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**WHY DO YOUTH STEP OUT OF SPORT AND INTO  
COURT?**

**A Narrative-Based Exploration**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

**Master of Sport & Leisure Studies**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

**Gloria Hine Clarke**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

2012



*Dedicated to the memory of our koro,  
whose stories opened my eyes.*



# ABSTRACT

Motivated by my son's incarceration months after he stopped playing sport, this thesis attempts to answer the questions that plagued me as I began dealing with lawyers, courts, and prison visits. If sport is all that it is supposed to be why is my son sitting in a prison cell? Had his fourteen years of playing sport been for nothing? Why hadn't sport honoured its promise to protect my son from such a reality?

Consequently, this thesis explores 'Why youth step out of sport and into court?' My objective is to provide parents and those interested in youth issues with new research that confirms, supplements, and/or challenges what is arguably 'known' about youth sports attrition and deviancy. However, rather than produce a traditional academic text I offer a polyvocal interpretive narrative text, where my own voice (as mother and academic) has been interwoven with the lived experiences and voices of five young men who had 'stepped out of sport and into court', as well as the voices of published theorists and researchers who have broadened my understanding of the issues. As a result, this thesis honours the lived experiences of the research participants as relayed to me during three semi-structured interviews, and is hopefully engaging enough to encourage you/the reader to think about the issues and to discuss them with others.

This study highlights the complexities of sport and deviance, in that we live in a world of multiple realities. For instance, while many of the research participants had had similar experiences they also come from different social, cultural and historical locations. For example, three of the participants had been raised by two parents, two by two parents but living in different locations, and one had been raised by extended family. Three had been raised in environments where gang ideology and drug use were normalised, while the other two had been raised in environments to the contrary. One had been arrested only twice, while the others had been arrested anywhere between five and thirty times before their nineteenth birthday, with charges ranging from painting on public property through to burglary and extreme violence. Their common experiences include their participation in rugby and/or rugby league; they had participated in sport and crime at the same time; they had been coached by intimidating people, and they had 'stepped out of sport' between thirteen and eighteen years old.

The first take home message is that parents need to be diligent for the duration of their child's sporting career, and to be aware that whilst sports can do great things for young people, sport may also dampen a child's sensitivity to fear, and normalise and reinforce deviant beliefs, attitudes, justifications and orientations. The second take home message is that it is time for us to consider other forms of sport and physical activity and to give youth the power to define what sport means to them. Furthermore, if we agree that things need to change, this study recommends that attrition and deviance research be made more accessible and that the interested parties work together rather than independently.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Prisanalasis*

How do I feel,  
When my cell is invaded  
By two screws  
And a dog?  
How do I feel,  
When I am stripped  
Naked  
And asked to display  
My scrotum  
And anus?  
How do I feel,  
When my letters are read  
By cold eyes  
Behind closed doors?  
How do I feel,  
Writing to my children  
So one day  
They will know I loved them?  
How do I feel, anger within  
Insight disoriented,  
Encaged, enraged... disengaged.  
How do I feel,  
Out of control  
(out of sight  
out of mind)  
how would you?

Craig White: Casuarina Prison, 1997.

From *Recapturing freedom* (p. 39), by D. Goulding, 2008, Sydney, NSW, Australia: Hawkins Press. Copyright 2008 by Federation Press. Reprinted with permission.



# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

When I got the phone call, I was so sure it was all a big mistake. The police had got it wrong. Someone had simply identified the wrong person. My son would never do anything like that. My sister however assured me, “He did it”. He had confessed to her a week ago.

I was shattered.

I knew my son wasn't perfect. Who is? But I'm a good mum. Aren't I? I had taught my boys the benefits of choosing right over wrong; they had to be indoors after dark; I made an effort to know who their friends were and even said hello to their parents; I made sure they went to school with everything they needed, and had encouraged them to play sports (I had even coached). When my sister said, “Are you alone? You better sit down,” I thought someone had died. But it was worse: One of my babies is going to prison.

This thesis sprang into existence from this experience. While I was told not to blame myself, that I had done everything right, that he wasn't a baby anymore and had made his own choices, I still spent hours reassessing his childhood wondering where I had gone wrong. And to be honest, one of the first things that sprang to mind was: But he had played sport! Doesn't a kid in sport stay out of court? I had studied sports as an undergraduate student and the literature as well as my own experiences had told me that sports can put fun and success into the lives of those who want it, seek it, and need it most; that sport fills those hours where people could otherwise be overeating, oversleeping, putting a dent in the couch, or getting up to no-good; that sport teaches leadership, assertiveness, fair play, the values of citizenship, and the list goes on. Sure, he had dropped out of sport almost twelve months ago, but had the previous fourteen years of playing sport amounted to nothing?

As others heard about my son's situation, they too shared stories of other young men who found themselves on this same path. These boys had also been excited about their sports and were talented, and did or could have taken it to another level, but instead had dropped out of their respective sports and had ended up in the justice system. I must admit it comforted me to hear I wasn't alone, and



this realisation ignited my academic mind. Why were young men walking away from something that they appeared to enjoy and excel at? How does one go from sports to crime? They seem to be such opposites. Or are they? Is there something wrong with sport? Is it too boring? Too safe? Too rule bound? What is crime offering that sport isn't?

These and other questions plagued me in my sleep and in my waking hours. Why isn't sport delivering on its promise to keep kids out of trouble? Isn't sport supposed to increase their self-esteem, initiative, courage, and persistence? Give them access to good friends and good role models? Does the 'a kid in sport stays out of court' mantra only apply while they're *in* sport? These seemingly endless questions troubled me as I began to deal with the reality of working with lawyers and courts to get him bail and to prepare for sentencing.

Moving forward with our lives, I found dealing with prison visits and prison mail deepened my wounds; bracing myself for new stories of 'life on the inside' that made my heart hurt and my blood boil. I did my best to help him through it, but in reality, there is not too much you can do. His stories about the other first-timers made me wonder about their parents and how they were dealing with this. Had their sons played sport too? It was time to do something. Surely anything would be better than nothing. And so here I am; submitting this thesis on behalf of youth, who like my son, have 'stepped out of sport and into court'. I do this in an attempt to provide some answers, some clarity, and some ideas about what is going on with our youth and our sports.

This exploratory and grounded study is guided by the broad research question: *Why do youth step out of sport and into court?* Going into this project I didn't know what I would discover or how it would be presented; all I knew was that I wanted to write a thesis that the reader would find engaging and easy to read, that would honour the lived experiences of the research participants, and would encourage the reader to think about the issues and perhaps discuss them with others. The result is this polyvocal narrative text, where my own voice (as mother and academic) has been interwoven with the experiences and voices of five young men who have 'stepped out of sport and into court', as well as the voices of published theorists and researchers.

The purpose of this study is to provide parents and those interested in youth issues with fresh research that confirms, adds to, and/or challenges our assumptions regarding youth sports attrition and deviant behaviour. I have endeavoured to provide a richer understanding of the issues as they have emerged from the lived realities of a group of young men who volunteered to speak to you the reader about their lives. In these pages, you will find a small collection of my personal stories so you can consider how my experiences have influenced how I have gathered, analysed, and interpreted the boys' stories and lives. Reflecting my decision to conduct an interpretive study (see Chapter 3), the findings (see Chapter 4) are presented as collective narratives, representing the combined experiences of the research participants. As an academic project, this written exploration reviews the literature, introducing the reader to a number of theoretical concepts and models (see Chapter 2) that reflect how society perceives sport and deviance. The discussion chapter (see Chapter 5) merges my voice, the boys' voices, and those found in the literature to reveal some new perspectives and areas worthy of further investigation. In the closing chapter (see Chapter 6), I explain why there are no definitive answers to my research question, present my take home messages, and identify some of this study's limitations.



## Watching Jenny

Our lot meet beneath the trees where the magpies nest. Today, I can see Jenny training on the other side of the school field. She and I are about the same height – 5 foot 4ish. She has freckles too – hers are darker though. Both fair – but I’m Māori<sup>1</sup> (I keep reminding myself). One of her advantages on the track, and my disadvantage is hair. Her mum cuts hers short like a boy. I reckon my long thick mop slows me down – but all the girls in the whānau<sup>2</sup> have long hair.

She’s getting better I suppose.

Those new starting blocks the school has just brought are cool. I didn’t know how to use them the first time I raced at the athletics stadium. Gee, that was funny. Not! Jenny shared her flash running shoes with me that day, and I sprinted faster than I ever had before; blew the competition away. “A force to be reckoned with!” My coach was proud-as. I told mum I needed those shoes, but she says we can’t afford them, ‘your feet will have to do’ she says.

She’ll be faster than me soon.

Watching her, I can see how stupid I must have looked. A mechanical girl: bum in the air at the blocks, swinging marching arms and legs, and shame! those yoga groin and hip stretches are rude-as. One, two, three (steps) – cock your leg (like a dog pissing) – rotate at the hip, and snap! (leg down). Pump those arms, reach – reach! Yeah, people marvelled at the way I could make it over all those hurdles so quickly. But they also laughed at me.

‘Yee-Haaa! Hey, didn’t you used to do that G?’ The cigarette came my way. ‘Used to.’ I pucker, inhale, and exhale... slowly. Chin up. ‘She was fast too bro!’ chimes in someone else. ‘So why dontcha join em?’ I recognise the glint in her eyes. Crushing the butt into the tree I sneer, and look her straight in the eye, ‘Oww, got better things ta do, cuz.’

Yip. Better than me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand

<sup>2</sup> Family



## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivated by my son's incarceration some months after he stopped playing sport, the purpose of this study is to provide parents and those interested in youth issues with new research that confirms, supplements, and/or challenges what is arguably 'known' about youth sports attrition and deviancy. Presented in two parts, what follows is a focused and selective review of existing sport attrition and deviancy literature. *Stepping out of sport* first discusses the nature of sport, then examines and evaluates Vallerand's (2001) hierarchical model of motivation and then Côté's (1999) developmental model of sports participation. The second section, *Stepping into court*, discusses the socially constructed concepts of deviance, delinquency, and crime, then compares and contrasts four prominent personality trait theories, and then analyses Akers' (2009) differential association/social learning theory. Both sections close with a summary that highlights the principle interpretations, and the chapter concludes with an explanation of how the research has been shaped by this selective review of the literature.

### STEPPING OUT OF SPORT

#### The Nature of Sport

If asked to define *sport*, the average New Zealander might say that sports are competitive games active people like to play. This would suggest that sport is perceived to be an activity favoured by those who enjoy physical rivalry and therefore possess the physical fitness, skills, and motivation required to compete competently. However, defining sport is not as simple as it first appears; complicating the matter are the two equally contestable concepts of *play* and *games*. Take for example Mechikoff's (2010) statement, "not all games are sport, and not all sport is play" (p. 5), indicating that play, games and sport are interrelated, whilst also suggesting that these relationships are strained.

Sport is a derivative of the Latin term *deportare*; "to indulge (oneself) in pleasure" (Blackshaw, 2009, p. 197). Some features of pleasure are fun, laughter and feelings of delight and enjoyment, which are also characteristics of play, "an expressive activity done for its own sake" (Coakley, Hallinan, Jackson, & Mewett, 2009, p. 6). In his classic work *Homo Ludens* (Man the Player), however,

Huizinga (1955) argues that play is neither a ‘free-for-all’ impromptu activity nor a means to an end. That is, play is not the manifestation of a human instinct to constantly seek stimulation, to master one’s environment, to relax from the demands of life, or a natural outlet for harmful impulses (Huizinga, 1955). Instead, he posits play as an inescapable human quality, an irrational “action to which our will impels us” (p. 213) related to the ideas of both freedom and order.

Most people would generally agree that play is a voluntary activity that allows one to choose what to play, how to play it, and who to play with for instance. However, Huizinga (1955) argues that there is always an order to play, even though rules and order are considered the antithesis of play (Caillois, 1962). This “structuring of the playful impulse” (Mechikoff, 2010, p. 6) is known as *games*. This means that while players experience freedom during play there are also boundaries within which all players must remain for the game to exist (Huizinga, 1955). By example, rules for a boys’ game of war typically involve: (a) selecting a location (e.g., the garden); (b) determining who can play (e.g., no girls); (c) allocating roles (e.g., hero vs. villain); and (d) deciding when the game will end (e.g., when hungry or bored). If the rules of the game are broken the play-world is compromised, the rule-breaker(s) may be punished and the game abandoned (Huizinga, 1955). Consequently, what initially looks like a simple game actually relies on order and thereby comprises a degree of seriousness. Huizinga (1955) explains this paradox of freedom and order as a balance between “play and seriousness [which] is always fluid” (p. 8).

This fluidity is also present in Caillois (1962) *paidia* and *ludus* continuum as applied to his four categories of games (see Table 1). *Paidia* is “frolicsome and impulsive exuberance” (pure play), while *ludus* refers to games “requiring an amount of effort, patience, skill, or ingenuity” (Caillois, 1961, p. 13). *Alea* refers to games of chance or fate (e.g., gambling), where players have no control over the end result; *mimicry*, games of imagination, imitation, and interpretation (e.g., war); *ilinx*, games where the player “gratifies the desire to temporarily destroy his bodily equilibrium” (p. 44); and *agon*, games where there is a “desire to win by one’s merit in regulated competition” (p. 44). To some degree each category has order or rules of engagement, and it is the presence of rules and regulations that transform child-like games into sport (Polley, 2011). Although, Caillois (1961)

contends that *paidia* and *ludus* do not simply refer to games, but the “spirit” in which games are played.

**Table 1:** Caillois’ Classification of Games

	AGÔN (Competition)	ALEA (Chance)	MIMICRY (Simulation)	ILINX (Vertigo)
PAIDIA ↑ Tumult Agitation Immoderate laughter	Racing Wrestling } not regulated Etc. Athletics	Counting-out rhymes Heads or tails	Children’s initiations Games of illusion Tag, Arms Masks, Disguises	Children “whirling” Horseback riding Swinging Waltzing
Kite-flying Solitaire Patience Crossword puzzles ↓ LUDUS	Boxing, Billiards Fencing, Checkers Football, Chess  Contests, Sports in general	Betting Roulette  Simple, complex, and continuing lotteries*	Theater Spectacles in general	Volador Traveling carnivals Skiing Mountain climbing Tightrope walking

(Caillois, 1961, p. 36)

In other words the more energy, persistence, expertise, and creativity required and devoted to an activity, the more games become sports. For example, Caillois (1962) positions the competitive sport of football in the *agon* category to the *ludus* end of the continuum (see Table 1). Committed to winning, serious rugby players train regularly, study and play according to the standardised rules of the game, submit to rule keepers (e.g., umpires and linesmen), and will be confident enough in their skills to perform in front of an audience. If, however, the seriousness of a rugby game lessens *paidia* increases and *ludus* decreases, and the rugby contest becomes a social or friendly game. Therefore, it is possible for play and games to become sport and to a degree for sport to revert back to games and perhaps some form of play; each form defined by the spirit in which players approach the activity; that is, the subjective meaning(s) individual players attach to the game/sport during that particular moment in time.

Thus play, games and sport are essentially a state of mind, which means that a singular definition of sport is untenable (Coakley et al., 2009). Nonetheless, sports do carry some generally agreed on qualities such as contest, rules, regulations, governing bodies (Coakley et al., 2009), and therein a heightened experience and expectation of order and seriousness. However, alternative sports such as surfing and skateboarding – which some might locate to the *paidia* end of Caillois’ continuum – also require ludic “effort, patience, skill, ingenuity”



(Caillois, 1962, p. 13). Hence sport is referred to as a “contested” activity: “activities for which there are no timeless and universal agreements about meaning, purpose and organisation” (Coakley et al., 2009, p. 9).

### Terms of Reference: Sport and Youth

For the purposes of this review, a general theory of sport and physical activity has been employed. References made to *physical activity* are inclusive of sports, both paidic and ludic; while *physical education* refers to physical activity lessons provided by physical educators working within schools. *Physical education and school sports* (PESS; Bailey et al., 2009) are defined as “an inclusive, generic descriptor for those structured, supervised physical activities that take place at school, and during the (extended) school day” (p. 2). And finally, to be specific, *sport* refers to the sporting context, while *sports* refer to competitive games (e.g., rugby and soccer). References to *children* are inclusive of ages 0-14 and *youth* ages 15-24 (Barry, 2006), while references to *young people* span both classifications and refers to people aged 5-18 (Cale & Harris, 2009).

### Theories of Sport Attrition

Whether they enjoy it or not young people all over the world are often expected to play or try sports. Since the advent of compulsory schooling children have been ‘interned’ and socialised by their respective states, governments and educationalists, and tutored in subjects deemed significant to the development of citizen and nation (Bailey et al., 2009; Laker, 2003b). Bailey et al. (2009) for instance, call attention to Britain’s 1909 *Syllabus of Physical Exercises*, which informed the country’s teachers that physical education and school sport (PESS) would support both the physical and educational development of their students. This document stated that the physical effects of regular physical activity would be remedial (e.g., improved posture) and developmental, “assisting the natural pattern of growth of the child” (p. 3), thus improving children’s general health. Complementing these benefits the educational gains were perceived to be moral and mental: “the inculcation of habits of self-discipline and order, and the allied qualities of concentration, manual dexterity and determination” (p. 3). Moreover, PESS would instil children with “leadership qualities, team spirit, deferred

gratification and character” (p. 4), and is therefore capable of addressing juvenile delinquency.

More than a century later the primary justifications for PESS remain physical, mental and moral health (Bailey et al., 2009; Hume & Salmon, 2011). As an enduring feature of the New Zealand education curriculum (Bailey et al., 2009), PESS is still perceived to play a major role in the socialisation of young people (Cale & Harris, 2009; Laker, 2003a, 2003b); despite the claim that socialisation, as it relates to the social construct of *character*, is a myth (Critcher, 2000; Miracle & Rees, 1994). Today, sport participation is associated with an even wider range of physical, educational, psychological and social benefits (Armour & Kirk, 2008; Critcher, 2000; Fox, Boutcher, Faulkner, & Biddle, 2000; Wuest & Fisette, 2012). Some examples of these perceived benefits include increased self-esteem, initiative, courage, and persistence (Danish, Taylor, & Fazio, 2003), as well as social capital, identity and status (Edwards, 2007; Miracle & Rees, 1994). The benefits of sport for the community and society as a whole are presumed to be the transmission of important cultural norms and values, and social cohesion (Polley, 2011; Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2007). Further, the sporting context is promoted as a site for legitimate excitement (Cashmore, 2010; Elias & Dunning, 1986) and behaviour modification (Holt & Sehn, 2008; Nichols, 2007) – two benefits associated with the catch-phrase “a kid in sport stays out of court”, often cited by New Zealand Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft (2009, 2012).

Nonetheless, while members of society have arguably been socialised to embrace and subscribe to these espoused benefits, sport attrition is a reality and is particularly high during adolescence (age 13-19; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Strachan, 2008). Worldwide, the annual attrition rate in competitive youth sport is estimated to be 35% (Ryska, Hohensee, Cooley, & Jones, 2002). In America only 60% of high school students meet the country’s physical activity recommendations (Wuest & Fisette, 2012). While in Canada researchers have noted an “unsettling” decline in childhood sport participation rates, dropping from 57% in 1992 to 51% by 2005 (Thibault & Kikulis, 2011). Similarly, Sport and

Recreation New Zealand<sup>3</sup> (SPARC; 2007) acknowledge that, “the physical activity levels of children and young people are trending downwards and sedentary behaviour is increasing” (p. 2). This assertion is supported by the New Zealand Secondary Schools’ Sports Council’s (2010) annual census figures, which show a 4% decline in participation between 2000 and 2010. Concerned about these trends for the wellbeing of future generations (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008), governments launch various interventions (Keat & Sam, in press) and sport intervention literature flourishes (Green, 2010).

A selective review of existing sports attrition literature leaves one with three particular impressions. First, there appear to be two principal trends in sport: athletes who persist, and athletes who eventually drop out. Furthermore, that these *persisters* and *desisters* (Nichols, 2007) are generally portrayed as superior and inferior human beings respectively. For instance, there are those who argue that athletes are less deviant than non-athletes (e.g., Field, 2000; Hastad, Segrave, Pangrazi, & Petersen, 1984; Nichols, 2007); that persisters play sport for all the right reasons while desisters had played sport for all the wrong reasons (Wuest & Fisette, 2012); and that sport is for the potentially elite and not lesser physical beings (Abrams, 2011; Siedentop, 2007). The second observation is that many of the studies referred to in the literature are decades old, and studies in which the participants’ voices had been included have subsequently been omitted. A final observation is that sport sociologists and researchers tend to approach sport attrition from either a ‘why?’ or a ‘how?’ perspective (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007).

