices inherent in the institution of sports have the potential to produce docile bodies out of the adolescents who participate.

Docile Bodies and Oppressed Populations

While automatic docility is problematic on a whole, it may be especially detrimental for populations who already experience unequal treatment and barriers to accessing power. Socioeconomically disadvantaged youth, and especially youth of color are subject to societal oppression including inadequate resources, violence, dislocation, daily microaggressions, and pervasive messages that they are dangerous and otherwise less than those in positions of racial and socioeconomic dominance (i.e. wealthy and White) (Miller & Garran, 2008; Sue et al., 2007; Takaki, 1993). This oppression may contribute to an internalized sense of powerlessness, which could be increased through mechanisms that instill automatic docility. Discussing how oppressed populations can have this powerlessness instilled within them, Harro (2000) writes:

> By participating in our roles as targets we reinforce stereotypes, collude in our own demise, and perpetuate the system of oppression. This learned helplessness is often called *internalized oppression* because we have learned to become our own oppressors from within. (p. 19)

Engendering discipline has the potential to create the docile body, obedient to higher authorities and motivated to use the physical self to perform and produce for the individuals in charge (Foucault, 1975). When one already experiences oppression, giving up one's power to a higher authority such as a coach, the team, or the school may increase one's internalization of oppression. In exploring why messages of 'surrendering' and 'giving up power' inherent in twelve-step substance abuse recovery are problematic for people of color, Smith, Buxton, Bilal and Seymour (1993) write:

> The concept of surrender, given its many war-related connotations of occupation, rape, and loss of freedom, is hard enough for anyone to accept, but particularly hard for cultural groups that have over time suffered more than their share of occupation, rape, and loss of freedom. African-Americans, for example, may feel that they have been in a state of individual and cultural powerlessness for many generations, and have no desire for further surrender. (p. 105)

The disciplining of adolescents of color through sports participation is illustrated frequently in *Friday Night Lights*. In the first season, the African American player Smash Williams is faced with a dilemma when he experiences overt racism and must decide between obedience to the team or solidarity with his fellow African American teammates. The assistant coach makes a racist remark to a journalist, comparing the African American players to junkyard dogs. Smash leads his African American teammates in a players' strike against the assistant coach. Eventually he ends the strike due to the economic pressure that forces him to choose obedience to the coaches in order to continue playing football. While the episode ends in reconciliation for all involved, there remains the implication that accepting the disciplinary

matrices of the sport is a requirement for adolescent athletes, even when acceptance furthers the oppression one already experiences (Massett & Zinman, 2007).

In later seasons, the theme of disciplining youth of color re-emerges. The character Santiago Herrera makes a brief appearance in the second season, a Latino adolescent ex-convict who is recruited onto the football team to improve his character and allow the team to simultaneously profit from his physical talents. In the fourth season, Vince Howard, an African American juvenile delinquent, is given the choice of playing football or going to a juvenile detention center. Vince is transformed into a docile body, obedient to authority (the criminal justice system, the coach, the team) and maximally productive in his athletic feats (Berg et al., 2006-2011). While the impact of these disciplinary mechanisms on the young men of color on *Friday Night Lights* is not explored, it can be reasonably surmised that instilling docility in youth who already experience the societal message that they must be docile and accepting of the institutional oppression they receive is not beneficial for adolescent developmental growth, recovery, and empowerment.

Sports-Based Interventions for Adolescents

Synthesizing these analyses of potential psychological benefits as well as risks associated with adolescent sports participation leads to the topic of sports-based interventions. Discussed in depth in the third chapter, sports-based interventions are social programs that feature sports activities are aimed at youth pro-social development and/or juvenile crime reduction. The programs vary in design but have the common element of using athletics as a means of engaging socioeconomically disadvantaged or at-risk youth for non-athletic goals (i.e. reduced delinquency, increased school attachment or labor participation, improved psychosocial development) (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Perkins & Noam, 2007; Pike, 2007).

Advocates of sports-based interventions have pointed to potential outcomes of increased physical self-concept, bonding with peers and caring adults, social capital accumulation, and feelings of competency and higher self-worth (Coakley, 2011; Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003; Gerber, 1999; Levine, 2010; Perkins & Noam, 2007).