Consequently, this section focuses on two theoretical lenses that represent these two perspectives: theories of human motivation and of human development. Specifically, the discussion examines two popular and insightful theoretical frameworks: Vallerand’s (2001) hierarchical model of motivation which draws on a number of historical studies, and Côté’s (1999) developmental model of sport participation, which has been vigorously tested since its inception (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). The particular significance of these models is that individually they represent a wider body of motivation and developmental

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<sup>3</sup> Re-branded as ‘Sport New Zealand’ in 2011.

research, and when considered in tandem, complement each other and offer a more holistic view of the sport attrition phenomenon.

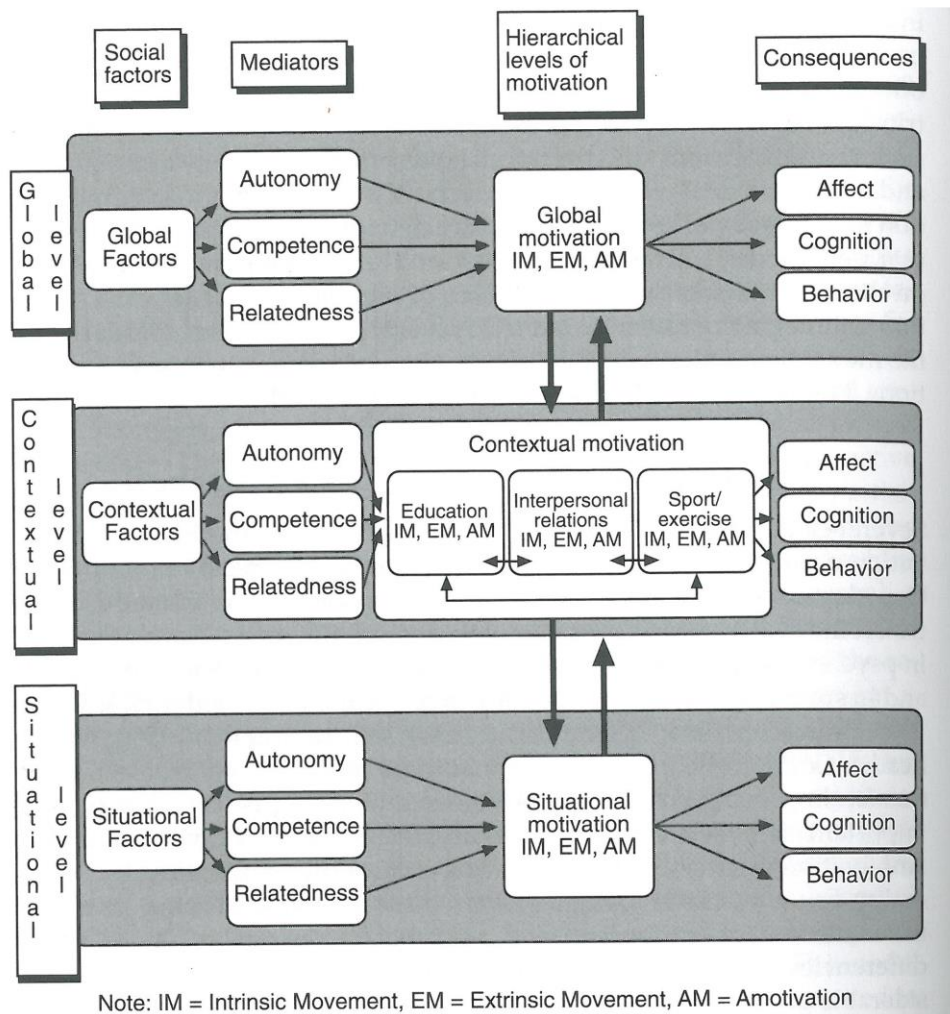
### Motivational Perspectives of Dropout

Deci and Ryan (1985) describe the study of motivation as “the exploration of the energization and direction of behaviour” (p. 3). Further, they depict motivation theories as ranging from the mechanistic to the organismic. Earlier mechanistic theories such as instinct theory, drive theory and need achievement theory assume that human beings are passive, “pushed around by the interaction of physiological drives and environmental stimuli” (p. 3). Conversely, relatively recent organismic theories (e.g., attribution theory, achievement goal orientation theory, cognitive evaluation theory) argue that people are proactive, “acting on internal and external forces [while also] being vulnerable to those forces” (p. 9). A possible effect of this theoretical evolution is the plethora of motivation definitions, making “motivation one of the most misunderstood aspects of sport psychology” (Finch, p. 67). Thus, Finch (2002) recommends that coaches and sport psychologists focus primarily on “the *direction* and *intensity* [emphasis added] of sport-related behavior” (p. 69) which often leads to persistence.

### The Hierarchical Model of Motivation

Vallerand’s (2001) hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (HMM; see Figure 1) is an integrated theoretical framework encompassing elements of both mechanistic and organismic theory. Of particular relevance to this examination of sport attrition is the model’s macro-micro view of human motivation, its three dimensional approach to motivational orientations, and in the way that it illustrates the “psychological processes underlying motivational phenomena experienced by sport and exercise participants” (Vallerand, 2001, p. 318). Additionally, the HMM represents three central motivation research categories (global, contextual, and situational) that Vallerand refers to as *levels of generality*. These levels are layered and scaffolded to illustrate and reinforce how human motivation occurs at three complementary and interrelated sites. The multiple dimensions of the HMM make for a complex framework and therefore an image has been provided (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** The Hierarchical Model of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation



From *Advances in Motivation in Sport and Exercise* (p. 266), by G. C. Roberts, 2001, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. Copyright 2001 by R. J. Vallerand. Reprinted with permission.

Briefly, the lowest level of the hierarchy is situational and refers to an individual's immediate state of being, influenced by variables "present at a given time but not permanently" (Vallerand, 2001, p. 282). By example, situational sport research typically examines negative and positive instructional feedback and how it effects an athlete's immediate motivational orientation. Locating situational events within their respective life domains, the contextual level of generality refers to an individual's "usual motivational orientation toward a specific context" (e.g., swimming; p. 275). Contextual sport research generally investigates determinants "present on a general or recurrent basis" (p. 282) and the consequences of sport and sport specific motivation. According to Vallerand (2001), contextual determinants include cultural norms (e.g., violence, number of

spectators, amount of training), motivational climate (e.g., prevalence of awards, parental support), and instructional style (e.g., supportive, authoritative). Last, the highest level of the hierarchy is global. In short, global motivation is the manifestation of one's relatively stable personality traits, influenced by pervasive global factors; namely one's social, historical, and cultural locations including socio-economic, educational, racial, and gendered experiences. The inclusion of this global level represents the integration of mechanistic and organismic theories of human behaviour; bringing together the personality traits and social/environmental traditions of motivation (Vallerand, 2001).

### Dropouts are not interested in sports

Drawing on the work of Deci and Ryan (1985), Vallerand (2001) proposes that intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), or amotivation (AM) exist within an individual at each level of generality. To define, Deci and Ryan (1985) describe *intrinsic motivation* as the innate energy source that drives humans to seek out and attempt to conquer optimal challenges that will satisfy their innate need for competence and self-determination. In contrast, non-intrinsic behaviour is driven by forces and factors that exist outside the individual (e.g., social and material rewards) and is thus referred to as *extrinsic motivation*. Further, without going into the intricacies of Deci and Ryan's cognitive evaluation and self-determination theories, intrinsically motivated individuals are driven by a genuine interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985), pursuing activities for their inherent qualities (e.g., joy, freedom, and fun; Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Finch, 2002; Vallerand, 2001). Conversely, while the behaviour of extrinsically motivated individuals is also directed by an interest, that interest is linked to external forces (e.g., friends) and/or factors (e.g., prize money) over which individuals have little control (Whitehead, 1993). Such situations are said to generate feelings of tension and pressure; meaning, according to some motivational researchers, that extrinsically motivated people do not generally experience feelings of joy, freedom or fun (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Finch, 2002; Vallerand, 2001).

However, while much has been written about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, discussions regarding amotivation are few (Vallerand, 2001). This is interesting given Vallerand's assertion that amotivation is "an important predictor of dropping out" (p. 274); an outcome Vallerand does not associate with

intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated athletes. In fact, based on Vallerand's motivational profiles which mirror Deci and Ryan's points above, one might suggest that Vallerand discusses two rather than three types of athletes: individuals who willingly invest in sport (IM and EM) and individuals who do not (AM). In short, while extrinsically motivated athletes are influenced by external determinants and goals, they are nonetheless engaged; whereas amotivated athletes are "neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated" (p. 271) and participate in sport without purpose or goals (Biddle & Mutrie, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kremer, Moran, Walker, & Craig, 2012; Vallerand, 2001). The inference here is that intrinsically motivated athletes are interested in sport for all the right reasons, extrinsically motivated athletes are interested in sport for all the wrong reasons, and amotivated "athletes" simply have no interest in sport at all and probably participate only in order to comply (e.g., educational requirement).

### Dropouts are too sensitive for sports

A possible explanation for a disinterest in sport, and consequently sport attrition, can be found in the way that the HMM illustrates an "ongoing transaction between the person and the environment" (Vallerand, 2001, p. 269). For example, the vertical series of arrows mid-model (see Figure 1) posit one's contextual and situational motivations as the manifestation of one's global motivation, suggesting that individuals cannot escape or adjust their core personality traits. Hence, Vallerand (2001) contends that individuals with a global IM orientation, which has been positively associated with life satisfaction, are predisposed to contextual and situational IM orientations. This suggests that a positive outlook on life manifests as a positive attitude toward life domains (e.g., sport, education) and situational events (e.g., training sessions), although, Vallerand notes that given the irregular nature of situational factors, situational motivation can be experienced differently each time. Moving back up the model, a series of recursive arrows (see Figure 1) suggests that a positive situational experience can positively influence contextual motivation and in turn global motivation, however, Vallerand (2001) notes that changing an individual's relatively stable global personality would be difficult and would take some time – a point that may warrant a thinning of the model's ascending arrows. Thus, one might argue that a disinterest in sport (contextual and situational) is the manifestation of a global AM personality that would be difficult to change without professional intervention. This may explain

why more recent motivation literature focuses primarily on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Vallerand, 2001) – perhaps AM individuals are too difficult to work with, or are considered to be a ‘lost cause’.

Another element of the HMM that illustrates this individual-environmental interaction is the proposition that “the impact of social factors on motivation is mediated by *perceptions* [emphasis added] of autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (Vallerand, 2001, p. 285). This implies that AM and EM individuals are more susceptible to social factors than IM individuals. The inference is demonstrated in situations where groups of people (e.g., sports teams) exposed to the same contextual factors (e.g., coach) exhibit different motivational orientations. By example, working with a class of elementary school children Boggiano and Barrett (1984, cited in Deci & Ryan, 2001) found that positive feedback (situational social factor) had a positive effect on IM children but a negative effect on EM children (with no reference made to amotivation). Deci and Ryan (1985) attribute these results to a difference in the children’s perceived *locus of causality* (LOC), meaning that the children had interpreted the external reward (feedback) as either informational (e.g., constructive) or controlling (e.g., critical).

To explain, IM individuals generally have an internal LOC; that is, they believe their choices and behaviours are guided by them and not others (Deci & Ryan, 1985). EM individuals on the other hand, have an external LOC; they feel their choices and behaviours are largely driven by external forces (e.g., coaches and parents) and/or factors (e.g., maintaining their championship status). According to the HMM this means that IM individuals generally interpret social factors positively (informational) and accordingly exhibit affirmative levels of autonomy (choice), competence (ability), and relatedness (feeling connected to significant others). In contrast, to greater and lesser degrees respectively, AM and EM individuals will generally interpret social factors negatively (controlling) and as a result feel less autonomous, competent, and related (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For these reasons, Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that IM individuals are more likely to comply with rules and instruction, whereas EM individuals are more likely to rebel. One might suggest that this rebellious spirit may manifest in the act of dropping out of sport, against the wishes and best intentions of parents, coaches, and society in general.



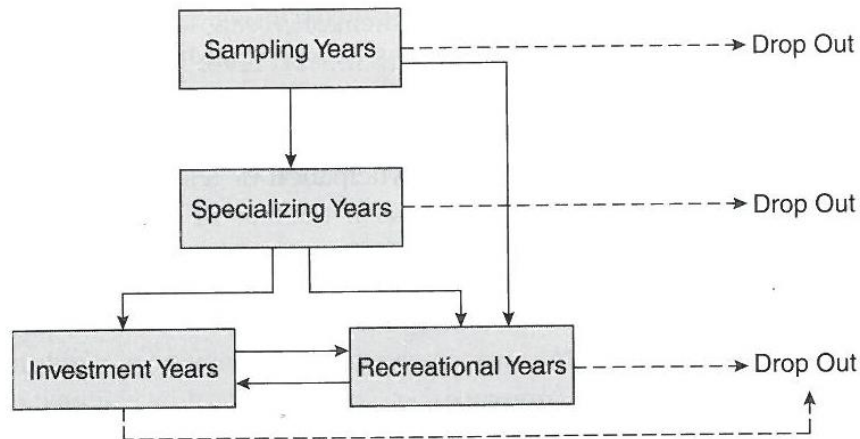
## Developmental Perspectives of Dropout

In contrast to motivation research and literature, theories of human development explore *how* human behaviour changes as a consequence of ongoing individual-environmental transactions: “the mutually influential relationships between the developing person, his or her characteristics, and characteristics of the sport context” (Theokas, 2009, p. 303). According to Bergen (2008), theories of human development can be categorised as linear or nonlinear. Earlier linear theories of development comprise empiricist (or reductionist) and rationalist theories that posit human development and learning as cumulative and transformational processes (respectively), which are therefore predictable. Conversely, nonlinear theories comprise post-modern theories of development and argue that human development is a dynamic process, offering “a probabilistic rather than a predictive perspective” (Thelen & Smith, 1994; cited in Bergen, 2008, p. 14). This means that sociological theorists generally “focus on environmental influences that may differentiate developmental patterns and they emphasize culturally diverse rather than universal patterns of development” (Bergen, 2008, p. 16). One model that illustrates this particularly well is Côté’s developmental model of sport participation (1999; Knight & Holt, 2011).

## The Developmental Model of Sport Participation

The developmental model of sport participation (DMSP) provides a useful framework for this study of youth sport attrition. Of particular relevance is the model’s visual simplicity (see Figure 2), the way in which it acknowledges alternative pathways and realities, and its underpinning qualitative research methodology; namely, the use of retrospective semi-structured interviews that explore the perceptions of a small number of elite athletes, their siblings, and their parents (Côté, 1999). Thus, the DMSP provides a longitudinal and multi-faceted viewpoint of the youth sport experience. This is in contrast to the survey and questionnaire methodologies typically associated with motivation research, which Fraser-Thomas, Côté and Deakin (2008b) argue is “intuitive, superficial, and subjective in nature” (p. 646).

**Figure 2:** The Developmental Model of Sports Participation



From *Psychological Foundations of Sport* (p. 488), by J. M. Silva and D. E. Stevens, 2002, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. Copyright 2002 by Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Briefly, the DMSP identifies and maps three stages of sport development that young people may progress through during their sporting lives, and which lead to three distinct outcomes: (1) elite participation; (2) recreational participation; and (3) dropout (Côté & Hay, 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008b; Wall & Côté, 2007). The sampling years (age 6-12) are marked by a child's induction to school (and thereby PESS). During this developmental period (childhood) children typically experience high levels of *deliberate play*, fundamental skill development (e.g., throwing, jumping, and kicking), and participate in a number of physical activities and sports. During the specialising years (age 13-15), youth enter high school and may represent a school sports team and/or a sports club, wherein "practice becomes a more powerful factor in skill development" (Côté & Hay, 2002, p. 493). Throughout this stage of development (middle-childhood) children usually stop sampling and specialise in one or two sports which generally entail drills, weight training, and other activities that "are physically demanding and are specifically designed to improve performance in the long term, often resulting in delayed gratification" (e.g., running and cycling; Wall & Côté, 2007, p. 85). Finally, the investment years (age 16+) are marked by an extreme investment in the pursuit of excellence; that is, greater amounts of *deliberate practice* and lesser amounts of deliberate play. Developmentally, it is also marked by the need to be autonomous (Chen, 2010; Hodge & Zaharopoulos, 1991).

### Dropouts specialised too early

According to proponents of the DMSP, training patterns and significant others are the most influential factors in a child's sport development (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Wall & Côté, 2007). Studies conducted by Côté and his colleagues reveal that these physical and psychosocial factors play an integral role in a child's transition from sampling to specialisation and from specialisation to investment, but even more so if the child experiences a premature jump from one stage to the next *or* skips sampling altogether (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009). These phenomena are referred to as *early specialisation*, which Coakley (2011) argues is motivated by the assumption that more hours of intense sport-specific training lead to increased levels of performance and thereby early success and prestige. While this can occur, early specialisation is also associated with a number of negative outcomes (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005) including early retirement (dropout), long-term and recurring injuries, low self-esteem, and "restricted psychosocial experiences that can interfere with normal maturation and development" (Coakley, 2011, p. 13). For example, some studies reveal that the most commonly cited reasons for dropout include conflict of interest, lack of interest, and having other interests; excessive competitive conditions leading to stress, anxiety, injury and burnout; a lack of enjoyment, fun, and success; and boring, irrelevant and repetitive content (Coakley, 2011; Hastie, 2003; Hodge & Zaharopoulos, 1991; Siedentop, 2007). Despite such data however, DMSP based research indicates that not all early specialists drop out.

### Specialisation was poorly managed

In contrast to the suggestion that persisters respond better to the pressures of sport and early specialisation than desisters, Côté and his colleagues argue that the decision to persist or desist "depends on personal experiences, which are heavily influenced by [one's] social environment" (Côté & Hay, 2002, p. 486). By example, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008a, 2008b) conducted a qualitative and a quantitative DMSP study (respectively), both with competitive adolescent swimmers, and found that whilst sampling (ages 6-12) active swimmers participated in a larger range of sports and/or extracurricular activities for a longer period of time than dropouts. They also found that when active swimmers began to specialise (age 13-15) they were generally managed by trained coaches (plural)

who were autonomy-supportive, valued reciprocal coach-athlete relationships, and who gave more one-to-one coaching than the coaches of dropouts. In addition, the parents of active swimmers were found to be supportive, but did not give supplementary side-line “coaching tips at practices and meets” (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008b, p. 654) or pressure their child to perform better and to continue swimming, as experienced by dropouts. Moreover, these swimmers were members of clubs that had developmental philosophies ensuring that the younger athletes participated in fewer practices and that their dry-land training was delayed.

Conversely, early specialist desisters reported that their coach (singular) was untrained, controlling, and “played favourites” (2008b) because they received less one-to-one coaching than the more successful swimmers. However, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008b) suggest that this perception may be in “comparison to perceptions of coach support when they were younger (and one of the top performers in the club)” (p. 329). Further, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008a, 2008b) noted that desisters did not mention progressive training practices and had begun dry-land training (e.g., weights, running, and cycling) and attending training camps significantly earlier than their active counterparts. The reality of such training conditions suggests that these intense deliberate practice strategies were approved and supported by parents who, coincidentally, had once been competitive swimmers themselves, or had not had the opportunity to participate in sports as children. Their studies also showed that parents of dropouts had offered incentives for excellent performance or to persuade their child/ren to continue swimming. This may relate to Coakley’s (2006) argument that such behaviours can be driven by the belief that a child in sport equates to good parenting and that a child’s sporting successes elevates one’s status as a “good” parent.

To a lesser degree, Côté and his colleagues also examined the roles that peers and friends play in youth sport participation patterns (Côté & Hay, 2002). They found that peers and friends were initially supportive and were often cited as one of the most important determinants of participation; however, as children entered their specialising years the influence of peers and friends changed. Both active and dropout swimmers reported that their swimming peers were more supportive than their school friends, who regularly pressured them to “go to parties, sleepovers, or other social events, and did not understand the commitment required in swimming” (Fraser-Thomas et al, 2008b, p. 654). However, persisters

reported that as they got older their school friends came to respect and support their commitment to swimming; while it appears desisters – who were often the youngest in their swimming group – may have succumbed to peer pressure; suggesting that they may have dropped out because they desired the companionship of youth their own age, which may have been exacerbated poor coaching practices and parental expectations discussed previously. Thus, one could conclude that dropout is not caused by early specialisation per se, but because specialisation is mismanaged by adults.

### Dropouts are victims of circumstance

Dropout, however, may be more complicated than mismanagement and may also reflect a lack of resources. Meaning that one's decision to persist or desist or desist is a reflection of one's personal experience of sport, which is largely determined by one's social, cultural and historical locations (e.g., gender, ethnicity, family income). For instance, persisters reported that their coaches were trained, worked in pairs, and coached for clubs that had developmental philosophies. This set of conditions may reflect a healthier bank balance that afforded the club professional trainers and/or a coaching development programme. It may also be a reflection of other organisational strengths, such as capable administrative systems and volunteers, and a professional association with like-minded clubs and agencies. In turn, these circumstances may have justified higher participation fees, and also produced positive competitive results. On the other hand, the coaches as described by desisters spoke were untrained, overly controlling, and biased. These coaches promoted intense deliberate practice strategies that compromised the athletes' normal maturation and physical development, with (it would seem) the permission of the club and parents. This set of circumstances could be indicative of a less effective club that may be experiencing a higher turnover of members and perhaps coaches, resulting in a lower fee structure. In short, it may be a case of 'you get what you pay for'.

Côté and his colleagues also found that persisters, when compared with desisters, had participated in a higher number of extra-curricular activities over a longer period of time during their sampling years (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008a, 2008b). This participation trend would have required a higher level of parental support in the form of transportation and financial resources. Such scenarios

would involve access to reliable and multiple forms of family transportation, a disposable income, and perhaps a stay-at-home parent or a parent working flexible hours in order to get the child/ren to their sports activities. Dropouts on the other hand, had specialised much earlier than persisters. One explanation may be that parents could not afford for their child/ren to sample more than one sport at a time; although, studies also found that the parents of desisters generally had an athletic history, which could also explain the move to specialise early. Then again, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008b) found that some parents of desisters “had never had the opportunities to participate and compete in sports” (p. 655), suggesting that these parents may have come from a lower socioeconomic band themselves. Therefore, it would have been advantageous for Côté and his colleagues to have collected and considered some additional demographic data.

### A Summary

In summary, it is clear that dropout has held the attention of sport advocates and researchers for many decades. Over these years interested parties have generally agreed that youth cite a number and variety of reasons for participation and dropping out of sports; reasons that are then often ranked by importance, and/or prevalence, and according to age and gender. Subsequently, these findings inform later research and writings and are harnessed by others who subscribe to a range of research paradigms and theories to provide readers with alternative viewpoints on this enduring issue. In some cases, data related to persistence and desistance are compared and contrasted, despite the argument that “reasons for participation and withdrawal may not be directly related” (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008a, p. 319). One such example is Vallerand’s (2001) hierarchical model of motivation (HMM) which suggests (amongst other things) that desisters do not enjoy sport as they are amotivated individuals who are particularly sensitive to social factors.

In contrast to the typical intrinsic-extrinsic motivation writings, Vallerand (2001) contends that amotivation – not extrinsic motivation – is directly related to the dropout phenomenon. However, rather than argue that amotivation causes dropout Vallerand implies that amotivation is a fact of life. That is, there will always be people who do not feel autonomous, competent or connected to others. In proposing that an amotivated situational orientation is essentially the result of

an amotivated global orientation, Vallerand's perspective has a fatalistic air to it; suggesting that a defiant or jaded attitude during rugby training (for example) is a sign of an amotivated attitude to rugby and/or sport as a whole, and is a sign of an amotivated attitude to life – that apparently involves a general state of apathy, helplessness and/or depression (Vallerand, 2001). As a consequence, the HMM gives credence to the argument that “sports do not build character. They reveal it” (Michener 1976, cited in Abrams, 2011, p. 40).

Furthermore, while Vallerand recognises a group of sport participants other researchers tend to ignore – children and youth who are simply not interested or inspired by sports – one could argue that Vallerand overstates amotivation, which raises the following questions. Is amotivation the appropriate concept to apply to a disinterest in sport? Why is a disinterest in sport referred to in such negative terms? And, is there a middle-ground, where disinterest does not equate to affective, cognitive and behavioural apathy, helplessness or depression? This last question is answered in part by Côté's (1999) developmental model of sport participation (DMSP), which recognises that some children prefer recreational pursuits rather than traditional competitive sports.

The DMSP's particular strength lies in its longitudinal perspective and empirical base; whereas Vallerand draws on a variety of previous situational, contextual and global studies. In short, the DMSP posits dropout as the mismanagement of early specialisation, even though others argue that *all* forms of specialisation can result in early retirement (Coakley, 2011). One could argue, however, that ‘mismanagement leading to dropout’ may be a somewhat superficial understanding of attrition. For instance, had Côté and his colleagues considered other demographic and situational information they may have found ‘mismanagement’ to be relative to club and family resources. Another limitation is that while the DMSP seems to be a probabilistic perspective in acknowledging diverse patterns of behaviour, it stops short of illustrating any mutually influential relationships between the athlete and the social forces around them.

In closing, while these frameworks have informed how this topic has been approached, they provide only a partial perspective and representation of the issue. On the one hand, the HMM brings to the fore personality traits and how they are perceived to influence participation, while the DMSP provides an in-depth

perspective of the sporting context as experienced by children and adolescents over time. Nonetheless, both frameworks are deficit models. The HMM illustrates a zero-tolerance for dropout; associating a disinterest in sport with personal deficiencies rather than a natural or justifiable disinterest. The DMSP on the other hand, appears to be more tolerant; although Côté and his colleagues stop short of considering whether there is an *acceptable* age and circumstance for dropout. Further, both models are deterministic; illustrating that athletes are acted upon or simply react to social forces rather than interacting with those forces. As a result, with regards to the research at hand, one could argue that these perspectives on their own are not ideal but that elements of these models might be applied and/or combined to good effect.

## STEPPING INTO COURT

### Deviance, Delinquency and Crime

Just as sport is a contested term so too are deviance, delinquency and crime (Farley & Flota, 2012); three interrelated social constructions often associated with youth (Muncie, 2009). At first glance these concepts appear to be one and the same, with deviance the contemporary expression for juvenile delinquency, a term that first appeared in early nineteenth century criminology texts (Hendrick, 2006). A review of the literature however, reveals such an assumption would be incorrect. For instance Flannery, Hussey, Biebelhausen and Wester (2003) state juvenile delinquency is a legal term, defined as “criminal behavior committed by minors” (p. 502); while Mays and Winfree (2006) contend that adults can also be delinquent, as “the term simply refers to anyone who fails to do what is required of him or her by law or duty” (p. 7). Further, Mays and Winfree (2006) argue that when *juvenile* is combined with delinquency the term takes on a unique socially constructed meaning: “a young person who is viewed by society... as having a devalued or spoiled identity.... used indiscriminately by the public at large” (p. 7-8). In this way, delinquency is similar to deviance, in that these terms are not specifically attributed to youth by definition. By example, deviance has been defined as “human behavior that violates existing and generally accepted social norms” (Humphrey & Schmalleger, 2012, p. 4); as “any behavior disapproved by a large or influential portion of society” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 292); and as “some sort of opposition to the societal consensus on the proper way to behave



and think” (Lawson & Heaton, 2010, p. 3). Moreover, crime is defined as “any deviant act that violates a law” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 298); although Lawson and Heaton (2010) contend generic definitions such as this “do not encompass the complexity of what is meant by crime” (p. 5).

Thus, by definition, a minor (aged 10-17) who steals a car is a juvenile delinquent as well as a deviant; while a minor who smokes cigarettes is deviant and perhaps a juvenile delinquent, but is not a delinquent. In the first case, a crime has been committed; a formal or codified social norm linked to a formal sanction. In the second case, an informal social norm or expectation has been violated and is connected to informal social sanctions (e.g., disapproving looks). In both cases, the common factor is that *society* – or rather those with the authority and resources to establish and enforce social norms (Coakley et al., 2009; Farley & Flota, 2012) – is responsible for setting the normative limit and thereby the applicable sanction. For this reason sociologists often argue that deviance, delinquency and crime are subjective and socially constructed concepts (Coakley et al., 2009) that differ from culture to culture, are often situational, and change over time (Farley & Flota, 2012). In short deviance, delinquency and crime are “a violation of socially defined rules rather than a violation of absolute moral standards” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 293).

Durkheim, a prominent deviancy scholar, argues crime (and therein deviance and delinquency) are normal and inevitable because people will always “identify differences within and between themselves and others” (Atkinson & Young, 2008, p. 5). In the interests of social order these differences ultimately lead to social processes that maximise conformity to and minimise deviance from social norms (Farley & Flota, 2012). These social processes comprise direct and indirect forms of social control (Farley & Flota, 2012); the latter arguably the most “pervasive and effective... because [they are] accomplished through socialisation” (p. 295): the “process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live” (Coakley et al., 2009, p. 94). This process of learning and development begins at birth and is managed by various agents of socialisation; significant others, groups, and social contexts that influence the growing child in two broad phases referred to as “primary” and “secondary” (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, & Carr, 2009).

The primary phase of socialisation is principally managed by the family, who teach their child/ren language and basic behavioural patterns (e.g., eating and sleeping cycles, displays of affection). The secondary socialising phase begins when children come into regular contact with the wider community such as education providers (e.g., pre-schools), organisations (e.g., sports clubs), peer groups (e.g., at school), the media (e.g., television), and eventually the workplace (Giddens et al., 2009). Thus, over time, children learn the rules of society and their place within it; rules and roles they are expected to internalise (Coakley et al., 2009) whereby they feel “psychological pleasure when [they] do things “right”, and... experience guilt when [they] violate social norms. Thus social control becomes self-control” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 295).

In contrast, direct social controls are sanctions, “rewards for conforming behavior and punishments for nonconforming behavior” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 296). Farley and Flota (2012) describe informal sanctions as “spontaneous reactions to behaviors that anyone can administer” (p. 296). Informal-positive sanctions for instance would include smiles, gifts or praise (e.g., a married woman’s pregnancy announcement); while informal-negative sanctions would include frowns, gossip, or condemnation (e.g., an unwed teenager’s pregnancy announcement). Conversely, formal sanctions “are well defined and can be applied only by people with proper institutional credentials” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 296). For example, formal-positive sanctions include being awarded a qualification or medal, or being conferred an important station/role in life (e.g. priest or judge). On the other hand, formal-negative sanctions include expulsion from school, dismissal from work, or criminal punishments such as fines or imprisonment. Thus it appears there are rules and sanctions for all facets of social life, regardless of one’s age, culture, situation or historical location. Further, while there are some definitional discrepancies, there seems to be a general consensus that deviance, delinquency and crime are essentially degrees of nonconformity – often associated with youth.

### Terms of Reference: Deviance and Deviant

For the purposes of this review, a general theory of deviance has been employed. *Deviance* substitutes references to crime, delinquency and juvenile delinquency and thereby encompasses all acts that violate social norms. Accordingly, *deviant*

refers to any young person whose behaviour deviates from the social norms of the day. For want of a better term, deviant has been used because it reflects the general theory of deviance employed here. Where it is necessary to differentiate the violation of formal and informal social norms, illegal behaviour is referred to as *criminal deviance* and non-criminal deviance is referred to as *normative deviance*.

### Theories of Deviance

Despite social controls, people deviate from social norms and expectations on a daily basis. All over the world people swear, tell lies, use illegal drugs, arrive late, commit suicide, break speed limits, abuse alcohol, engage in same-gender sex, tattoo their bodies, and pollute the environment: all forms of deviancy depending on the time, place and social situation (Lawson & Heaton, 2010). However, according to the media, criminal statistics, and society in general the larger portion of deviant acts are committed by youth (Muncie, 2004, 2009). As a result deviance has become synonymous with youth and “the young have come to be defined only as a social problem, rather than representing any positive or creative possibilities for the future” (Muncie, 2004, pp. 12–13).

Hendrick (2006) and Muncie (2004) attribute the perceived ‘problem of youth’ with the social construction of childhood and legislation that criminalised nuisance behaviours in the early nineteenth century. They argue that children were once treated as adults but that their role in society changed after reformists advocated the need to “safeguard their innocence and morality” (Muncie, 2004, p. 53). The construction of childhood effectively set young people apart as a distinct group requiring protection and discipline (Hendrick, 2006; Muncie, 2009). This in part led to the end of child labour, leaving large numbers of working-class children unemployed and unsupervised (Muncie, 2004). Hendrick (2006) argues that these developments led to “the aggressive attitude of the police and courts in prosecuting ‘traditional’ working-class youthful leisure activities” such as “drunkenness, malicious mischief, loitering, begging and dangerous play” (p. 7). Further, Hendrick (2006) contends that these and subsequent cultural and political developments explain why adults are sensitive to the socially constructed ‘problem of youth’.

Two centuries later, perhaps reflecting the rise in legislative and social expectations, the number of young people ‘stepping into court’ is relatively high. In 2009 American law enforcement agencies arrested 1,906,600 young people aged 10-18 years old (Puzzanchera & Adams, 2011). Annually, an estimated 70,000 English and Welsh school-aged children enter the justice system (Natale, 2010), with just under half of those arrested in 2009 (half of 934,443) aged between 10 and 20. Closer to home, Australia’s offender statistics are highest for 15-19 year olds, representing 30% of the country’s total offender population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). And while the New Zealand Department of Corrections has reported a steady long-term reduction in young prisoners (Harpham, 2011), youth have the highest offending (see Appendix 7) and recidivist rates (see Appendix 8) of all offender age groups (Nadesu, 2009). In fact, young offenders (17-20 years) are twice as likely to return to prison as those aged over 40, with almost half of all young recidivists returning to prison within twelve months and 64% re-imprisoned at least twice within five years of their initial sentence (Nadesu, 2009).

However, while statistics are useful they are also flawed. For instance, Lawson and Heaton (2012) argue that illegal deviancy statistics do not provide a true representation as illegal deviance often goes underreported (e.g., domestic violence) and undetected (e.g., drug use). Furthermore, they contend that official statistics are the result of discretionary decision-making<sup>4</sup>, based on the police’s perception of “where most crime is likely to take place and who is most likely to be a criminal” (p. 28). Criminal deviancy statistics are therefore socially constructed: “the final product of a complex process of decision-making by those involved in the reporting and classifying of criminal acts” (p. 20). Nonetheless, the media often selectively amplifies facets of statistical data and distorts “the nature and incidence of crimes” (p. 11), playing a central role in the creation of unsubstantiated ‘moral panics’ and perceptions of ‘crime waves’ (e.g., Green, 2010; Katz, 1988; Muncie, 2009; White & Wyn, 2005). In turn, public anxiety has heightened the imperative for research that examines why some people – particularly youth – do not conform to social norms.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the New Zealand police recently announced they intend to stop recording all incidences of domestic violence (Donnell, 2012).

A selective review of criminological and sociological literature has resulted in two general observations. First biological, psychological and sociological theories of deviance are generally deterministic, arguing nonconformity is either the manifestation of deficient personal characteristics or social factors over which people have little or no control (Burkhead, 2006). Second, the literature appears to rely predominantly on statistical information and historic research and theoretical perspectives, and less so on the voices of today's so-called deviants. Thus, of particular interest to this study is the empirical work of Barry (2006) and Goldstein (1990) who foreground the voices and opinions of their research participants, who cite personal factors (e.g. fun and excitement) and relational factors (e.g. family and peers) as the primary causes of their deviancy.

As a result, this section focuses on two theories of deviancy: personality traits and social learning theory. More specifically, the first part of the discussion provides an overview of four theories of personality: Eysenck's extroversion-introversion and neuroticism theory (1970), Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory (1970; Corrs, 2008), Zuckerman's theory of sensation seeking (2005), and a reversed view of Lyng's theory of edgework (1990, 2005). The second part examines Akers' integrated theory of differential association/social learning (2008). The particular significance of these theories is that they represent widely held beliefs about the causes of deviancy, and when considered alongside each other, offer a more holistic and perhaps a more accurate view of the issues.

### Individualistic Perspectives of Deviance

According to Muncie (2009) individualistic theories of deviance (biological and psychological) were the "bedrock of criminological studies for the first half of the twentieth century and have regained importance since the 1990s" (p. 99). The earliest biological theories assume that deviance is linked to physical abnormalities. Lombroso for instance dissected criminal cadavers in an "attempt to prove that criminals were physically different to good citizens" (Muncie, 2009, p. 86), while Sheldon argues deviance is a behavioural trait of *mesomorphs*, people with an athletic body shape (Muncie, 2009). These types of theories were followed by psychological theories that argue deviance is related to cognitive abnormalities (Lawson & Heaton, 2012; Muncie, 2009), such as low intelligence and/or a lack of self-control; inheritable characteristics, according to some

geneticists (Muncie, 2009). One of the more popular theories of deviance is the concept of adolescence; the inevitable phase of human development that interrupts otherwise peaceful growth – a time of suffering associated with “emotional disorder, impairment and pathology” (Muncie, 2009, p. 94). In short, individualistic perspectives locate the cause of deviant behaviour within the individual, supporting the argument that “criminals are born, not made” (Muncie, 2009, p. 90).

## Personality Traits and Deviance

Personality traits are the bundle of characteristics that people are born with that describe how the individual thinks and behaves (Carver & Scheier, 2004). The *idiographic* view of personality asserts, “there may be as many traits as there are people” (Carver & Scheier, 2004, p. 58), while the *nomothetic* view contends that there are a basic set of traits that apply to all people. One of the more enduring nomothetic theories of personality is Eysenck’s (1970) supertraits of introversion-extraversion and emotionality-stability<sup>5</sup> (see Table 2). His theory of personality links nonconformity to brain functions and provides a useful starting point for this examination of deviancy. Of particular interest is that Eysenck’s theory describes psychobiological processes underlying personality, that his theory recognises degrees of diversity, and that his perspective relates to contemporary theories of self-control, reinforcement sensitivity, sensation seeking and edgework.

**Table 2:** The Introversion-Extroversion and Emotional-Stability Model

	Emotionally stable	Emotionally unstable
Introvert	Passive careful thoughtful peaceful controlled reliable even-tempered calm  <b>Phlegmatic</b>	Quiet pessimistic unsociable sober rigid moody anxious reserved  <b>Melancholic</b>
Extravert	Sociable outgoing talkative responsive easygoing lively carefree leaderly  <b>Sanguine</b>	Active optimistic impulsive changeable excitable aggressive restless touchy  <b>Choleric</b>

<sup>5</sup> He later added psychoticism, but this will not be discussed.

From *Perspectives on Personality* (p. 64), by C. S. Carver and M. F. Scheier, 2004, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education. Copyright 2004 by Pearson Education, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Briefly, ranging along a continuum to allow for diversity, introversion-extroversion is influenced by the part of the brain that activates and deactivates the cerebral cortex<sup>6</sup>, which is responsible for maintaining alertness and concentration (Carver & Scheier, 2004). Emotional-stability (neuroticism), also on a continuum, is influenced by the brain's emotional centre which in turn determines the "ease and frequency that a person becomes upset or distressed" (Carver & Scheier, 2004, p. 63). According to Eysenck (1977), when combined, these supertraits explain individual difference including the types of situations people seek out or avoid, why some people are impulsive while others are reserved, and why some individuals conform while others do not.

To explain this idea, Eysenck's theory of personality posits an introvert's base level of arousal as higher than an extrovert's cortical arousal (Carver & Scheier, 2004). This means that introverts are more alert than extraverts and are also more sensitive to stimuli. On the other hand, extroverts experience 'cortical inertia' and therefore seek out extra stimuli in order to reach an optimal state of arousal. Consequently, introverts prefer lower levels of stimulation (e.g., less noise) and can concentrate longer than extraverts; whereas extraverts prefer higher levels of stimulation (e.g., more activity) and generally find it difficult to focus for long periods of time (Carver & Scheier, 2004). These preferences also depend on an individual's emotional-stability trait as according to Eysenck, different stimuli can push individuals beyond their emotional limits, to the point where they lose concentration, motivation, confidence and perhaps self-control.

### Deviants cannot be conditioned

In applying his theory to deviance, Eysenck (1977) argues that anti-social behaviour is largely held in check by a person's conscience, developed during the socialisation process through cause-and-effect conditioning (Carver & Scheier, 2004). For example, through trial-and-error young children eventually learn that

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<sup>6</sup> The ascending reticular activating system.

adults do not enjoy hearing high-pitched screams, and that screaming is for emergencies only. However, Eysenck (1970, cited in Muncie, 2009) claims that some children – particularly extraverts – are born with a cortical weakness that impairs their ability to “learn from and adapt to environmental stimuli” (p. 95; e.g., a frown), meaning they are more difficult to condition. This biological impairment hinders the development of a social conscience; that is, an appreciation for social norms and an internalised desire to choose right over wrong.

In contrast, unstable introversion is a “disorder of over-socialisation”. (Eysenck & Rachman, 1965, cited in Gray, 1970, p. 125). This can be described as the extreme internalisation of social norms or a strong social conscience that can make some people feel overly anxious or depressed when they need to make decisions. Conversely, unstable extraversion is a disorder of under-socialisation, “resulting in a lack of feeling of responsibility to society and the various forms of anti-social behavior” (Gray, 1970, p. 251), in short, a weak social conscience. From a sociological perspective this suggests that parents of young adult extraverts have been too permissive, while parents of young adult introverts have been overly authoritative. This idea is supported by Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) theory of self-control, which asserts that low self-control is a deviant personality trait and is the result of ineffective child-rearing. They state that parents of deviants failed to: “(1) monitor the child’s behavior; (2) recognize deviant behavior when it occurs; and (3) punish such behavior” (p. 97).