While frequently lauded on a policy level, sports-based interventions have not consistently proven that they are effective in meeting their goals (Kelly, 2011; Lubans, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2012; Nichols & Crow, 2004). Critiques of these programs have pointed to their focus on reforming the individual adolescent instead of addressing the sociocultural factors that affect the youth in question (Coakley, 2011; Cole, 1996; Kelly, 2011). In examining sports-based interventions for adolescents in the UK, Kelly (2011) writes:

> Targeted intervention programmes are clearly unable to significantly impact on many of the processes serving to 'exclude' young people in neoliberal, post-industrial societies; at best, they can alleviate some of the consequences for a minority...[I]ndividualized programmes risk legitimating a reductive analysis of these complex processes, where individual deficits and 'self-exclusion' are highlighted and structural inequalities de-emphasized. (p. 145)

Further critiques of sports-based interventions explore the racial implications of these initiatives. Many of these programs target 'at-risk youth,' primarily adolescents of color with low socioeconomic status in inner cities. Cole (1996) explored how sports-based crime reduction programs create a dichotomizing racist narrative of youth of color existing only as criminals or athletes. In describing media representation of this dichotomy, Cole writes:

> Sport is depicted simultaneously: as a practice that leads to a healthy and productive life; as that which distinguishes a previous and properly disciplined and productive generation

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of African Americans from today's inner-city youths; and as the inner city's means for

realizing America's utopic promises. (1996, p. 367)

While rhetoric has shifted in recent literature on sports-based interventions to emphasize

positive youth development over crime reduction (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003; Perkins &

Noam, 2007), this goal of removing the danger of adolescent delinquency from communities has

remained, implicitly or explicitly (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann, 2012; Kelly, 2011). Explaining

these two goals in UK sports-based interventions, Kelly (2011) writes, "The concurrent

prioritization of 'social inclusion' and 'crime reduction' in current sports-based interventions can

be understood to exemplify a long-standing 'potential-threat' dichotomy identifiable in youth

policy" (p. 129). This 'potential-threat' dichotomy illustrates the goals of creating a *docile body*,

one whose potential (productivity) is maximized, while their threat (obedience to authority) is

minimized. Coakley (2011) discusses the disciplinary nature of sports-based interventions

targeting youth of color, "According to those proposing the programs, sports would

simultaneously control and inculcate discipline among "disadvantaged" and "at-risk" youths who

lacked the attributes needed to obtain socially acceptable goals in mainstream institutional

spheres" (p. 313). Whether the goal is implicit or explicit, the creation of docile bodies through

disciplinary matrices has the potential to exist within sports-based interventions simply due to

the disciplining nature of organized team sports.

In contrast to the possible negative effects of instilling automatic docility in participants,

sports-based interventions also have the potential to serve as a holding environment and potential

space for transitional phenomena. The adolescent who is engaged in a sports-based program

may experience all the therapeutic benefits discussed previously. This could be especially

significant for adolescents who have experienced early childhood environmental deficits. These

adolescents are often the target of sports-based interventions (Coakley, 2011; Perkins & Noam, 2007). If designed to provide safety, structure, and the allowance for independent growth, sports-based interventions have the potential to be reparative and therapeutic via their holding and facilitating mechanisms.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology

Prior to exploring implications for clinical social work practice, it is important to revisit the methodological design of this study. The phenomenon of adolescent sports participation was analyzed through the theoretical lenses of Donald Winnicott and Michel Foucault with the hope of furthering the conceptual understanding of how sports participation may positively or negatively affect adolescent psychosocial development. These theorists were chosen due to their relevance in their respective fields (psychology and social theory) and invisibility in current literature on adolescent sports participation. In addition, these theories were illustrated with case examples within the popular television series, *Friday Night Lights*.

Strengths. The current research on adolescent sports participation originates from a variety of academic fields (i.e. medicine, adolescent mental health, sports psychology, social work, and sociology), theoretical orientations (i.e. psychology and sociology), and produces varied results (sports facilitate development, sports hinder development, sports have no/mixed impact). This study surveyed the broad field of literature and then applied theoretical concepts that were representative of the academic approaches previously undertaken in the literature, yet these concepts had not been utilized by other authors. Social work uses a syncretic approach to knowledge acquisition, pulling from a broad swath of disciplines in order to consider social problems systemically (Trevithick, 2008). In keeping with the tenets of social work discourse,

this study was able to synthesize empirical and theoretical literature to create a deeper understanding of the effects of sports participation on adolescent development.