In sum, Eysenck’s theory of introversion and neuroticism assumes that extraverts are more likely to be deviant because they are less cortically aroused and for that reason “... don’t learn from punishment” (Carver & Scheier, 2004, p. 160). This implies deviants are less alert or attuned to social cues (Hasking, 2007), have failed to internalise the meaning of sanctions, and have not learnt how to respond appropriately to environmental stimuli (Revelle, 2008). However, taking into consideration an apparent need for stimulation, one could suggest that extraverts are less alert or intuitive than introverts because they are preoccupied with maintaining an optimal level of arousal (e.g., socialising; Hasking, 2007). However Gray (1970) disagrees, arguing that the differences between introvert and extravert personalities are a case of being more or less susceptible to fear (respectively), rather than being more or less predisposed to social conditioning.



## Deviants have no fear

Gray modified Eysenck's theory of personality by rotating the model "to form the more causally efficient axes of 'punishment sensitivity', reflecting Anxiety (Anx), and 'reward sensitivity', reflecting Impulsivity (Imp)" (Corr, 2008, pp. 5–6). His basic hypothesis is that introverts are more attuned to punishment and threats of punishment, not because they are more cortically aroused and therefore easily conditioned, but because they are neurologically sensitive to signs of danger (Corr, 2008; McNaughton & Corr, 2008). Conversely, extroverts are less attuned to signs of danger or punishment; instead, more impulsive, acting "on the spur of the moment because his [*sic*] behavior is relatively more determined by potential rewards" (Gray, 1970, p. 256). Gray subsequently developed and refined his own theory of personality, commonly referred to as the Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory.

The Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory<sup>7</sup> (RST) is a neuropsychological model of personality that comprises three interacting neurological systems (Corr, 2008). This theory sets people apart according to the system/s they rely on most often as they go about their lives. An individual relying largely on their *behavioural approach system* (BAS) is typically sensitive to and motivated by signals of reward; material and social rewards that "result in positive experiences and feelings" (Pickering & Smillie, 2008, p. 120). According to Corr (2008), BAS is manifest in specific behaviours situated along a type of neuroticism and planning continuum, ranging from general optimism and reward-orientation then impulsiveness through to addictive and compulsive behaviours including high-risk behaviour; behaviours that involve different degrees of planning, or none at all. In comparison, individuals with a highly active *behavioural inhibition system* (BIS) are sensitive to and motivated by signs of danger (Corr, 2008). This system is a *defensive-approach* mechanism in that these individuals are typically anxiety-prone, but do not necessarily move away from danger. Instead, the BIS encourages individuals to "gather information to tip the balance in favour of approach or avoidance" (McNaughton & Corr, 2008, p. 77). This "constantly on the lookout for possible signs of danger" (Corr, 2008, p. 11) system manifests as

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<sup>7</sup> Gray conducted a major review of the RST in 2000 (for details refer to Corr, 2008).

caution and thoughtfulness, but can also lead to over-anxiousness and obsessive disorders (Corr, 2008).

Finally, the *fight-flight-freeze system* (FFFS) is a *defensive-avoidance* mechanism that motivates avoidance and escape behaviours. Individuals who are FFFS sensitive react strongly to imminent signs of danger and respond with fight, flight, or freeze behaviours (e.g., panic attack); although, people can switch between their FFFS and BIS if the distance between the individual and the danger widens (McNaughton & Corr, 2008). In short, the RST assumes that deviants have a highly active BAS, possess an optimistic “can-do” attitude, are not attentive to signs of danger, and are therefore not prone to feelings of anxiety or fear. As a consequence, these individuals open themselves up to a range of experiences and sensations (Carver & Scheier, 2004), including those other people might consider risky and/or anti-social.

### “For the thrill of it all”

Like Eysenck, Zuckerman (2007, cited in Buss, 2012) posits the brain of deviants as underaroused<sup>8</sup>, and like Gray, emphasises the personality traits of impulsiveness and risk-taking to propose an alternative theory of personality (Zuckerman, 2005). Specifically, Zuckerman argues that people differ according to their level of *sensation seeking*, described as the pursuit “of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman, 1994, cited in Roberti, 2004). However, while Eysenck claims deviants lack the psychobiological ability to be conditioned, and Gray argues deviants are less sensitive to signs of danger, Horvath and Zuckerman (1993) contend that deviants – generally high sensation seekers (HSS) – *are* sensitive to signs of danger but appraise danger differently to non-deviants, who tend to be low sensation seekers (LSS). According to Roberti (2004) HSS “willingly take risks for the sake of the experience” (p. 261), indicating HSS can identify and do compare the costs and benefits of an experience. By example, in studying perceptions of risk Zuckerman, Ball and Black (1990) found HSS to be more

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<sup>8</sup> “Sensation seeking relates to monoamine oxidase enzyme levels....which regulates several neurotransmitters, including serotonin and dopamine” (Carver & Scheier, 2004, p. 167).

likely to smoke cigarettes than LSS, even though both groups acknowledged cigarette smoking is a risky health behaviour. They also note that HSS are typically social smokers and suggest that HSS may smoke to counteract the “depressant effects of alcohol or the lowered diurnal arousal curve as the evening wears on” (p. 218). However, one could also suggest that HSS assess the risk of contracting a smoke-related disease as relatively low because they smoke socially, rather than daily.

In another study, McCarthy and Hagan (2005) interviewed 482 Canadian “street youth” about theft, drug selling and prostitution, to test the hypothesis that danger discourages offending. For each illegal activity these youth were asked to rate how dangerous their illegal activities are, how probable an arrest for each is, and how wrong, exciting and lucrative they perceive these activities to be. McCarthy and Hagan’s findings revealed that the sample comprised both fearful and fearless individuals who together largely perceived these activities to be dangerous. Surprisingly, they feared informal sanctions (e.g., victim retribution) more than formal sanctions (e.g., arrest), which were perceived to be “remote and abstract” and significantly less physically painful than informal sanctions (e.g., victim retribution). Further, they found excitement was associated with the perception that one is “immune to the perils of crime” (p. 1079). This combination of perceived immunity and thrill is similar to the principles of Lyng’s (sociological) theory of edgework (1990), suggesting that some of these youth were in fact *edgeworkers*. Although edgework is a sociological theory, there are many parallels between it and the preceding neuropsychological perspectives. However, because the focus here is personality traits the following discussion foregrounds the edgeworker in opposition to Lyng’s tendency to foreground edgework.

### Deviants live for ‘the edge’

According to Lyng (1990, 1993, 2004, 2005), edgeworkers have three qualities in common: (1) they pursue activities that take them to ‘the edge’; (2) they believe they have the ability to control the uncontrollable; and (3) they are motivated by the sensations provided by edgework. Like sensation seekers, edgeworkers willingly engage in exciting activities but specifically seek to control the uncertainty and chaos (Lyng, 1990, 1993). For example, sensation seeking youth

may enjoy “gambling, flouting authority, going into dangerous neighbourhoods, stealing, using illegal drugs, and bouts of drinking” (Buss, 2012, p. 93); while edgeworkers value opportunities that “test the performance limits of themselves... or themselves and a material form” (Lyng, 1990, p. 858). Edgework is about successfully “negotiating the boundary line between chaos and order... between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, and sanity and insanity... the line between order and disorder” (Lyng, 1993, p. 110). Thus, in contrast to some of the previous theoretical arguments, criminal deviance as edgework involves a sizable amount of planning, self-control, intelligence and skill.

To successfully control chaos ‘real’ edgeworkers must not only possess technical skills (e.g., breaking a window quietly) they must also have “the right stuff” (Lyng, 1993). That is, they need to possess survival skills; the innate ability to “deal with any contingency, to respond creatively and effectively to a unique sequence of events that cannot be fully anticipated or planned for in advance” (p. 114). Hence, according to Lyng (1990), failing to negotiate the edge is an indication that one “never possessed ‘the right stuff’ in the first place” (p. 859) and explains the “elitist orientation” and “powerful solidarity” (p. 860) found among some edgeworkers (e.g., gang members, skydivers). This perception contributes to the illusion of control and in turn fuels a positive feedback loop where confidence, immunity, and participation or offending subsequently increase (Horvath & Zuckerman, 1993; Lyng, 1993; McCarthy & Hagan, 2005).

The final distinguishing feature of edgework is its inherent and “magical” characteristics which edgeworkers find intoxicating and potentially addictive (Lyng, 1993, 2004). These include *self-realisation* or the discovery of one’s ‘true self’; *intense emotions* ranging from nervousness, fear and excitement through to exhilaration and omnipotence; *flow-like sensations* (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) of intense focus, time passing faster or slower, and “a ‘oneness’ with the object or environment” (Lyng, 1990, p. 861); a ‘*hyperreality*’ or authenticity; and not least, an *ineffability* (words cannot describe). However, while proponents of the preceding theories would argue such sensations are caused by any number of neurobiological systems, Lyng (1990, 2004) and Miller (2005) claim edgeworkers, including criminal deviants, are responding to and are driven by a “sense of helplessness” or oversocialisation. That is, edgework is a form of “experiential anarchy” whereby people “experience a sense of direct personal

authorship in their actions, when their behavior is not coerced by the normative or structural constraints of their social environment” (Lyng, 1990, p. 878).

### Sociological Perspectives of Deviance

In contrast to individualistic theories, sociological theories of deviance locate the cause of nonconformity in the social order (Farley & Flota, 2012). Functionalist theories assume deviance is the result of “dysfunctions in social and economic conditions” (Muncie, 2009, p. 102). For example, Merton (cited in Farley & Flota, 2012) argues that deviance occurs when society’s norms exclude people who do not meet social expectations (e.g. are educated). Similarly, conflict theory draws on elements of Marxism to argue that “powerful groups use definitions of deviance to repress groups they perceive as threatening, thus enabling them to maintain their privileged position” (Farley & Flota, 2012, p. 321). This is in contrast to control theory, which assumes that deviance “results from an imbalance between [natural] impulses toward criminal activity and the social or physical controls that deter it” (Giddens et al., 2009, p. 182); while interactionist theories are “based on the idea that human beings, as they interact with each other, give meanings to themselves, others and the world around them, and use those meanings as a basis for making decisions and taking action” (Coakley et al., 2009, p. 44).

### The Differential Association/Social Learning Theory

Sutherland’s differential association theory (DAT; postulated in 1946) has been classified as an interactionist theory (Giddens et al., 2009) and is reported to be one of the more enduring and popular explanations for deviance (Muncie, 2009). In short, it represents the widely held belief that deviance is learnt and transmitted through personal contact with deviants; the proverbial ‘rotten apple’ scenario. A review of the literature however suggests that the DAT and its subsequent revisions – most notably social learning theory (SLT; Akers, 1966) – are “among the most frequently misstated, misinterpreted, and misapplied” (Akers, 2009, p. xvii) sociological theories of behaviour. Therefore, the following section draws predominantly on Akers’ (2009) monograph: *Social Learning and Social Structure: A General Theory of Crime and Deviance*, as it reasserts the theoretical

underpinnings, revisions and integration of Sutherland's DAT and Akers' SLT (hereafter Akers' DA/SLT).

The primary focus of Akers and Burgess' initial DAT revision (postulated in 1966) was to explain how deviant behaviour is learnt, as Sutherland (1947, cited in Akers, 1996) simply stated that it occurred as in "any other learning" (p. 230). Drawing on the criminological work of Sutherland and psychologist Skinner (Akers, 2009), Akers and Burgess developed the 'differential association-reinforcement theory', arguing that the deviant learning process involves rewards and punishers (Akers, 2009). Other theorists have also revised the DAT (e.g., Cressey, 1953; Sykes & Matza, 1957; Hartung, 1965; Heimer & Matsueda, 1994, cited in Akers, 2009), providing subsequent theorists and writers with a range of perspectives to draw on. Although, in the process it appears that the *differential* element has been discarded, effectively diluting two intriguing theoretical perspectives. This observation motivates the following discussion, which examines Akers' four "testable hypotheses", presented here within the central proposition of the DA/SLT:

The probability that persons will engage in criminal and deviant behavior is increased and the probability of their conforming to the norm is decreased when they differentially associate with others who commit criminal behavior and espouse definitions favorable to it, are relatively more exposed in person or symbolically to salient criminal/deviant models, define it as desirable or justified in a situation discriminative for the behavior, and have received in the past and anticipate in the current or future situation relatively greater reward than punishment for the behavior. (Akers, 2009, p. 50)

### Hypothesis 1: The ratio of good and bad messages

"Individuals are more likely to violate social norms when he or she differentially associates with others who commit, model, and support violations of social and legal norms" (Akers, 2009, p. 51).

This hypothesis appears to support Goldstein's (1990) description of the DAT as "association-engendered learning" (p. 16), or Humphrey and Schmallerger's (2012) statement that "criminal and deviant behaviors are learned... from close personal association with others" (p. 68). However, these are oversimplifications, as *differential association* refers to an individual's "relative exposure to criminal and noncriminal patterns" (Akers, 1996, p. 229), and is "the process by which persons experience conflicting definitions about appropriate behavior" (Matsueda, 1982, p. 489). The original proponents of DA/SLT contend that deviance represents an *imbalance* in prosocial and antisocial learning, derived from "indirect and direct, verbal and nonverbal communication, interaction, and identification with others" (Akers, 2009, p. 52). However, in this context *others* refers to human communication as a whole rather than persons, as indirect and nonverbal associations can include literature, media, gestures and observation (Akers, 2009).

To illustrate, imagine a set of balancing scales to which a number of individual weights are to be added; one side representing nonconformity/deviance, the other conformity. As the individual comes into contact with and interprets the world around them, weights are added to both sides of the scale. Advocates of the oversimplified DA/SLT definitions would add weights representing personal contacts only and would focus on the nonconforming side of the scales; whereas, Sutherland and Akers would add weights representing all forms of human interaction, to both sides of the scale.

## Hypothesis 2: Positive and negative reinforcement

"Individuals are more likely to violate social norms when the violative behavior is differentially reinforced over behavior in conformity to the norm" (p. 51).

In contrast to hypothesis one, which focuses on "the ratio of criminal and noncriminal contact" (Akers, 2009, p. 30), Akers' second hypothesis regards the qualities of that contact. Specifically, he asserts that the principle mechanisms of learning are *differential reinforcement* and *imitation*. The former is a behavioural mechanism that refers to "instrumental learning through rewards and punishers" (p. 25); that is, one's relative exposure to formal and informal, and positive and negative sanctions. The latter (imitation) is a cognitive mechanism whereby

learning is achieved through “observing the behavior of others and its consequences” (p. 52). Together, these mechanisms “produce overt behaviour and cognitive *definitions* [emphasis added]” (p. 51) – “beliefs, attitudes, justifications, [and] orientations” (p. 52) that tip the scale in the relative direction (Akers, 2009). Therefore, according to this argument, deviancy reflects an imbalance or a skewed understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

In general, the reviewed literature acknowledges that rewards and punishments can initiate and strengthen deviant and conforming behaviour. However, the literature also assumes that deviant behaviour and definitions are transmitted by deviants, or more specifically, deviant youth. Such assumptions reflect an under-emphasis or disregard for the general concept of *differential*, a theoretical oversight that may explain why Akers feels that the DA/SLT is widely misstated and misapplied. Take for instance Cressey’s (1960, cited in Akers, 2009) statement that “while law-violating definitions are typically communicated by those who have violated the law, it is also possible to learn law-abiding definitions from them, just as one can be exposed to deviant definitions from law-abiding people” (p. 26). Taking into account that differential association refers to *conflicting definitions* about appropriate behaviour, and that differential reinforcement relates to conflicting sources of definitions, one could characterise differential as ‘a contrasting and conflicting balance of variables’.

### Hypothesis 3: Role modelling

“Individuals are more likely to violate social norms when he or she is more exposed to and observes more deviant than conforming models” (p. 51).

This hypothesis introduces Akers’ concepts of *modelling* and *differential exposure*. Specifically, he refers to the types of people and behaviours that an individual is likely to imitate, based on the “frequency, duration, intensity, and priority of [such] associations” (Akers, 2009, p. 52). Here, differential refers to the contrasting and conflicting balance of role models, each model possessing and transmitting their own deviant and conforming definitions (beliefs, attitudes, justifications and orientations). While the literature generally acknowledges the influence of role models, it tends to focus predominantly on the deviant modelling of peers in the first instance and the family in the second. Akers (2009) argues



this is misguided as “according to the priority principle, association, reinforcement, modelling and exposure to conforming and deviant definitions occurring within the family during childhood... occur prior to and have both direct and selective effects on later delinquent and criminal behavior and associations” (p. 54). Furthermore, by focusing on one side of the scale, the literature fails to acknowledge that “conforming behaviour is also peer influenced” (p. 52).

#### Hypothesis 4: The family lays the foundation

“Individuals are more likely to violate social norms when his or her own learned definitions are favourable toward committing the deviant acts” (p. 52).

This final hypothesis addresses one of the major criticisms of many contemporary DA/SLT definitions, such as Giddens et al.’s (2009) statement that “individuals become delinquent through associating with people who follow criminal norms” (p. 181), meaning peers. In response to such assertions, Akers (2009) argues that the DA/SLT has *always* predicted that “deviant associations precede the onset of delinquent behavior” (p. 56), otherwise the question becomes: if people learn deviancy from others, how did the original deviant become deviant themselves? According to both Sutherland and Akers, the answer is that “interaction and socialization in the family precedes and affects choices of both conforming and deviant peer association” (p. 55). In short, peers (deviant or otherwise) cannot precede the family into which a child is born. Thus, according to the DA/SLT, one’s potential for deviancy is established during the first phase of socialisation, an environment not of the child’s making.

#### A Summary

Across time and borders, people are subject to socially constructed rules, rule makers, and sanctions in the interests of social order. Yet, while deviance or the violation of social norms is arguably normal and inevitable (Durkheim, 2008), there is a rising concern that one particular segment of society struggles more than others to conform. Official criminal deviancy statistics show that young people are consistently overrepresented, although some theorists argue that the figures reflect historically situated discretionary decision-making and/or media induced moral panics. Nevertheless, researchers worldwide continue to search for answers.

A review of the literature reveals a plethora of theories, generally individualistic or sociological in nature, with advocates of the former locating the cause of deviance within the individual and proponents of the latter in social organisation and social structures (Muncie, 2009).

A selective review of individualistic perspectives of personality and deviance highlights the longevity and evolution of personality trait theories. Three of the four examples included here demonstrate forty years of theorising the perceived relationship between behaviour and neurological systems, with the fourth illustrating a leap from individualistic to sociological theory. However, while each theory is distinctive, they share intriguing and contrasting views of arousal, risk taking and what is 'normal'. Eysenck (1977) argues that extroverts are prone to deviancy because they suffer from cortical inertia which interferes with their ability to develop a social conscience. In short, deviants violate social norms because they are not like everyone else (i.e., normal). In contrast, Gray's theory of personality (1970, 1987) suggests that deviants are in fact normal, and perhaps even more so; the basic premise being that people are 'wired' differently and thus by nature are more or less sensitive to signs of danger and reward. According to the RST, anti-social behaviours are typically associated with a highly aroused BAS which, coincidentally, is also attributed to optimism, intelligence and low levels of anxiety, risk aversion and fearfulness. Thus, one could argue that deviants are motivated, driven and confident individuals.

Zuckerman (1984, 2005) argues that high sensation seekers are not averse to signs of danger but actively pursue it, believing they are immune to the associated risks. In contrast to Eysenck and Gray's theories however, high sensation seekers are portrayed as defiant and mischievous rather than neurologically abnormal or assertive. Lastly, Lyng's sociological edgework theory (1990, 1993, 2004, 2005) represents an opportunity to develop a new theory of personality. Like high sensation seekers, edgeworkers are also aroused and motivated by the inherent sensations of thrilling activities and believe they are immune to danger. However, edgework must allow the edgeworker to use their technical and survival skills to successfully negotiate the thin line between chaos and order. Therefore sensation seeking activities such as gambling or flouting authority would not be classed as edgework - and far from being perceived as normal or average - edgeworkers

might be considered superhuman: (successful) sky divers, cage fighters, bank robbers, and financial embezzlers for example - intelligent, skilful, and fearless.