Weaknesses. While the study may have helped to conceptualize ways sports participation can affect adolescent development, it is not an empirical study and therefore cannot prove that psychosocial benefits or harm emerges from sports participation. Further, concepts such as *docile bodies* and *holding environments* are difficult to quantify. An organized team sport may provide holding for one athlete and create automatic docility for another. The factors that create holding or docility are hypothetical in nature, based upon the ideas of Winnicott and Foucault. Therefore, this study is limited in its generalizability and raises as many questions as it answers. In addition, the case material is fictional and can be understood only as an illustration of the author's points. However, considering that popular narratives influence mass conceptualizations, using a fictional case that has broad appeal may be more important than using a real case that has little influence on others.

Author biases. While a number of potential author biases have been discussed in depth in the Methodology chapter of this study, an additional bias should be presented. Namely, that *automatic docility* is considered by this author to be harmful. While self-discipline is frequently referenced in the literature as a positive attribute of adolescent athletes (Browne & Francis, 1993; Chandler & Goldberg, 1990), whether or not this discipline in regards to respect for authority is good or bad is debatable. Certainly this is a value judgment and one in which this author is biased towards viewing *automatic docility* negatively. Docile bodies may in fact experience benefits from their docility, such as educational attainment, social capital, and increased earnings (via their productive obedience). Yet, this author regards the internalization of docility as an extension of oppression, and that this is the antithesis of empowerment and liberation. In this

final section of the chapter, implications for social work practice and areas of further research will be discussed, bearing in mind the methodological strengths, limitations, and author biases in this study's design.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Considering the theoretical conceptualizations of potential benefits and harm of sports participation for adolescents, the question remains as to how social work practice should proceed. Participating in a roundtable discussion on the profession of social work, Foucault (1972/1999) states:

> What is important is that social work is inscribed within a larger social function that has been taking on new dimensions for centuries, the function of surveillance-and-correction: to surveil individuals and to redress them, in the two meanings of the word, alternatively as punishment and as pedagogy. (p. 92)

In contrast to this evaluation of social work as a system of 'surveillance-and-correction,' the National Association of Social Workers (2008) puts forth that the mission of social work is to, "enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (p. 1). These values are sometimes at odds with the reality of social workers who must function within systems (i.e. schools, criminal justice, community mental health) that have more 'surveillance-and-correction' than empowerment and enhancement of wellbeing in their designs (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). How can social work practice with adolescents best meet these goals of enhancing wellbeing and empowerment while not colluding with systems of 'surveillance-and-correction,' which seek to control?

Due to the prevalence of sports in American youth culture, social workers practicing with adolescents are bound to encounter athletic participation as a topic in adolescent life (Gerber, 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Clinical social workers may work with adolescent athletes, former athletes, those involved in sports-based interventions, or non-athletes still affected by sports culture. Questions for social work practice include: How to work with current or former adolescent athletes? Should one refer adolescents to sports-based interventions and/or traditional sports participation (i.e. interscholastic sports)? Are sports-based interventions therapeutic, neutral, or harmful and how can program design align with social work values?

Working with current and former adolescent athletes. Clinical social workers in practice with adolescents may serve clients who are current or former athletes, with this sports participation having varying degrees of clinical relevance for the individual adolescent. Considering the Winnicottian lens of psychological benefits associated with sports participation, the social worker may want to explore how the athletic environment does or does not facilitate developmental growth for the adolescent. Specifically, does the adolescent experience attunement with their teammates and coaches, is the athletic environment safe and predictable enough for the adolescent to feel held and supported, and does the structure allow for the adolescent to experience transitional phenomena or is it overly impinging? Given the potential for psychological benefits if the athletic environment is designed to be supportive, this study recommends that social workers seek to facilitate their client's navigation of the athletic environment in order to have these needs met adequately.

Social workers may also encounter current or former adolescent athletes who have experienced failures of the athletic environment to meet these needs for holding, transitional

phenomena, and object usage. If there has been major physical injury, violence, trauma, unreliable adult figures, lack of structure, overly restrictive structure, or any other failure of the organized team sport to be a holding environment, this may psychologically harmful for the adolescent, especially for those who have a history of trauma or neglect in their childhood. Examples of these holding environment failures from *Friday Night Lights* include the paralyzing injury of the quarterback, racial strife within the team leading to hostility and divisions, physical violence by a rival team, and the appointment of a misattuned coach who is not responsive to players' needs (Berg et al., 2006-2011). As these and countless other failures of the holding environment may occur in adolescent sports, it is important for social workers engaged in practice with adolescents to address these issues and the potential psychosocial impact they may have on the clients served.

In addition to addressing the potential object-relations impact of sports participation, social workers in practice with current or former adolescent athletes should consider the psychological ramifications of their clients' participation in a disciplinary social institution. Foucauldian theory states that the disciplinary matrices inherent in social institutions are designed to create docile bodies, obedient and productive individuals (Foucault, 1975). Clinicians working with adolescent athletes may encounter automatic docility in their clients, possibly in the form of rigid thinking, identity foreclosure, submission to authority, overemphasis on performance (maximal productivity), or internalized oppression (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999; Foucault, 1975; Rail & Harvey, 1995). This study proposes that clinical social workers should address these issues of automatic docility with their adolescent clients and explore ways clients can become empowered to develop a sense of personal agency and efficacy.

Referring to organized sports and sports-based interventions. In addition to issues of clinical social work with current and former adolescent athletes is the question of referring non-athletes to sports participation programs. Given the potential for both positive and negative psychosocial effects as a result of sports participation, this study recommends that social workers exercise caution in referring adolescent clients to traditional sports programs or sports-based interventions.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, organized team sports have to potential to serve as a holding environment and a site for transitional phenomena and object usage. In this context, sports participation may facilitate healthy adolescent psychosocial development and also serve as a reparative therapeutic experience for adolescents who have had environmental deficits in their early life due to trauma, neglect, or misattunement. Social workers in practice with adolescents may find that referring a client to sports programs can be a therapeutic intervention. However, the program should be evaluated for fit with the individual client. Can it provide safety and reliability? Are the coaches and teammates adequately attuned to the client being referred? Is the structure open enough (i.e. not overly restrictive) for the client to be free in their participation enough to experience transitional phenomena? Social workers must explore these aspects of the sports experience that is being referred to in order to ensure that this is an appropriate intervention for their individual client.

Social workers should also exercise caution in decisions relating to adolescents who experience oppression when considering a referral to sports programs or sports-based interventions. Many sports-based interventions target socioeconomically disadvantaged youth of color with the dual mission of youth development and crime reduction. Inherent in the values of many sports-based interventions is the pervasive societal message that youth of color living in

poverty are dangerous or otherwise deficient and need to be controlled, disciplined, and reformed (Coakley, 2011).

The disciplinary aspects of sports participation may result in psychosocial improvements in areas that are often associated with an adolescent's involvement with a social worker (i.e. truancy, aggression, school performance, antisocial behavior) (Coakley, 2011; Hartmann, 2012; Kelly, 2011), yet may also have the additional consequence of instilling automatic docility in the adolescent. Examining the reasons for referring an adolescent to a sports-based intervention (i.e. for disciplining the adolescent's character or providing extracurricular social supports?) is necessary prior to referring adolescent clients who experience oppression to sports programs. How disciplinary is the structure of the program? Is youth empowerment a feature of the program design? Does the adolescent already struggle with automatic docility and internalized oppression? This study suggests that social workers should evaluate these issues when deciding to refer an adolescent to a sports-based intervention or traditional sports program.

Sports-based interventions and program design for adolescents. On a micro practice level, social workers may be engaged with questions of supporting current or former adolescent athletes and potentially referring adolescents to sports-based interventions or traditional sports programs. In addition, social work practice is involved with policy and program design and can consider the question of sports-based interventions for 'at-risk' adolescents. These interventions have been popular for policy makers seeking to address youth issues in the past few decades. Hartmann and Depro (2006) explain that sports-based interventions saw a rise in popularity due to their cost-effectiveness, their alignment with current neoliberal values of reforming the individual instead of the system that shaped the individual, and consistency with American belief in the transformative power of sports.