Two of the more pervasive sociological theories of deviance are Sutherland's DAT and Akers' SLT, both supposedly representing the commonplace belief that one becomes deviant by association. However, both theories are often presented as incomplete and contrasting perspectives, even though the SLT is a revision of the DAT and "not a totally different or rival theory" (Akers, 2009, p. 46). These tendencies are unfortunate, as the central principles of the DA/SLT provide some fascinating arguments that could change the way deviance is perceived by the public and theorised by professionals. The major problem is that the 'D' has disappeared from the DAT, with more recent writings failing to acknowledge the conflicting and contrasting *balance* of associations and reinforcers. This has effectively shifted the focus from all forms of association (direct-indirect and tangible-intangible) to personal contact only and the focus from the family to simply peers. This sweeping generalisation of the DA/SLT also ignores the potential for law-abiding sources to transmit nonconforming sentiments, and for peers to be a force for the good. Nevertheless, whichever way one looks at it, the DA/SLT assumes that deviants are the product of their environment. In summary, while these perspectives are an indication of how deviance and deviants are perceived, they represent a partial and historically situated view of the issues. Thus, with regards to the research at hand, one could argue that these perspectives on their own are not ideal, but that elements of some these models might be combined and/or applied to good effect.

## Conclusion

This literature review has been the first step towards answering a mother's petition: If sport is all that it is supposed to be, why is my son sitting in a prison cell? How does one go from years of 'character building' directly to jail? *Why do youth step out of sport and into court?*

This review has revealed that many others have asked these same questions, although, generally, not one alongside the other. Initially I had hoped to discover *the* answer, a grand theory that I would then use as a framework for my research. But this has not been the case. Instead, I have become aware of and familiar with

a whole series of perspectives, each with their own strengths and limitations, and each with a potentially viable contribution to make. Consequently, I stopped looking for a grand theory and have instead attempted to present a balanced yet detailed review of the literature; selecting theories with the potential to help me understand a range of possible realities – as the research participants are likely speak about an assortment of experiences. Thus, I find myself drawn to the interpretive paradigm, which encourages the use of open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews (see Chapter three). By inviting my research participants to speak freely I believe that more than one of these theories will be put to the test or brought to life (so to speak). By applying an inclusive rather than exclusive or prescriptive approach to this study, I hope to identify sincere themes and provide a representation of my understanding of the issues, and one mother's petition.



'The Talk'

don't tell me what to do  
I'm not a child  
Anymore.  
got my own place  
my own money  
come and go as I please

you can't stop me  
I'm not your little girl  
Anymore.  
drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes  
got a man  
surf and sand all day

look at me mum, dad  
I'm not too young  
Anymore.  
pay rent and power  
a parent too  
just like you

shhh, stop talking  
I do hear what you say  
too young for kids  
shud've stayed at school  
no, he's not working  
yes, another on the way

This is my life now.



## Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

As an undergraduate student attending numerous lectures one particular statement struck a chord with me: perception is reality. From that moment it was intriguing to witness time and again people interpreting and reinterpreting the world around them, creating then acting upon a personal understanding of what is true and therefore real. As a result, the way I looked at my world and the worlds (plural) in motion around me changed. I tried not to take public narratives at face value. I watched the evening news and wondered whose ‘truth’ was being reported, and whose was not? However, it appears that over time this critical perspective had faded, because I had bought into the ‘kid in sport stays out of court’ ideal. But with all that has transpired, this critical position has been reinstated with a new-found vigour.

As a consequence, I position myself within the interpretive paradigm. In exploring why youth ‘step out of sport and into court’ I seek deeper understanding rather than a grand theory: for there is no universal truth because reality and therefore truth is mind-dependent (Crotty, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Donnelly, 2000; Lawler, 2002; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010; Richardson, 1994; Sparkes, 1992). Thus, this study relies heavily on the voices of the research participants, specifically their spontaneous and performative stories. I examine reality/truth as a matter of interpretation, informed and constrained by the participants’ and the researcher’s social, historical and cultural locations. I also acknowledge and value similarity and difference.

This chapter details the research process and is presented in four parts. The first section *Interpretivism: Strengths and limitations* briefly outlines the interpretive paradigm, focusing on the paradigmatic assumptions that resonate with my world view. Specifically, the conviction that meaning, reality, and truth do not exist in spite of us, but because of us (Sparkes, 1992). *Ethical considerations and challenges* reveals how I dealt with three important issues: (1) how to locate the ideal sample; (2) how to be transparent; and (3) how to present my findings. The third section *Speaking with real people* outlines the data collection process. I reveal how the participants meet the selection criteria, identify some of the strengths and limitations of semi-structured interviews, and summarise how I developed participant-researcher rapport. The final section



*Interpreting reality* reviews how I analysed and interpreted the qualitative data; in particular the three stages of coding (descriptive, analytical and topical) that led to an analysis of the interview data as narrative. The chapter then closes with character profiles for each of the research participants in preparation for Chapter four (Interpretive Narratives).

### Interpretivism: Strengths and Limitations

A diverse and participant-centred paradigm, the interpretive perspective celebrates subjectivity (Coakley, 2001). It gives precedence to the meaning-making processes by which people construct differing and competing realities (Coakley, 2001; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005). For the researcher this involves interpreting “the meaning that interactions, actions, and objects have for people” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17), such as the words and actions of people attending sporting events including friends, family, coaches, the opposition, and spectators. Interpretive researchers also examine how citizens experience the social constructs with which they come into contact on a daily basis such as the media, government policies and education. The focus of interpretive research, however, is not these social forces per se nor the ways in which people respond to those forces or the ‘other’ – but rather, how people situated within particular social, historical, and cultural locations (where and how we have positioned ourselves in the world as informed by our unique experiences) construct meaning and meaningful lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; Sparkes, 1992).

This exploration of meaning is beyond the scope of the positivist paradigm, making interpretivism a valuable research perspective (Coakley et al., 2009; Crotty, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010; Richardson, 1994; Sarantakos, 1993; Sparkes, 1992, 2002). Concerned with the “products of the human mind” (Sparkes, 1992, p. 25), interpretive research examines people’s interests, emotions, values and opinions which more often than not are unique not universal, multifaceted not simple, and emotional not stoic. As such, and also acknowledging the influence of researcher subjectivity, the range of interpretive methods is diverse, creative and continues to evolve (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Consequently, interpretivism is capable of investigating and

representing an endless array of human issues and phenomena including those from the past, the present, and even the future.

Another notable characteristic of interpretive research is its potential to effect change (Crotty, 1998; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Sparkes, 2002). Speaking about interpretive interviews, Kvale (1996) testifies that they “can lead to knowledge that can be used to enhance the human condition” (p. 11). Denzin (cited in Denison & Markula, 2003) states that interpretive writing has the power to “inspire and mobilize readers” (p. 17). While Ellis and Bochner (1996) report that the invitation to speak about one’s realities can be immensely empowering and therapeutic for individuals who feel socially excluded or marginalised. In fact many interpretive studies and writings are inspired by the plight of underserved groups (Sparkes, 2002) seeking the values of full citizenship; those being social justice, recognition, respect and voice (Lister, 2007). Examples of underserved groups include women (e.g., Bjorkman & Malterud, 2009; Handy, 2006), obese children (e.g., Edmunds, 2008; Thomas & Irwin, 2009), people living with disabilities (e.g., Hotchkiss, 2004; Poria, Reichel, & Brandt, 2010), HIV/AIDS sufferers (e.g., Dane, 2002; Seeger, 2007), indigenous peoples (e.g., Cortis, 2009; Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths, 2004), and youth (e.g., Barry, 2006; Muncie, 2009).

Being participant-centred means that interpretive projects are flexible in nature (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). Interpretivists recognise that understanding and concepts emerge as research participants interpret their lived experiences and world views, which can lead to any number of methodological changes; from rearranging interview schedules, deleting or rewording questions, to completely shifting focus (Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). By example, when Goulding (2008) began her investigation of inmate recidivism her objective was to find practical solutions that would help long-term detainees transition from prisoner to free citizen. Her interviews however, revealed a more pressing and political issue – the imprisonment of the mind. This revelation changed the direction of Goulding’s research and her publication *Recapturing Freedom* (2008) is an examination of “the mental, moral and social impacts that prisons have on inmates... and [in turn] how prisons affect the wider community” (p. 9).

Yet, in the face of these strengths there are a number of limitations to consider (Crotty, 1998; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010; Sarantakos, 1993; Sparkes, 1992). Interpretive interviews can be expensive and time intensive. They entail selecting and booking appropriate interview locations, coordinating interview times, travelling to meet with participants, and not least, conducting a number of interviews. Then, as the exploration of subjectivity generally produces a great deal of raw data, there is also hours and hours of verbatim transcription, which given the inductive nature of interpretive studies, may then prove to be surplus or simply ‘meaning-less’ (Sparkes, 1992).

In addition, the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities means that interpretive research is less generalisable (Coakley et al., 2009; Denzin, 1997; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Sparkes, 1992). For example, one could argue that Goulding’s (2008) study of 11 Australian prisoners is not a true representation of the wider Australian or international prison populations, and therefore her findings and recommendations are baseless. However such assertions are positivist in nature and relate to a belief in universal truths; whereas interpretivists are more concerned with gaining “an understanding of why people think and act in the *different* [emphasis added] ways they do” (Fetterman, cited in Sparkes, 1992, p. 28). Thus, in pursuing this goal interpretivists *knowingly* and *willingly* “trade breadth for depth” (Karp, cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 54).

The interpretive quest for deeper understanding complicates a project’s methodological ethics. In particular, above and beyond gaining informed consent, there is a heightened sense of social and moral responsibility (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kvale, 1996). Face to face interaction, the exploration of lived experience, and prolonged and/or regular researcher-participant contact means that interpretivists are more likely to feel accountable to their participants and therefore more concerned with ethics and transparency (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Kvale, 1996). Questions to this end may include: Do my research participants understand the full extent and intent of my research? And, should I make them aware of my biases, and how their lived experiences will be used to that end? The pursuit of depth also involves difficult conversations. Research that explores the untimely death of a child for example, will unavoidably involve the reliving of pain. In such cases, the researcher may need to ask themselves: How will I

protect my participant(s) from further and unnecessary harm? Am I suitably sensitive and compassionate? What will I do to gain my informants' trust? Hence, interpretive studies are not simple undertakings as the researcher must attend to all the ethical decisions and dilemmas that could, and often do unfold during interpretive research (Kvale, 1996).

## Ethical Considerations and Challenges

### Sampling

The first of three major considerations specific to this study was deciding how to locate young men who had appeared in a court of law. Foremost in my mind was the likelihood of causing offence, for while sport participation is a socially acceptable activity, criminal deviance is not. I could have approached young men in the street to ask whether they had once played sport, however, asking strangers if they had ever appeared in court, would not have been as easy. I could have approached young men waiting to appear before a judge at the local court house, but that too felt invasive and inappropriate, especially in terms of privacy and confidentiality. There was also the issue of security. How would I know whether prospective candidates were a threat to my personal safety?

In the end Patton's (2002) advice to consult "well-situated people" (also known as snowball or chain sampling) provided the way forward. A short email introducing myself and outlining the project's academic rationale and participant criteria was sent to a small number of youth development organisations (see Appendix 1), who in turn forwarded the email to similar agencies. The benefit of this strategy was that these groups had direct access to young men who did meet the criteria and with whom they had built trusting relationships. There was also an assumption on my part that they would recommend people who did not pose any risk to my safety. This approach produced the desired outcome; five young men were informed about the project and all volunteered to participate.

### Transparency

The next major consideration was deciding whether and how to declare my social locations, so the participants and the reader might consider how my "position on

particular issues impact how I gather, analyze, and interpret my data” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 39). The first of two paramount questions was: Is it really necessary to reveal that my son’s imprisonment was the catalyst for this study? My instincts told me that it was unethical to withhold relevant information, especially when I was expecting the participants to be honest and open with me. Therefore upon meeting each participant, in the interests of ethics and to establish trust and rapport, I spoke about my son’s incarceration and the effect it had had on me. In doing so I placed the research participants in an informed position where they could assess how I might interpret and write about their lived experiences (Sparkes, 2002).

Once aware of this personal connection most of the participants then asked: “Why don’t you just ask your son?” In other words, why was my son not one of the research participants? I explained that given his circumstances my son needed his mother not a researcher<sup>9</sup>, and that his situation had inspired this project but it is not about him. The participants seemed to appreciate my position, especially those who had themselves spent time ‘inside’. Nevertheless, by making reference to my son I have indirectly involved him in the research, and so the same ethical considerations were extended to him (see Appendix 2). The second question: “How would I tell the reader about myself?” was answered during the writing phase, influenced by my decision to analyse the data and present the findings as narrative. Thus, rather than announce my biases or world views in the traditional academic manner I have chosen to write personal narratives, “to show rather than to tell” (Denzin, cited in Chase, 2008, p. 69).

Illustrating my unique social, historical and cultural locations I offer three performative narratives; “produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes” (Chase, 2008, p. 65). These narratives highlight personal attributes of importance to the research including gender, race/ethnicity, and class (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Sparkes, 2002). The short narrative *Watching Jenny* (p. 6) speaks about my withdrawal from athletics during high school. It is a story of regret and transition, and emphasises my experiences of ethnicity, youth culture, femininity, and financial hardship.

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<sup>9</sup> As he was incarcerated he didn’t meet the deviance criteria - but this was a secondary point.

*The Talk* (p. 50) is a poem and speaks about a perceived shift in power and the attainment of 'freedom'. Not only does it reveal that I was a teen parent but implies that the decision to have a child may be driven by a misguided desire to be treated as an adult and equal. This poem illustrates that I am sympathetic to the issue of self-determination, which I believe permeates youth realities. Another narrative, *Venetian Blinds* (p. 124), is based on an experience I had in a gang-immersed household. This personal narrative is about fear, family violence, drugs, addiction and male dominance. It is significant to the research because it is an environment that four of the five participants had experienced, to different degrees and from different positions. This story reveals that gang culture is not unfamiliar to me, and therefore did not unduly distract me from exploring topics more pertinent to the research questions. How exactly such experiences have influenced the research process, however, is a question for the audience – and the answer is likely to differ from reader to reader.

To place the research questions in the wider context I have also included *It was a Thursday* (p. 110), a reconstructed journal entry about the day my son was sentenced. *Dear Son: An unsent letter* (p. 132) was written after hearing that my son had been transferred from a secure to a less secure unit as a form of punishment. And the opening offering *Prisanalaysys* [sic] (p. xiii) is a poem written by one of the prisoners involved in Goulding's (2008) research. These writings entreat the reader to consider what life is like for prisoners and their families. These performative stories and poems are clearly delineated by empty pages before and after; spatially separated from my academic voice. This quiet white space offers the reader time to ponder the significance of each text and a moment to consider how my social, historical and cultural locations have influenced the research process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

## Representation

After completion of the data collection and analysis the final challenge was deciding how to write-up my interpretations/findings. In searching the 'how to write research' literature I discovered a vast number of writing genres to choose from. Van Maanen (1988) and others (e.g. Denzin, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Richardson, 1994; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Sparkes, 2002) write about a host of new experimental writings including

realist, confessional, and impressionist tales, autoethnography, poems, ethnodrama, reader's theatre, creative fiction, layered texts, satire, visual texts, hypertexts, narratives, and metaphors – to name just a few. As a novice researcher I was overwhelmed by the wealth of options and was hesitant about beginning the writing process.

In time, an answer emerged from the data itself. Following a period of conventional coding, the data was rearranged as topical narratives and only then did patterns within and across the cases become clearer. It seemed only fitting therefore to present the findings in the format that had been the most revealing and insightful; to retain the participants' voices and in settings and contexts that meant something to them. As I read about the power and potential of narrative to heighten an audience's sense of empathy, community, and justice (Chase, 2008; Denison & Markula, 2003; Eisner, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, 2008; Sparkes, 2002) I was even more convinced that a narrative form of representation would make the most impact on the reader, on the behalf of the research participants and youth in general. Unfortunately, this decision was reached at the post-interview stage and so the opportunity to consult with my participants had been lost. Uneasy about adapting their stories without their input, I was forced to consider alternative narrative strategies that would disguise the research participants, but convince the reader that my interpretations were nonetheless trustworthy, credible, and authentic.

In attempting to discern what degree of 'truth' would be considered credible, a tentative solution was found in the work of Kvale and Brinkman (2009) who identify three narrative strategies. The *narrative rendering of stories* relies heavily on the verbatim reporting of the participants' stories; *stories as specific narrative modes* include alternative textual forms, such as poems featuring excerpts of verbatim data; and *recasting participants' stories as new stories* are stories that have been "reconstructed with regard to the main points the researcher wants to communicate" (p. 286). This last strategy suggests that I purposefully omit and/or emphasise various elements of my participants' stories so the recast stories align with my interpretations. It also implies that in order to produce convincing narratives I would need to employ fictional writing techniques. What

Kvale and Brinkmann do not discuss however, is the shape, form, or degree to which recast narratives reflect the original data.

Speaking more specifically about presenting interview data in narrative form, Sparkes (2002) discusses the subtle differences between creative fiction and non-fiction. Of particular interest is the assertion that creative non-fiction “is fiction in form but factual in content”; meaning “the events actually happened but that the factual evidence is being shaped and dramatized using fiction techniques to provide a forceful, coherent rendering” (pp. 154-155). However, given that interpretivism focuses on the subjective creation of meaning rather than actual happenings, I propose that ‘factual content’ can apply to the factual meanings embedded in the participants’ stories. Moreover, if meaning-laden stories are understood as performances of a particular truth (Riessman, 2012), then ‘factual content’ might also be extended to include one’s *interpretation* of those subjective truths.

Adopting this particular approach to creative non-fiction, I have blended and woven together the participants’ lived experiences; recasting them as interpretive narratives that capture the essence of their individual and shared realities. I refer to these narratives as interpretive as well as collective as they “meld together participants’ voices with other sources” (Bruce, cited in Barbour, 2010, p. 55) such as media stories, novels, and my own experiences – “combined into and expressed through the actions of believable fictional characters” (Barbour, 2010, p. 55). In this way these interpretive narratives represent a cross-case analysis; a collage of real world events and people – storied renderings of significant meanings and lived realities.

## Speaking with Real People

### Sample and Procedure

At the time of data collection (2010) the five male research participants were aged between 18 and 25 years old. As children, four had sampled more than one organised sport. Then, during adolescence they specialised in one sport; two playing rugby while the other three preferred rugby league. Between the ages of 17 and 18, four of the five participants withdrew from sport with the other



participant withdrawing from rugby at 13 (and he did not sample any other sports as a child).

To meet the deviancy criteria participants had to have appeared in a court of law at least once. Two of the young men had appeared on one occasion, one had appeared on five occasions, with the other two appearing in court somewhere between fifteen and thirty times each. With the exception of one, all had participated in gang activity and two had achieved ‘patched’ membership status. Three of these four had been held in custody between two months and ten years-plus. To avoid any ethical issues related to disclosure, the recruitment email (see Appendix 1) and letter of introduction (see Appendix 3) clearly stipulated that participants could not to be involved in any current or ongoing criminal court proceedings.

The research participants were interviewed individually, three times over a three-month period. In agreement with the participants, the interviews were restricted to no more than two hours. The preferred interview locations were either the participant’s residence or offices provided by the youth organisations involved in the recruitment phase. Each interview was scheduled only after the previous interview had been transcribed verbatim, then read and approved by the participant. While this strategy slowed down the overall interview process, it gave me time to identify emerging themes across the cases and in turn modify the interview guide before the next interview.

The interviews were digitally recorded then stored on a password restricted computer. Printed and handwritten documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet at my residence. The research participants received copies of their signed consent forms (Appendix 4) and approved transcriptions. Refreshments were provided during each interview, and upon completion, the participants were offered a small koha.<sup>10</sup> In ending the interview phase, the participants were asked if they wished to offer additional thoughts pertinent to the research, and were given the opportunity to ask any final questions. Then, in addition to the interview koha each young man was presented with a final gift of thanks.<sup>11</sup> To

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<sup>10</sup> Koha: Gift. A mobile phone voucher.

<sup>11</sup> Literature of interest to them (e.g. rugby icons).

further reduce the possibility of identification, the participants and any people and people and locations they had mentioned by name were given pseudonyms during transcription. Dates and ages have also been slightly adjusted.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary research method for this project was the semi-structured interview. Also referred to as the interview guide approach (Patton, 2002) the semi-structured interview is a combination of structure and flexibility (Gratton & Jones, 2010). For instance, following an interview guide (see Appendix 5), I was conscious that I had two hours to gather the information related to my prepared questions. On the other hand the flexibility of this method allowed me to deliver these or similarly worded questions when and where they fitted the natural flow of conversation (Patton, 2002). Then again, by checking my interview guide I was able to monitor which questions had and had not been asked, ensuring each participant had had the opportunity to address the same topics (Patton, 2002). Still, the semi-structured interviews remained inductive (Patton, 2002); as new themes emerged I refined the interview guide and paused to probe and clarify for deeper understanding, a process that resulted in a large amount of rich qualitative data (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Patton, 2002). This method produced less formal, conversational interviews, which enhanced research-participant rapport and understanding, whilst ensuring that the desired information had been gathered across all five cases.

Nevertheless the semi-structured interview has limitations, one of the more notable being the amount of time it takes to transcribe large quantities of data (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Patton, 2002). Researchers must then take into consideration the time it may take participants to read, approve and return these documents for analysis (Gratton & Jones, 2010). In this case, the average transcription and turn-around period for one interview was four to five weeks. In terms of collecting accurate accounts there can also be the “problems of recall, misperception and incorrect knowledge” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 158). For example, whilst compiling individual cases I discovered a number of inconsistent ‘facts’, primarily dates and ages when particular events had occurred. Furthermore, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews can result in dissimilar data, impairing comparability (if this is a research goal). However,

Patton (2002) points out that the more time a participant is given to speak freely the greater the amount of data to transcribe and analyse, and the less likelihood that emergent themes will be found across the other cases.

### Conducting the Interviews

The interview guide (see Appendix 5) adhered to five recommendations from Gratton and Jones (2010). First, to keep the discussion focused the questions were topically grouped. The first interview was designed to gather general demographic information and then sports data, with an hour allocated to each topic and a break in between. I had planned to use the second interview to finish the sports topic (if required) and then to gather the deviance data. The third and final interview had been reserved for elaboration and clarification; to gain a fuller understanding of significant issues and topics discussed previously. However, in all five cases, the demographic portion of the first interview led to an in-depth exploration of significant relationships and educational and childhood experiences, consuming the full two hours. Therefore, the second interview began with the sports discussion, and to my surprise we were also able to cover the deviance topic as intended. The final interview proceeded as planned.

Second, to help the informant to “begin talking comfortably” Gratton and Jones suggest that interviews begin with ‘easy’ questions that “need not be directly relevant to the research” (p. 159). I interpreted this to mean that participants would need to be eased into their role as an interviewee. This was achieved during the meet-and-greet portion of each interview, where I asked the participants about their week or weekend, where they had just come from, or how their job or training was going.

The third recommendation is to set the scene to ensure that research participants feel informed and prepared (Gratton & Jones, 2010). In this case, before each interview began, I gave a brief overview of the topics covered in the previous session (four to five weeks prior) and then addressed any subsequent questions. This process proved extremely useful as it refreshed their memory as to why they had volunteered to participate in the study, and unexpectedly, also refreshed our relationship. In recovering the common ground created during the last interview, we also recovered a sense of familiarity and connectedness. Next,

they were “briefed as to the nature of the interview at hand and how it would be carried out, and were also given an indication of its likely length” (Gratton & Jones, 2010, p. 162).

Fourth, Gratton and Jones (2010) recommend that all interview questions be “clearly worded, unambiguous and understandable” (p. 159). For me this meant adopting a tone and language that research participants can relate to and projecting a version of self that would put the participants at ease because it is somehow familiar. This strategy became necessary during the very first interview when I realised that the conversation felt awkward because the participant was simplifying cultural concepts for my benefit. I believe he did this because he perceived me to be a well-educated ‘white’ woman.<sup>12</sup> who was therefore culturally uninformed. Imagine his surprise when I traded my professional tone for the relaxed style of conversation I use with friends and family, then translated something he said to me, thereby revealing that we shared the same cultural background. Consequently, our conversation began to flow.

Finally, Gratton and Jones (2010) suggest that the most potentially threatening topic be introduced last, after a trusting relationship has been established. In hindsight however, the first interview (demographics) was the most intense because the participants spoke about their ‘non-traditional’ family relationships and childhood circumstances. Speaking about these sensitive topics earlier rather than later, however, did make the final interview (deviance) much easier, because the “writing was on the wall”. In other words, the participants found it easier to talk about robbing houses, taking drugs, or going to prison because they believed that I understood that their actions were inevitable given the preceding events (Lawler, 2002).

### Building Rapport

According to Patton (2002), one’s capacity to build rapport depends on one’s “ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgement” (p. 366). This means remaining neutral; listening and inquiring in a manner that shows that one neither approves nor disapproves of any shared information (Patton, 2002).

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<sup>12</sup> I am quite fair-skinned.

Adopting this strategy during the very first interview, I found this approach ‘bland’; producing an unnatural and disconnected feeling between the participant and myself. Concerned that this strategy was creating a barrier I relaxed, laughing and raising my eyebrows in response to his stories, for example. This strategy relieved the tension, evident by changes in his body language and in the way he became more engaged in the conversation. I believe this occurred because he could *see* and *hear* that I was interested in what he was saying, as would happen in any (ideal) real-world conversation. Learning from this first encounter, I then adopted this approach with all the research participants.

One particular strategy used to good effect was Patton’s (2002) ‘illustrative examples in questions’. Here the researcher introduces a topic or question by sharing information that demonstrates they have “pretty much heard it all” (p. 366). In doing so, Patton suggests that participants then understand that the question is not an invitation to impress or shock. Furthermore, demonstrating that one has “heard it all” has the ability to put participants at ease, confident that the researcher will not be stunned or upset by what they have to say (Patton, 2002). Illustrative examples can also be used to restate a question that fails to draw a response (Patton, 2002). More than once, *and careful not to breach confidentiality*, I shared storied information provided by other participants or shared my own experiences in an effort to ‘kick-start’ a failed question. This strategy greatly enhanced the flow and frankness of the interviews, and the gathering of meaning-laden data.

### Interpreting Reality

Complementing the inductive nature of semi-structured interviews the constant comparative method of analysis involves the simultaneous and progressive collection and processing of data (Glaser & Strauss, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As data is transmitted or shared between participant and researcher so too is meaning, revealing tentative categories and themes (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). In turn, these emerging themes suggest where the researcher might focus their energies during subsequent interviews as they work to “delimit and saturate” (Glaser & Strauss, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 344) categories of significance. This parallel collection and processing of data occurred at three

stages and helped me to identify and flesh out themes relevant to the research questions.

The first stage of analysis began after the first interviews had been transcribed/typed, approved and released (see Appendix 6). The raw data was copied and pasted into the left-hand column of a two-column table, with the right column used to record **descriptive** codes (e.g., new sibling born, absent father, and gang legacy<sup>13</sup>). The codes and key words highlighted within the data were then used to create individual biography charts that mapped significant life-course themes including places of residence, changing family and friendship combinations, education providers, and employment. This process was repeated with the second set of transcripts and the charts were then up-dated (e.g., beginning and ending of sport participation, drug and alcohol use). These biography charts were checked for accuracy during the third and final interviews; these life histories were later used to compose the character profiles found at the close of this chapter.

The next stage of coding was **analytical** and was more interpretive as it relied on my insights; that is, what I thought the data *meant* rather than what the data said (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Richards, 2009). These insights surfaced at three points in the analysis process. First, any thoughts that came to mind during the interviews became hand-written memos post-interview. Then, ideas that emerged during transcription were typed beside the raw data. Finally, during a dedicated period of analysis these descriptive codes, memos, and typed notes were brought together and re-examined as a complete unit of analysis, and then summarised as one analytical note. This process was conducted after the first then second round of interviews, with clarifying and probing questions set aside for the third and final interview. The following has been taken from Evan's first interview and illustrates the coding process described above:

Demographic Data: *"I remember getting my first Xbox and I was the only kid that wasn't from a rich family [who had one] – and the other kids were like "how did you get a Xbox? Did you steal it?" – "na,*

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<sup>13</sup> I use this term to describe youth related to prominent gang members and who are therefore by association ascribed a portion of that family member's status.

*paid for it, and I had all my mates there and went and bought it myself man” – “how did you do that?” – “doing like 16hr graveyard shifts at [fast food restaurant] ...[mum] got me that job....”*

Descriptive Code: *Employment, poor, working young*

Hand-written Memo: *His friends didn't work*

Transcription Note: *He points out that he had witnesses to the purchase*

Analytical Code/Note: *Evan was proud that he was able to provide for himself, he had figured something out that his mates didn't seem to understand – if you work you can buy things. He worked and made his own decisions about what to spend his money on – so very early on he felt independent – a man.*

Post-interview phase the data was then **topically** coded. Interview transcripts for each participant were merged then arranged into three topical categories (biography, sport, and deviance), each with naturally occurring sub-categories (e.g., soccer, rugby, league). This arrangement centralised the properties of each category, maximising saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By example, most of the participants spoke about their parents and friends during their sport and deviance interviews. These segments of data were then copied and assigned to *all* the associated topical and sub-topical categories. To reduce the size of the tables and aid analysis, the data was then edited and truncated: repetitive phrases, redundant information and diversions were deleted; repetitive stories and incidences were merged; and quotes were reduced to one principal exemplar (bolded text below). Evan's demographic data above, for instance, was also copied to the *mother* and *employment* sub-categories, and also linked to the *gang* sub-category:

Demographic sub-category: Mother

*Evan pointed out that he was different from the other kids in his neighbourhood because he worked and paid for his things. This reflected the work ethic his mother had instilled in him - although given their rocky relationship he doesn't acknowledge this: She was*

*the shift manager and got him the job when he was 11yrs old – too young to actually be working which suggests she had an excellent reputation with the owners. He prides himself on being different – on being better than the kids in his neighbourhood who came from gang homes, a social and economic class lower than he and his mum, because they didn't rely on a benefit: **"I remember getting my first Xbox and I was the only kid that wasn't from a rich family [who had one] - and the other kids were like "how did you get a Xbox? Did you steal it?" – "na, paid for it, and I had all my mates there and went and bought it myself man" – "how did you do that?" – "doing like 16hr graveyard shifts at [fast food restaurant]."** This point surfaces again in the gang section where he talks about being different from the prospects of his age group because he continued to work, had standards, and a code of conduct.*

This format facilitated a fuller understanding of particular people and relationships across different contexts. It also revealed that the data was in fact a collection of fragmented and partial but highly perceptive stories. Thus began my journey into the field of narrative inquiry – and an unexpected fourth stage of analysis.

### The Analytical Lens

Narrative in its simplest form refers to stories, “one of the natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to organize and express meaning and knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 153). In their more complex form however, narratives are not simply stories that carry a set of ‘facts’, they are “interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves.... within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations” (Lawler, 2002, p. 242). For this reason narrative as a site of identity construction and performance has increasingly become the object of investigation (Chase, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 2012). In privileging “positionality and subjectivity” (Riessman, 2012, p. 696), such investigations embody a wide range of narrative definitions, methodological assumptions, and analysis strategies (Riessman, 2012).



In conducting my analysis of the interview data as narrative, I adopted three narrative lenses; examining the participants' stories as (1) performative, (2) retrospective meaning-making, and (3) as being enabled and constrained by resources and circumstances (Chase, 2008; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 2012). Reconceptualising 'narrative as performance' I reread the participants' topical stories and visualised them as plays. The participants became playwrights; writing and directing productions that demonstrated "how they interpret[ed] the social world, and their place within it" (Lawler, 2002, p. 244). These short productions included comedies and tragedies, good news and bad news, and characters cast as villains, heroes, victims, and supermen. Some of the cast were 'storytyped', where "out of prejudice or generosity" the narrator saw "more virtue or value in the lives of others than they might see themselves" (Randall, 1995, p. 326). This was particularly common in Calvin's 'productions', where *everyone* liked his sister or it was *fair enough* that popular people did very little.

The second analytical lens, 'narrative as retrospective meaning-making', encouraged me to consider how the boys' constructed versions of reality were "reconstruct[ed] from the vantage-point of the present" (Pontalis, cited in Lawler, 2002, p. 255). This perspective not only suggests that over time a person becomes better at (re)storying their past, but that people 'see things' differently in hindsight, influenced by what they have experienced and learnt since the original experience or previous telling (Chase, 2008; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 2012). For example, when Evan spoke about his mother he made it clear that *she just didn't care... she wasn't there for anything that counted*; however, now a parent himself, whilst speaking about his first job he realised that perhaps she did care: *Mum was the boss so, that's how I got that job! And then, I think, now I think about it, I think she got me that job to try and keep dibs on me*. Thus, in narrating this account Evan discovered new meaning in an old story. Such examples impressed upon me that the participants' narratives were occasioned (Chase, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000); spontaneous versions of reality constructed during that particular moment, by a storyteller who might tell the story differently tomorrow.

The third approach, narrative as "enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances" (Chase, 2008, p. 65) emphasises that "people are not free to fabricate narratives at will" (Lawler, 2002, p. 251). In other words, while people are actively constructing a sense of self, people are also locally

constrained by the public narratives and social norms of their particular cultures (Chase, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 2012). In terms of identity and reality construction such forces influence what individuals do and do not story, and in turn their narratives reflect what the narrator believes is and is not possible or is worthy of being told (Chase, 2008; Riessman, 2002). This was demonstrated by the frankness with which the rugby and league playing participants spoke about hitting and smashing opposing players; illegal behaviour in any other setting, but normal and acceptable in the eyes of many rugby-mad New Zealanders. Bruce justified his passive life choices by often referring to a public narrative that says that teenagers are lazy. Evan struggled with the contradiction of being abused by family in the face of public narratives that promulgate the values of family togetherness and love (e.g., family-based television shows). Furthermore, most of the young men felt that gang membership was the only realistic career option for people 'like them'. This particular lens encouraged me to consider how public narratives and social norms helped and/or hindered the development of the research participants' sense of self and reality, and what this meant with regards to the research question.

Employing these three analytical lenses my evaluation of the data culminated in three dominant 'findings', presented in the following chapter as interpretive narratives. *Interpretative* has replaced the positivistic report term *findings* as this is precisely what the chapter presents: my interpretation of the spontaneous stories performed for me during a moment in time that can never be recaptured (Chase, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Lawler, 2002; Riessman, 2012; Sparkes, 2002). As discussed earlier these interpretive and collective stories do not focus on or restory factual events or people, but emphasise meaning interpreted to be of significance to the research questions. As a prelude to Chapter four, the following character profiles introduce the five research participants (all using pseudonyms).

A note to the research participants: You will notice that some details are slightly out of sync with the information you provided during the interviews. This has been done purposefully to further protect your identity.
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## Participant Profiles

**Adam** was deeply affected by the separation of his parents shortly after he began attending primary school. This particular event set the scene for what was a tale of two identities: the student who played-down his intelligence and loved surfing, and the gang legacy who was one of the most prolific *crooks* in town. The first version of self, lived with mum in the city during school terms; the second, the Adam who enjoyed little if any supervision while staying with dad during the holidays. Most of Adam's stories featured his friends: once in a while, the city surfers who seemed to have everything that he didn't, and more often the small town league players who stole what they needed and had a ball doing it.

Eventually, Adam chose one lifestyle over the other. He left the 'big smoke' at sixteen to live with his father (a gang member) and focused his energies on being his father's son – notorious by association and in deed. He dropped out of school only weeks after arriving, and spent his days doing *whatever* with his unemployed friends. Drugs, alcohol, parties, and robbing houses and businesses, Adam's stories were tales of hedonism and reckless abandon. In restorying these days, Adam often said he *just didn't care* about the consequences. This cavalier attitude also applied to sport, for while his friends (and therefore Adam) enjoyed playing rugby league, it was common for the boys to be hung-over or *wasted* during practices and sometimes games. In fact, supplying drugs pre-practice and post-game was their coach's standard motivational tool. Eventually, the club folded and rather than play for a neighbouring club with whom they had no previous ties, Adam and his friends stopped playing sport altogether. In constructing these stories Adam rarely laughed; most of the time shaking his head, lamenting the choices he had made.

In time, after serving a short juvenile sentence himself, and watching his friends falling foul to excessive drug or alcohol use as well as the justice system, Adam realised he was going in circles. In his early twenties Adam left the small town where he had been enveloped in a cycle of poverty and crime, and returned to education.

**Bruce** is very different to the other research participants in that he experienced an especially positive and supportive family environment. Typically, his stories were tales of acceptance, inclusion, and success, and while he admitted that he wasn't a good student, he believed his sporting ability compensated for this. As a child Bruce sampled a number of sports and his parents made a concentrated effort to get him to games and trainings. Life was good: He loved his semi-rural hometown, everybody knew and liked him, local coaches pursued him, and his family were very proud of their talented son.

Life changed however when Bruce began high school. With the greatest of intentions his parents sent him to a prestigious school on the other side of the city. With two working parents, younger siblings, and limited public transportation Bruce was unable to play sport for the school, but continued to represent his local rugby club. Spending most of his waking hours at school or on buses Bruce bonded with a group of boys who also bussed to his school, but didn't play sports. When his friends discovered that Bruce was a talented artist they taught him how to tag<sup>14</sup> and inducted him into their crew. On weekends, this crew would bus to the city from their respective neighbourhoods to meet; talking about what they had tagged during the week and planning their next *hits*.

While Bruce continued to play rugby, daily contact with the crew led to an all-consuming passion for tagging and eventually bombing.<sup>15</sup> The better he became the more he wanted people to see his work, and he soon discovered that tagging public property was more exciting and rewarding than rugby. At the age of sixteen with his parent's consent he withdrew from school, and then sport. Instead, he poured all his time, effort, and limited resources into his art, which appeared on walls and buildings across the region. Then, after a couple of major tagging sprees the police caught up with Bruce and charged him with wilful damage. Today, two or three years later, and while his school mates have moved on, Bruce is still intensely passionate about graffiti art and aspires to be one of the best 'writers' in the industry.

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<sup>14</sup> Quickly painting or scratching one's mark or brand on public property.

<sup>15</sup> Mural art form.

**Calvin** cast his childhood self as a victim of circumstance. Whether speaking about school, sport, or family, most of his stories were tales of abuse, control and rejection. The courts removed him from his mother when he was an infant and she in turn worked hard to deny Calvin's father custody and visitation rights. Nonetheless, Calvin was his father's son: he possessed his father's name, they managed to have sporadic contact, and he aspired to the patched status that his father had achieved. For young Calvin the gang lifestyle afforded its members the things he wanted most – a caring/supportive family, freedom, and power.

Placed with extended family members Calvin was an unwelcome burden. His stories centred on his lowly station, which family members of his own age also exploited. The master narrative that ensured his passive behaviour was the 'respect your elders' mantra. This contradiction of ethos and action was not lost on him. Stories of his first year at high school illustrated how his exclusions from school were the result of him meting out 'justice'; punishing adults and students who said one thing but did another. Rugby was a location where Calvin was able to break away from his identity as a victim. It was the one activity during which his family acknowledged that he existed, and was capable of making a worthy contribution. Through rugby, Calvin was able to vent his anger, hurting others without consequence.

In the end, freedom for Calvin came at a hefty price. During his second year at high school he ran away from the abuse and while living with his father explored the world of the 'powerful', which revolved around drugs, alcohol, and violence. He also stopped playing sport. After five months of being 'free', refusing to be a victim again, Calvin committed a crime carrying a ten year-plus prison sentence. A gang legacy, his stories of time inside were ones of position, privilege, and power. Listening to Calvin, it was clear that he was still angry about what had been done *to* him; but he had also reached a point of forgiveness. After leaving prison, and turning his back on the gang, Calvin celebrated his release with his family and is moving forward.

Like Bruce, **David** was born into a loving and supportive family. His childhood stories portray him as a capable student, a loving family member, and a strong rugby league player who also enjoyed other sports. However, when his family moved to a major metropolitan centre the year David began high school, a new character emerged. In search of friendship, he joined a local rugby league club, where a new friend took him home to a gang-immersed household and introduced him to a raft of new experiences. David's stories became tales of disobedience and experimentation. With both parents working, happy their son was making new friends, David began smoking cigarettes and marijuana, was drinking alcohol during 'sleepovers', stole the family car while his family slept, and became enthralled with the thrills of shoplifting. He was free to explore, his busy parents none the wiser.

While restorying this period of his life David was a solemn narrator. In the space of two years he had been expelled from school for intimidating teachers, had begun to drift away from his sports, and although his family was not short on money he had been charged with counts of burglary and then assault. In due course, his parents became aware that their son was on the road to disaster. Also conscious of the poor choices he was making, David eventually decided he wanted to return to his former self. He enrolled in a new school and tried to stay away from his old friends, but with his reputation preceding him he found it difficult to convince teachers that he wasn't responsible for everything that went wrong in class.

Fortunately, David's family was not long after offered a new life, which they gladly accepted. Moving to a small rural town where no one knew him, David promptly put his years of exploration behind him. Today, he speaks optimistically about educational success and new supportive and inspirational friends. For the moment however, while he focuses on studying, his references to sport remain past tense.

In restorying his past, **Evan** often spoke about letting his actions do the talking. His character was one who got things done; who made a decision and got on with the job. Those 'jobs' included the variety of sports he played as a child; from martial arts to the standard ball sports, Evan put everything in and didn't stop until he reached the top. This drive and determination was coupled with personal codes of conduct. Whether speaking about school, work, sports, family, friends, or crime, Evan had a strong sense of what was acceptable behaviour. He was very serious about everything he did, with no time for fools.