Sports are deeply embedded in American culture, with little evidence that they are a temporary phenomenon (Edwards, 1973). Therefore, social work practice that can work with the institution of sports while remaining critically aware is more likely to be effective. Adolescents may experience psychosocial positive and/or negative effects, depending upon the individual's needs and how those align with the sports program in question. Clinical social workers must be attuned to their individual clients' attachment histories, object relations needs, and internalized oppression when considering sports participation. Referrals to sports programs require the social worker to consider not only the needs of the adolescent but also the ability of the sports program to meet those needs.

Social workers involved in policy and program design for youth should consider the efficacy of sports-based interventions, how sports-based interventions may contribute to racialized othering of youth of color, and how disciplinary matrices in sports programs may lead to the production of docile bodies, compliant adolescents who internalize oppression.

Recommendations for further research. As discussed previously, sports-based interventions have shown mixed results in regards to reaching their goals of crime reduction and psychosocial development for disadvantaged youth (Coakley, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Lubans, Plotnikoff, & Lubans, 2012; Nichols & Crow, 2004). To this date there has been no literature regarding potential psychological benefits of the holding environment in sports-based interventions for adolescents. This is a useful area to explore further in future studies of sports-based interventions, especially when considering that their target population may have experienced deficits in early childhood holding environment provision.

Another area for future social work research is sports-based interventions' production of docile bodies. Evaluating disciplinary matrices in the design of these programs and measuring

automatic docility in the outcomes for adolescent participants would be useful directions to explore further. While there may be disciplinary matrices inherent within the design of many sports-based interventions, these may be counteracted programming that emphasizes agency and empowerment in adolescents served. Coakley (2011) writes:

> [T]here is a need for theoretically informed explanations of the ways that sports and sport participation can be organized and combined with other activities for the purpose of empowering young people to make choices about change-oriented civic engagement based on critical awareness of the factors that negatively affect their lives. (p. 318)

Further research is necessary to empirically evaluate potential holding environments and disciplinary matrices in sports-based interventions. In addition, social work practice should explore how sports-based interventions can be combined with youth empowerment programming so that youth served by sports-based interventions are not trained into docility but allowed to grow, heal, and find strength within themselves.

Summary

This chapter began with a review of previously explored Winnicottian and Foucauldian concepts in relation to the phenomenon of adolescent sports participation. Winnicottian theories were extrapolated to athletic contexts, demonstrating how sports can provide a *holding environment*, a *potential space* for *transitional phenomena*, and an environment for healthy *object usage*. This section also addressed necessary factors for the provision of holding, including safety, reliability, and attuned adult figures. Following this, Foucauldian concepts of *disciplinary matrices* in the social institution of sports and their contribution to the production of *docile bodies* were revisited. The production of *docile bodies* was explored, with special emphasis on how this may lead to internalized oppression for marginalized populations such as

socioeconomically disadvantaged youth of color. The explicit and implicit agendas of sports-based interventions was discussed, with an analysis of how the dual goals of adolescent crime reduction and productive youth development may lead to the creation of *docile bodies* in these programs.

In the final sections of this chapter, methodology was revisited and implications for social work practice as well as future social work research were presented. Here, it was suggested that clinical social workers in practice with adolescent athletes should consider the potential holding and disciplining mechanisms of sports environments, working to facilitate their client's navigation of the athletic environment in order to have their needs met adequately. It was recommended that social workers examine their reasons for referring a client to athletics and familiarizing themselves with the nature and structure of the program in question in order to ensure a good fit between client and program, maximizing developmental benefits and minimizing psychosocial harm. After this, macro level social work was addressed in regards to policies and program designs of sports-based interventions for adolescents. Questioning the potential negative impact of these programs and their contribution to the production of *docile bodies,* it was recommended that future designs incorporate youth empowerment programming so that the adolescents being served are given a voice and encouraged to become agents of change within their society, their communities, and their own lives.

Finally, this chapter examined areas for future social work research. Specifically, empirical examinations of potential psychosocial effects of holding environments and disciplinary matrices in adolescent organized team sports should be conducted. There is no uncomplicated answer to the question of sports participation and its effects on adolescent development. Perhaps the simplest recommendation of this study is that social work

practitioners remain mindful of the dual mechanisms of holding and disciplining that can exist in sports contexts and to use this knowledge when working with adolescents to best facilitate how they can heal and grow inside, outside, despite, and through athletic environments.

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