Raised by his mother and with regular contact with his father, Evan lived in two worlds. The former family were cast as honest hard working people, while the latter, involved in gangs and drug distribution. While his mother worked long shifts, Evan hung out with the neighbourhood kids or stayed with his father, partaking in drugs and alcohol and observing the gang lifestyle. Nevertheless, Evan managed to do well. He enjoyed learning, excelled at sports, and also held down a part-time job. But his world came tumbling down during his final year of high school when he was expelled for participating in gang activity on school grounds. Narrating this particular story Evan emphasised that the school's decision had effectively stopped him from completing his education, that the school had ended a promising rugby career, and that this single disciplinary overreaction had pushed him into being a full-time gang member.

His bed made, Evan set about being the best *gangster* he could be. He prided himself on being a good soldier; doing what he was told regardless of the consequences. His unwavering dedication to the patch and the brotherhood put him in good standing with senior members and he quickly moved through the ranks. Today, however, Evan is very different. Growing weary with his years of anger and conflicting standards he negotiated his release from the gang and is currently learning how to live in a new world.

## Chapter 4: INTERPRETIVE NARRATIVES

### Taken for Granted

‘Go...Go...Gooo!’

*Phee!* The umpire’s whistle is short and sharp.

‘Yea! Sammy.’

‘Way to run it Sammy.’

Sam grins – on the inside. He leaps up from the cold winter mud and ignores the opposition as he jogs past them. A filthy oval ball lies on its side between two metal posts, dressed in red vinyl padding. Sammy has just run seventy meters of the hundred-meter field, broken through two tackles, side stepped another defender, and had been ankle tapped by the opposition’s fastest player, one meter from the try line. But with his right arm extended, ball in hand, Sammy had prevailed. Now with his eyes fixed on the trampled earth beyond the faint white line that once marked half-way, Sam didn’t need to look up to know that he was gold.

The Wanderers supporters clap and cheer. Their jubilation is so loud that Sam expects they’re drawing the attention of players and spectators attending the other games. Still, he conceals his pride. His peripheral vision tells him that the smaller figures, the mums, are the ones bouncing up and down with glee, and that the larger figures with their feet firmly on the ground, are the men. With each grunted *yeah!* Sam knows that prizefighter fists punctuate the air, victorious. With each hissed *yess!* clenched fists, triumphant, but closer to the body. He can also hear the coach of the other team yelling at his players.

‘Bloody useless you boys! You! Get off!’

Sam smiles, and then suddenly afraid that he’ll crack his mask of humility he makes a concentrated effort to snap-out-of-it. He mustn’t let on how pleased he is to score his second runaway try – this isn’t soccer. Sam promptly reroutes his attention from his ears to his eyes. *Here come the boys: be cool, breathe gently, don’t smile.*



.....

‘Yeah!’ *Spit.*

‘#\*\*\* yeea.’

‘Rocked your world brutha!’

*Spit.*

The front row celebrates. Their chests physically inflated with their boasting they have risen to their full height and with their shoulders back, fists at their sides, they nod grandly at their rivals, *you’re next!* They also turn to each other and relish in their shared bravado. They honour Sammy and Tui who have just taken down the opposition’s largest player. Tui had smothered Number 10 from the right and as he pulled down his prey, Sammy had nailed him from the front. Number 10 had fallen hard on his back, Tui still wrapped around him and Sammy on top. The ball has been lost forward.

‘Yeeeeaaaaaaa!’ Their supporters had shouted, while the opposition’s followers winced and/or turned away in disgust.

Sam pulls Tui to his feet, a bit worse for wear, and then stands over their victim.

‘Punk.’ *Spit.*

He stomps backwards to rejoin his unit, watching the fallen player, urging him to *stay... down.* Inhaling deeply, he then exhales malice-laden carbon dioxide through pursed lips, his pitiless game-face softening just a little. Sam’s body has been flooded with top-shelf adrenaline for close to forty minutes. The Wanderers coach takes it all in: The crowd is ecstatic and the team is pumped – Sammy is proving to be an asset.

‘Yeah! Sam – way to do the damage bro!’ he shouts.

It had been Sammy’s triumphant stance that initiated the feral display taking place on the pitch. The teenage boys roar and rage like gorillas, all but pounding on their chests. Meanwhile, Number 10 lies on his back, winded and dazed. The game whistle is shrill.

‘Time!’ barks the referee.

The opposition’s female manager jogs over to assess the damage. Their coach stays on the sideline; hands on his hips, shaking his head. The Wanderers turn their backs on the ‘enemy’ and saunter over to huddle with ‘Coach’, who will seize this opportunity to rally his troops. Grubby but warm fleshy palms rest on sturdy hips and filthy knees. Chests heaving.

‘Right boys remember the plan; run the markers tired, 11 looks good.’

‘Max, run the diamonds on them. Sammy, Tui, you ok to keep going?’

‘Yip coach,’ Sam speaks up for Tui.

‘Just keep it up boys,’ shouts Coach, as he slaps the backs of the sweaty players standing either side of him. He then looks across to Max, the captain.

‘Yaaa, this is our game my bruthas – smash em!’

‘Hee!’ Is the team cry.

.....

*Singin’*: Don't worry about a thing,

Sam grasps the volume dial on the car stereo and turns it down.

*Cause every little thing gonna be all right!*

They had been listening to Bob Marley and the Wailers on their way to the game, his dad an old-school reggae fan. The vehicle is in motion, reversing slowly across the gravel car park. Large gravel stones pop, crackle and crunch under the weight of the white double-cab ute. Sky blue text on the doors and tail advertise a local construction business.

Glad to be out of the cold and sitting in the warm interior of the ute, Sam suddenly feels tired and sinks into his slightly reclined seat. Tilting his head to the left he gazes blankly at the images captured in the wing mirror. A woman holds a bright yellow plastic bag open, supervising the removal of muck-covered rugby boots.

Rise up this mornin',

Smiled with the risin' sun,

The Pak'n Save grocery bag will carefully transport two pairs of rugby boots home. Her young sons, he assumes, are sitting on the stones pulling at their sodden boots and socks. Sam predicts that their black shorts will be just as wet and dirty, and wonders what she'll do about that. Strip them naked?

The ute begins to turn and the boys exit, stage right. The mirror is then filled with bare legs, long socks, umbrellas, coats, and more mud. Muffled laughter. Sam closes his eyes and feels them thaw beneath his lids.

The ute stops moving, and Sam then hears the gear stick shift into drive. The ute is now moving forward. A couple of seconds later, his father speaks.

'These fullas need a ride?'

Sam opens his eyes and rolls his head to the right to see who he's talking about. The ute idles at the mouth of the park's driveway. Waiting for a break in the traffic, Henry has noticed four boys on the footpath wearing the Wanderers navy blue socks and shorts. They look cold: hoodies up, shoulders hunched, hands jammed into pouches or armpits.

Three little birds, pitch by my doorstep

Singin' sweet songs, of melodies pure and true,

'Nar, they're on someone's car.'

Henry notices that they don't have any adults with them and wonders which one is driving. There's a break in the traffic and he puts his right foot on the gas.

'Was that Q?' he asks Sam as they drive past the walking boys.

'Yip.'

Henry nods. Quentin had been the first mate Sam had brought home when they moved here a year ago. They attended the same high school and Q, as he liked to

be called, had initially spent a bit of time at the house – so much so that Henry had once asked him if his parents knew where he was. Q had simply said ‘oh, they don’t care where I am’. But he seemed okay: polite, reserved, with a sense of humour.

*Singin: Don't worry bout a thing,*

It had been Q who piqued Sam’s interest in rugby league. Although, Henry had noticed that Q had stopped coming around. He wasn’t sure why. He hadn’t asked.

‘Number 4 made some good breaks.’

‘Mmm, Rob,’ Sam identifies the player.

Henry’s tone suddenly lifts,

‘But if I was still paying you two bucks for every goal or try and five for player of the day – I’d be broke right now.’

He laughs, flicking the indicator down to turn right. Sam grins and joins the joke.

‘You’d owe me thirteen bucks old man.’

‘Not bad for a first season mate, but you’re still not as good as I was.’

Sam chuckles, ‘whatever!’

*Singin: Don't worry bout a thing,*

*Cause every little thing gonna be all right.*

Sam is pleasantly surprised that his father had made it to most of his league games. His parents were supportive, but mum usually took care of the sports stuff. She would have driven him to trainings and games, but instead she had encouraged dad to do it. And Sam was glad that she had. Dad understood league and he loved the game. Mum on the other hand worried about him getting hurt and asked too many questions. After games, she talked *all* the way home.

‘Spoke to your coach the other day.’

‘Oh yea,’ replies Sam.

‘He wanted to know if you’re playing next season – has he talked to you?’

‘Kinda.’

In fact, Coach has been pushing Sam for an answer for weeks, *he’s a hoha* groans Sam to himself.

‘Reckons they got scouts coming next year to check out the talent – hey! don’t forget us little people,’ he grins at Sam.

‘Yeah, well... might do something else next year,’ Sam announces.

Henry doesn’t miss a beat as tries to hide his surprise.

‘Oh yeah, whatcha up to bro?’

‘One of my mates does boxing.’

‘True.’

‘League’s cool, but my mate’s pretty good and they do fight nights.’

Henry tests the water, ‘could do both?’

‘Maybe... na... dunno.’

Actually, Sam is certain he won’t be playing next season, but he’s picked up on something in his father’s voice.

Contemplating what this means, Henry can’t help but be disappointed. He has enjoyed his son’s company: talking about league, the occasional run together, watching the games on TV. *Why?* He asks himself. *What a waste of talent!* But he knows that there’s no use trying to change the boy’s mind; his wife had a terrible time trying to keep him in soccer after he had wanted out. Sam had then played touch rugby, then basketball, and a bit of mid-week indoor netball; filling the living room mantle with trophies, a box with certificates, and a basket with sport shoes and equipment. *Well... at least he’s finishing the season. Who knows, next season is a long way off.* Henry attempts to recover the conversation.

‘Your uncle Hemi used to box, he could give you a few pointers.’

‘Did he?’ Sam responds positively to Henry’s white flag.

‘Yea bro – that’s why he’s so ugly!’

Laughter fills the vehicle. Henry reaches over and turns up the volume.

Sayin, This is my message to you-ou-ou:

Singin: Don't worry about a thing, worry about a thing, oh!



### Commentary

This interpretive narrative is about assumptions and expectations. It illustrates the perception that talented athletes will continue to play the sports in which they excel and appear to enjoy. Sam’s coach and father have assumed that because he is a talented player, Sam will play next season. But this appears to be an unsubstantiated belief. When Sam announces that he will not be playing next season his Dad is initially surprised then disappointed. It is likely that Coach will be too, when he discovers that one of his prized ‘assets’ will not be back. In fact, the research participants (the boys) generally did not have anything nice to say about their last coach. And while they said they had fun and supportive coaches as children, it seems that as they got older the coaches changed. The boys had the following to say: *[my last coach] he was good, not good at coaching, but a nice fulla but lazy, he’d sit there all day and tell us what to do, sit there and yell at us (Bruce).*

*As a young fulla I had a lot of good coaches, and I really wanted to impress them and do well.... [but my last coach] I didn’t like him... he just didn’t measure up. He was a bit of an egg, bit of a clown, bit aggressive... quick to threaten us if we didn’t listen to him... (Adam)*

*I remember this one time, our uncle was taking us, next minute next training, different uncle; next training two different uncles [laugh] but at least we **had a coach** you know, at least we knew we wouldn’t run*

*out of one. Most of them were like “Oi! Grab that ball! Grab it!! Fucken grab it! Throw it! I’ll kick your arse!”....and cause he was your uncle, you had to listen.... [But] Uncle\_\_\_ was my favourite... he never hit me [laughs]. He would be like “ow, you can do it” and next minute he just picked me up, so I go hard. (Calvin)*

*My [martial arts] teacher... he was hard on me. I felt like I was never ever hard enough no matter what I did. But then later when you look at it he was just trying to keep me down, always aim that little bit higher. Na he was a hard fulla. [In rugby] when they’re swearing at you you’re thinking ‘I need to improve’ or ‘I’m doing good’... most people who play have a rugged background so generally they come from an environment where they swear a lot. (Evan)*

*[My first coach] he was a cool chap. Like he’ll push you as far as you want to go. He just pushes and pushes and pushes, until you give up or you get better, until you succeed at what you want to do, if you tell him. And he’ll back you 100% all the way... he doesn’t swear at you and yell at you. [But my last coach] he pushes us but he pushes us way over the boundaries, cause he’ll yell and swear at you “rah-de rah-de ra” and all this.... So I just hacked it, and did my parts and that was it. (David)*

The expectation that athletes will commit to sports they have a natural aptitude for was a reality for most of the research participants. Positioning themselves within their stories, four of the boys specifically portrayed their sporting selves as capable or gifted. Adam for example, referred to himself as *one of the play-makers*. According to Calvin, in the eyes of his family, his sporting prowess was his only redeeming quality: *when it came to sport, we all stuck together. We did. That’s one area where the family knew to get me, cause yeah I was pretty good at sports*. Evan spoke about playing school rugby alongside a number of now prominent New Zealand rugby players.<sup>16</sup> He also sampled some of the minor sports, testing his theory that his sporting ability is hereditary:

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<sup>16</sup> I would like to point out that Evan also said the following: I’d never use their name to say “yeah I know that fulla” or put them down, the fact that they were in my life is good enough for me.

*I was good at [hockey] because my cousins were good at it... just happens my family's good at sports and just happens whatever sport they're good at, you know same genes, you're good at it naturally – but doesn't mean that it appeals to you.*

Bruce too sampled a number of sports as a child; not because he was interested in them, but because he had been pursued or persuaded. His stories suggest that he felt compelled to play, obligated to make others happy:

*I was one of the fastest on the field at the time, ah had a few people after me, that's why I was always going back and forth from rugby and league, cause the coaches were always after me, always going back and forth, having turns with them.*

However, when Bruce discovered something that *he* enjoyed (graffiti art), he abandoned his identity as a local league talent, and potentially a contract to play rugby league in Australia:

*Some fullas came over from Australia, looking for league players to sponsor and take over there... and I found out that my name was one of the main ones that popped up, so yeah I missed out on a pretty big opportunity there. Not to say that I regretted it or nothing. I mean, if I wanted to play sport for a living, I would of done that...*

When the research participants withdrew from sport, people – generally adults – were somewhat surprised. Why would a talented young athlete with potential to play at a higher level simply leave? How could he not be enjoying the game? In reading and re-reading the interview data, it occurred to me that the adults in the boys' lives believed excellence is synonymous with enjoyment and therefore dedication (just as I had). But as we can see, this is not always the case. The following excerpts illustrate the pleasure and positive benefits that the research participants derived from their sports – yet all withdrew:

*I feel awesome... happy feeling really... I like getting hurt, I like getting smashed up... like I said, it's a whole physical game, you're not out there to walk out without a grass stain on you, you want to walk off with grass stains, mud stains, blood... your mates are limping off, getting bandaged up, bleeding and everything, [and] you know*



*that they've played their game to the fullest – if you walk out with a little scratch, you just don't have the satisfaction. I just don't see why you should play if you're not going to play all out. (Bruce)*

*[I] play defence cause I love tackling... just hearing that sound... when you go in for a tackle, a rib shot, that "huh!" It's a nice sound, it's a nice sound.... You can tell, if you're watching a game of rugby, if you can hear that, you can tell it was a good tackle. (Calvin)*

*Relieving all your stress into your tackles or into running the ball as hard as you can, running the ball as hard as you can with all your frustrations and anger... family and that sorta thing... you can trust your team mates to be there for you, so you got heaps of trust for them. (David)*

*We had a pretty hard out little team – [but] didn't win too many games aye, too wasted. Just go to tackle really... that was the main reason I played league, tackling, but that was cool cruising with the boys, just being part of something. (Adam)*

*Personal growth, because you can have the social, [and] that makes you feel better because you got support, but when you train hard, yeah you might put yourself through pain training, you want to collapse, but after that training "yeah I feel good; I'm healthy" cause you're raising your standard of living. (Evan)*

To a lesser degree, but of no less importance, *Taken for Granted* also highlights issues of masculinity. It speaks briefly about the 'bro' friendship that initially drew Sam into the sport and the father-son relationship which had been strengthened through his participation. It illustrates some male norms of behaviour; how males should and should not behave, and what are and are not acceptable displays of ego and pride. This collective story also highlights the presence of legitimised violence and the belief that inflicting pain and fear are the ultimate measure of a league player, of a team, of a man. Minor plots highlight some gender differences in the context of male sports, as well as the absence of some parents. This latter point is illustrated by the following comment, which reflects a common experience among the boys: *They liked me playing sport,*

*[but]... I had to find my own way there, cause trainings were after school and mum was at work, so I had to find my own way there so I caught the bus (David).*

## Sport for All

They have waited until midnight and leave the house through the back door. At the bottom of the steps, they stop briefly to assess the night. It's muggy. Tossing and turning in their sleep, people will leave windows open. The air is still. No wind to disperse noise. But, as predicted, it's darker than usual; the moon a small sliver of light on an ebony-black canvas. Looking up into the heavens, millions of tiny stars wink at the young men knowingly. They drop their gaze and walk single file around the side of the house, then along the grassy edge of the stone driveway. Not a word. Behind them, the ghostly light of a television flickers across the emerald green curtains of an empty living room. Jaws II will screen until one-forty-five in the morning. They have one-and-a-half hours to get in, get out, and get home again.

Earlier that night, just after dark, Peter parked his black and silver top Valiant Ranger down the street. It waits for them now, outside two-two-three, an abandoned house surrounded by a neglected hedge. The broken home faces an empty overgrown section. No one sees or hears three darkly dressed figures climb into the parked car, clicking the doors shut behind them. But the sound of the V8 engine igniting startles tomcats prowling the slumbering neighbourhood. Matt, the youngest of the trio, cringes. Peter puts the car into drive and pulls gently away from the gutter and into the deserted street. No lights. Pauly rides shotgun.

At the end of Stafford Crescent Peter switches the sedan's headlights on and Pauly lights a cigarette.

'Yea bro.'

Pauly passes the cigarette to the driver and lights another. On the back seat, Pete's cousin also lights a cigarette. The car fills with cheap grey smoke. The occupants of the Valiant sway gently as it turns, left into Fox Street... right into Domett... and then at the T intersection, pulls out onto Whitaker Road, the main

drag into town. However, this vehicle heads in the opposite direction, away from the populace.

‘Hey,’ calls Matt from the back seat, ‘member the first time we stole something cuz?’

‘Yeah bro,’ Pete chuckles. He then speaks to the front passenger.

‘Us and some of the bros told the olds we were stay’n at a mate’s place, so we could go to this disco, then we slept under the rugby stands...’

‘Got a hell of a fright too bro,’ interrupts Matt, ‘this pile of rags underneath it turned out to be a homeless dude – man! when he sat up we #\*\*\* ourselves.’

They all laugh. Pauly imagines a groaning rag-covered mummy rising beneath the town’s rugby stands as a group of young boys scream in horror.

‘The next morning, early-as, starving-as,’ Peter continues, ‘we see this guy delivering bread and milk to a closed café on the second floor of this mall...’

‘And when he’s gone,’ Matt interrupts again, ‘he runs up the stairs and throws us down some bread and coke.’

‘Yeah bro, it was just sitting there. The delivery fullas just leave their stuff at the door. I didn’t know they did that – so, oh well, their bad.’

‘Get sprung?’ asks Pauly.

‘Nah, but after a few times they put a gate at the bottom of the stairs and locked it. I was about, twelve?’

‘Yeah cuz, you were at intermediate.’

Matt had been at primary school at the time.

After twenty minutes of small talk they leave the highway, turning left onto an unpainted country road. Pete eases up on the accelerator and the Valiant Ranger cruises softly along Weld Road, rising and falling, hugging the tar-sealed path.

‘Wind up your window bro.’

Pete is speaking to Pauly. He's worried their voices will carry in the still of the night. The car's round lamps throw light on the tall grass growing both sides of the tar-sealed road, waist high and dried out by the hot summer sun.

'Took the shoes off the first fulla I smashed,' Pauly offers a tale as he cranks his window up.

'What'd he do bro?' asks Pete.

'Nothin. Got in my way. Was at this party and he banged into me so I gave him a dong, had cool Nikes on, so took those while I was at it.'

Pauly grinned, remembering. He had been thirteen at the time, in his first year of high school. The other guy had been a senior in the first fifteen. Knocking him down had set him up for the rest of high school, top dog until he was eventually expelled about two years ago. Pauly's now on a benefit and attends a work skills course. In his free time he rolls with whoever he finds interesting – like Pete, who had joined the training programme a few weeks ago. Pete is the first mate Pauly has had who enjoys the gym as much as he does – he also has wheels.

'And the rest is history folks,' Matt imitates an announcer and chuckles.

He likes the way people look down or cross the road when they see Pauly (and himself) approaching. Although Pauly is only 18, he's as big as a bouncer and is covered in tattoos, a blend of Māori patterns, scrolled names, and angry animals down both his arms, across his chest, over his back, and up his neck. He looks like Tiki Taane on steroids. Matt on the other hand is only sixteen, is still at school, and has a basketball physique. Pauly has promised to take him to the gym, to help him bulk up. As the car begins to slow, the niggles Matt has carried with him all day begin to pinch his neck and shoulder muscles.

'We're almost there,' declares Pete, 'cuz, put your smoke out.'

Matt begins to wind down his window.

Pete snaps at him, '#\*\*\* wanna start a fire bro? Use the ashtray.'

Pauly chuckles, 'on-to-it bro.'

Matt's cheeks burn with embarrassment. He takes another drag on his smoke, then crushes it inside the silver ashtray on the door. Then suddenly it's dark. Pete has switched off the headlights. He leans over the steering wheel staring intently at the dark road; the last thing they need is to end up in the drain. And then he sees it. The sign: Hank's Butchery & Homekill. Turning into the gravel driveway the Valiant leaves the quiet tar-sealed road. Matt winces, the noise of the stones being crushed by the tyres seem deafening.

'Those flax bushes will hide the car from anyone coming from that way,' Pauly says.

Against the star-studded sky his accomplices can see a dark hedge of tall flax, but they don't know which way is 'that way' – it doesn't really matter. Pete moves the car into position, beside the flax and facing the exit for a quick get away. He turns the car off and they sit for a moment, listening to the *ticks* and *tanks* of the engine as it cools.

'Ok cuz,' Pete reviews Matt's role again, 'you stay here and watch the road, if you see or hear anything, let us know.'

'Sweet bro,' replies Matt.

Pete reaches over the front seat and passes his young cousin a single key.

'Unlock the boot and leave it down until we show up with the stuff.'

'Got-it.'

Pete then reaches under his brown vinyl bench seat, produces a set of bolt cutters, and passes them to Pauly. The size of the chiller padlock remains a mystery, but Pete's confident that his mate can manage it. Pete then Pauly slowly wind down their windows creating a vacuum that pulls thick warm air into the vehicle. It combines with the smell of stale cigarettes. The boys stare into the rural darkness. Looking for lights. Listening for cars. Crickets eventually resume their singing.

'Ok,' is all Pete says, before he and Pauly step boldly from the car.

Alone in the dark, Matt freezes up; his eyes as wide as a possum caught in a spotlight. His young heart thrashes about inside his chest. He grips the key and it digs into his palm. Then, after what seems like forever his brain screams at him, *Boot! Open the boot!* Startled, he searches frantically for the door handle and finding it takes a deep breath before he creeps out of the Valiant. When he reaches the back of the car, Matt realises that he doesn't know where the lock is.

'#\*\*\*! No way,' he growls through gritted teeth.

His heart now pounds in his ears, his skin cold and clammy. Holding the key in his right hand he runs his left over the car's rear end and is surprised to find a small round lock almost immediately.

'Man,' he sighs.

Down on one knee he manages to insert the key and turns it.

'Oi!'

The combination of a leaping boot lid and an angry whisper startles him. Matt's hammering heart hits a brick wall, he turns awkwardly, loses his balance and falls against the car. Pete stands above him holding a large box. It looks heavy.

'#\*\*\*, get up,' Pete hisses at him.

Matt scrambles to his feet: boot up, (box in), boot down, crouch and watch. Moments later, Pauly emerges from the dark carrying a similar cardboard box: boot up, (box in), boot down, crouch, watch.

. . . .

'Ha! Hank'll wish he'd paid for an alarm now, aye?' laughs Pauly.

It had been just as Pete's informant had promised: no alarms, no traffic. And Pauly had made short work of the medium-sized padlock. But they were still in the woods. They are driving a car loaded with stolen meat. Pauly regularly checks his speedometer and is feeling confident, the cops don't know about his cousin Matt. Pete watches the silent silhouette of his cousin in his rear-vision mirror. Matt is lighting his fifth or sixth cigarette.

‘One night cuz, then it’s gone.’

‘Yeah okay bro, mum’ll be home tomorrow night.’

*Please don’t come home early*, he pleads silently. His mother had trusted him to watch the house and stay out of trouble while she visited a friend up north. One night alone, and he had broken every rule in the book, and then some. If she ever found out what he’d just done, he’d be grounded for life. He now knows why mum isn’t keen on Pete, uncle lets his kids do anything – except get caught. Matt feels sick.

The Valiant turns into Stafford Crescent and as they approach two-one-two Pete kills the lights. The car cruises softly onto the grass and footpath outside the dark weatherboard home. The television is still on. The engine running, three figures exit the car and transfer six boxes from the boot to the other side of the brick fence at the front of the property. Pauly and Matt then step over the fence and hide among the long leafy fingers of a willow tree, and watch the Valiant pull away.

. . . .

Gathered to unveil the fruits of their labours Matt opens the freezer liberating a large ray of artificial yellow-white light. Pauly pops open one of the boxes, and then lifts it up onto the corner of the freezer so they can admire the assortment of Christmas hams: ham cooked on the bone, pressed sandwich rolls, honey cured hams, traditionally smoked manuka hams of all shapes and sizes.

‘Ham anyone?’ laughs Pete.

The older boys snicker then begin to drop the meat into the depths of the barren Kelvinator freezer. Dull *thuds*, *thud... thud*.

‘Gonna take a couple home tonight bro,’ announces Pauly as he puts aside a large smoked ham on the bone and a sandwich roll.

‘Good idea bro, not me, cops will probably turn up in the morning’ explains Pete.

‘What about the boxes?’ asks Matt.

‘Got a fireplace?’ Pauly replies.

‘There’s a fire drum out the back.’

‘Burn them night bro, and crush the ashes, so you can’t see the printing’

Matt nods, and flattens the empty boxes before stashing them behind the freezer .  
He closes the lid. In the dark, Pete sets the tone for their departure.

‘Okay cuz, we’ll be back tomorrow.’

‘What time’s that?’ asks a nervous Matt.

Pete looks in Pauly’s direction, ‘we finish about twelve aye bro?’

‘Yea about that – probably be late though, I’m wasted.’

‘Yea same,’ sympathises Pete.

‘Why don’t we give training a miss bro? Get Mack and James after touch.’

‘Yea... why not.’ *It’s just training*, reasons Pete.

‘Shot bro, we out?’

‘So lunchtime cuz?’ Matt checks with Pete again.

‘Yea bro, between twelve and one.’

The older boys exchange hushed handclaps and shoulder bumps with a gloomy Matt. Pauly feels for young Matt, this had been a first for him.

‘Don’t sweat it G, the bros are keen-as, we’ll be here right after training – your mum’ll never know.’ He then tries to cheer him up, ‘easy cash bro, *easy-as*.’

*Da-ra-da-ra...* inside the house, movie credits begin to roll.



## Commentary

This collective narrative is about contradictions. It illustrates the co-existence of crime and sport, and thereby challenges the idea that sports people are somehow a better class of citizen (Laker, 2003a): because according to the catch-phrase, “a kid in sport stays out of court”. Not only does *Sport for All* demonstrate that criminals play sport too, it also points out that there are varying degrees of commitment to sport. For instance, tired after their ‘night out’, Pete and Pauly decide to forego touch rugby training to catch up on their sleep, unlike their teammates Mack and James who are willing to purchase stolen goods, but will train before they ‘shop’. This suggests that young people might participate in sport without possessing a sense of true loyalty to the team, the game, or to sport in general. One might interpret this ‘disloyalty’ as a form of deception: ‘athletes’ reaping the benefits of sport participation (e.g., community recognition) while choosing to breach the standards and values associated with sport.

Reality for the research participants was a blend of deviant behaviour and sports. For instance, and perhaps the extreme example, Adam admitted that he and his teammates indulged in drugs just prior to trainings and games, and that his coach was usually the instigator or facilitator:

*I remember one time before a game, um [coach] came to pick us up and we got **wasted** at his place... some really **tacky** oil, and we were **wasted**... I couldn't even feel my arms, I couldn't even go play, but the boys went and they said that they couldn't even get on the field.... Yeah but that was usual, you know, get hammered as – go have a run around.*

Somewhat more committed to their sports, Bruce and David pointed out that they did their best to attend trainings and games, and therefore committed their crimes on their nights off: ... *playing sports, going to training, and after that – shall we go tagging? No – after training I'm too tired, I'm going home to have a rest.* (Bruce)

*... we only had trainings twice a week and then one game, so it was sorta temporary... there was still like three or four days to do whatever... and Xbox got boring... but I didn't let [burglary] get in the*

*way of my league and my league in the way of my burglary.... I was pretty knackered after trainings to do anything. (David)*

Evan spoke about participating in three sporting codes simultaneously, but also the enduring presence of violence in his life: They put me into judo [age 5] because, like I said we were in a poor area, rough neighbourhood, and it was good for the self-defence...

*... that's just what I remember, just had this whole idea of being a gangster when you grow up; go to jail, and that was the sweet life.... I had a lot of family in gangs and a lot of mates in gangs – that's all we knew.*

*It didn't help that everyone's favourite rapper was shot... or the best sports people happened to be violent, or you see violent families... especially when that Once Were Warriors came out [age 8-9], everyone wanted to be like that... everyone kept calling me "Muss" cause I was just like him – drink, fight, and I don't care even if it was a woman.*

*I was just too angry, too violent you know, no teacher could talk to me without me getting really psycho, and then we started gangs up in the school... and I got expelled and trespassed [age 17]...*

Even prior to living with his estranged father, Calvin was a keen rugby player, who sold drugs and fought in gang related battles:

*Question: What do you remember about high school?*

*Response: Selling drugs, fighting.*

*... because of my father's past, you know, younger people, other people from other gangs knew who I was and that's why I fought... I pretty much had no choice, I was born into it.... This one time I was gang bashed [at school] and so I went back, got some of my cousins and stuff and gave it back... we ended up attacking anyone and everyone.*

Thus, each of the research participants lived a life of contradictions. They were regularly immersed in a culture long associated with positive outcomes such as enhanced intrinsic motivation and educational and occupational results (Holt & Sehn, 2008), elements of positive personal development that according to Lerner, Bretano, Dowling and Anderson (2002, cited in Holt & Sehn, 2008) is both the “precursor and product of positive community involvement” (p. 27). Yet the research participants also engaged in habitual criminal deviancy.

Interestingly, when asked what kinds of lessons they learnt in sport or how sports are similar to crime, the boys generally spoke about being toughened up and being able to rely on others to back them up. This suggests that they had either misinterpreted the lessons of sport, or that the espoused benefits of sport had not been delivered:

*Me against the world [by 2Pak], that song will really pump you up, so on the field it was me against them, on the street it was me against everyone else as well and I was going to survive, I was going to do alright... getting one over on the other team, that's similar to this hustling, getting one over on the cops, get one over on these [people] who done wrong to you. Beating the other person, beating the system, beating the team, victory always tastes good. (Adam)*

*All I wanted to do was be the hardest out there [martial arts], I just wanted get to that top, and, yeah I just wanted to be feared, but in a loving way [laugh]. Not like, yeah, when you see people fight and you see knock outs or someone get hurt, I don't condone them getting hurt but, still wanna be not the one getting hurt, while I'm looking cool, so. (Evan)*

*That you can trust your team mates, or like the people around you to be there for you, so you got heaps of trust for them... you know, if we have a fight or something, if one of us get beaten up the other ones will come too, if there's more than one of them, basically, but they're always there with me. (David)*

*Sport for All* also speaks to the importance and power of friendship and camaraderie. For instance in *Taken for Granted*, a new friend introduces Sam to

rugby league; while in *Sport for All* it seems a new friendship might pull Pete away from touch rugby. This interpretive story also alludes to the need to belong, to fit in, and to be accepted by others, often to the detriment of significant relationships (e.g., Matt and his mother, Pete and his aunty). *Taken for Granted* also touches on the experience of fear, something that Pete and Pauly seem to have conquered.

### Crushing Butterflies

Mavis: You know these kids today Carol? They got no respect, not for their parents, their teachers, not even the police.

Carol: What they need is a good hiding – a good kick up the backside.

Mavis: Too right, in my day all it took was a look and it stopped you in your tracks. *These* kids, they're just not scared enough, they've got the run of the place.

Carol: Well when I was a child, my father would take the hose to us, had a piece just the right length that he kept in the shed, and there was no use tryn to hide it because he'd just cut another; line us up he did, the naughty ones, and whip us up against the wall. *That* put you on the straight and narrow quick smart!

Mavis: Yes my mother, no skin off her nose to slap you across the face if you used foul language. Tell you what, you watched your Ps and Qs that's for sure; but kids today swear like sailors...

Carol: And the girls are just as bad as the boys!

Mavis: I know! You know what I saw the other day Carol?

Carol: What's that?

Mavis: I was at the market on Saturday and this boy, maybe 8 years old, asked his mother for some money and she said no – so he kicked her! In the shins, as plain as day.



walk-jog across the field agonising to watch. The last of the kids who use the alleyway have long gone.

‘Samantha took my bag,’ groans Mark, ‘I had to chase her round the swings.’

Danny shakes his head, ‘Geez she’s a pain.’

‘All girls are a pain,’ grumbles Mark, ‘sometimes I just wanna *punch* them.’

Danny understands his friend’s sentiments. He has a four-year-old sister and she gets everything: piggy-back rides, all sorts of pink shoes, the biggest presents, and worst of all he can’t watch Transformers after school because *she* likes Dora the Explorer. As far as eight-year-old Danny is concerned – girls suck!

‘Let’s go ok, before the high school kids get there.’

‘Yeah yeah,’ replies Mark, readjusting his WWF backpack.

Walking faster than usual, the boys turn right at the end of the dirt alleyway. Very few primary school children go home in this direction. This end of Waterhouse Grove simply fades away. The road becomes a paddock that leads to scrub which hides a little footbridge, built over a thin stream that runs through a small gully. On the far side of the narrow bridge is an equally secreted alleyway, a tall grove of bamboo concealing its existence. The alleyway path had been tar sealed at some point, but large patches of trodden clay, which has fallen from the bank beside it, suggest that the council has since forgotten it. Scraps of rubbish blown from the street above or dropped by the few pedestrians who use the shortcut litter the track. Paper and cans captured by long grass and bamboo. The path snakes up a steep bank and delivers travellers to the end of Vogal Grove, two blocks from Pollen Street where the two friends live. Using this shortcut the boys are spared thirty minutes of walking.

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‘How’d you get here so quick?’

Danny’s mother checks her watch, ‘it’s only three-twenty.’

Danny's heart jumps. He isn't prepared for this question. Butterflies begin to dance inside him.

'Ah... got a ride,' Danny lies to his mother's face.

'Oh okay, who with?'

She returns to the task of unloading groceries from the boot of their silver Nissan. He avoids eye contact, his face red-hot. The butterflies' wings beat harder inside him. He reaches into the boot and pulls out a shopping bag of vegetables, and starts walking to the house – ahead of his mother.

'Oh, one of my mates doubled me on their bike,' he lies again.

'Not on the road though aye?'

'Dowt-it,' he reassures her.

The kitchen sliding door is open and as his mother sets down her purse and three shopping bags on the kitchen bench, she asks another question.

'You're not using that shortcut are you Danny?'

Danny can't help himself, 'But why? It's shorter!' he snaps.

He dumps his shopping bag on the table and frowns at her. His butterflies disappear.

Her tone hardens, 'It's dangerous, that's why.'

'But other kids are allowed to walk that way.'

'It's too secluded.'

'But lots of kids use it mum.'

She pauses and looks directly at her son.

'No they don't, now stop arguing. You will walk the long way home. I've told you Danny, if I come to get you on the car I want to be able to find you.'

Danny has heard it all before and decides to give in while he's ahead.

'I'm going to my room.'

Backpack in hand he heads down the hallway.

'Are you hungry?' She calls, hopeful.

'No.'

As he walks down the hall he shouts at her telepathically, *liar! – you never pick me up.*

.....

'Oi, go on then,' Mark demands.

'Okay, hold this.'

Danny shrugs off his backpack and hands it to his friend then wades through the bracken and broom, thankful there are no thorns or prickles. A handful of butterflies take flight. Mark runs to the bridge and waits for the show to begin. *He won't do it*, he hopes. Mark is a year older than Danny and he wants to be the first one to do it – but he hadn't thought about it lately. It seems that Danny had. *He's not going to do it*, Mark tells himself, sending negative thoughts into the green hues of the scrub. The wild growth is taller than Danny, but the disturbed bushes reveal that he's approaching the bank. Seconds later his friend emerges, and stops.

Things look different on this side of the bridge. Protruding from the bank on which Danny stands, and reaching out into thin air, is the pipe. The butterflies inside him multiply, fluttering frantically. His heart begins to protest, beating faster. The pipe looks smaller up close, the same thickness as the wooden poles the phone company had replaced with underground cables on their street last year. It looks as long as their hallway at home, maybe seven or eight metres long. It stretches out in front of him. At each end of the pipe the bank is bald; patches of dirt where the older kids mount and dismount the pipe. On the far side is a trail, where they shimmy along the bank to get to an old wire fence at the bottom of the alleyway. For the first time, Danny notices that nothing really grows on that side



of the bank. If he slipped, there was nothing to hold on to. He looks over at Mark, who simply yells at him, 'hurry up then!' Danny swallows the lump in his throat, then looks down.

Below the black pipe is a four or five metre drop. In the middle of the gully is a stream, a metre wide and very shallow. Bricks line the bed of the stream. Lush green grass grows both sides of the man-made channel. *What if I fall? Will it hurt?* He didn't have any answers, because although he and Mark had spent many afternoons watching the high school boys cross the pipe – none had ever fallen off. The gully walls were almost a sheer drop. *How will I get out?* Then, he remembers the fulla who had landed on his nuts (!) His heart pounds harder, against his ribs, overpowering the butterflies. A salty tear of sweat trickles down his forehead and into one of his eyes. He uses the back of his hand to wipe it away.

'Buurk-burk-burk-burk...' Mark taunts him from the safety of the bridge.

Danny shoots him a look and snaps, 'shuddup!'

'Well hurry up then!' Mark comebacks, laughing.

Danny inhales, and then exhales slowly. *I gotta do this.* He fixes his all his attention on the pipe. It's wrapped in what looks like a humungous black plaster, the material sort. *Doesn't look slippery.* His brow is brimming with beads of sweat and his navy blue shirt is glued to his sweaty back. Inside his black and white Chuck Taylors his bare feet perspire, his toes have become wet and slippery. His black board shorts stick to the insides of his thighs. *What if I fall off and break a leg or something? Bleed? Mum will find out that I've been in the gully – I'll be dead meat – I'll get hiding.* Danny hadn't had one of those in ages, not since last year when he had stolen money from his mother's purse to buy lollies. Shut in his room, while his parents discussed what his punishment should be, Danny had cried and had even contemplated jumping out of the window and running away. In the end, he had stayed. He was grounded for a week and received five belt strokes across his bum. His father didn't hold back either. Danny winces remembering that he didn't sit comfortably for about a week.

Suddenly, the scrub behind him shakes and male voices pierce the air.

‘Puzzle time!’

Laughter and a number of finger snaps follow. *Click! Click! Click!*

‘Hard case aye bro?’

More laughter.

‘You seen that video bro?’

‘The one about the ghost chips?’

‘#\*\*\* yea, crack-up.’

‘Nar’

‘#\*\*\*!’

This voice is on top of him, a high school boy comes out of the brush and almost knocks into Danny. He’s alone. The other voices are now on the bridge.

‘Is that your mate?’ One of the boys ask Mark.

‘Yea, but he’s chicken, we’ve been here for ages.’

Danny frowns.

‘You go first bro!’ shouts the taller one, ‘so we can get out of here.’

The older boy looks down at Danny, ‘you wanna go first?’ he asks.

‘Na you go,’ Danny replies.

The teenager notices that the boy’s fringe is wet with sweat.

‘First time?’

The boy looks down, ‘yea.’

‘I’ll go first – show you how it’s done.’

This invitation lifts Danny’s spirits, ‘yeah ok.’

He pushes himself against the bushes, giving the teenager room to pass.

‘Don’t hesitate bro, makes it harder; just get on and go and whatever you do – don’t look down.’

The bigger boy steps onto the pipe and immediately begins to walk across. Danny watches him closely: feet slightly turned out; arms raised a little, palms open; head up. *I can do that*, Danny tells himself. The teenager quickly reaches the other side, then turns and calls to Danny over the divide.

‘Don’t look down bro.’

Danny nods.

‘I can do this, I can do this,’ he whispers to himself.

He breathes deeply, and watching his shoes, steps out onto the pipe. His heart hammers inside his chest and he worries that the vibrations will bounce him off the pipe. He raises his arms slowly.

‘Look at the pipe ahead of you,’ calls one of the teenagers on the bridge.

Danny doesn’t look over. He looks straight ahead, then lowers his eyes onto the pipe.

He whispers again, ‘don’t look down, don’t look down.’

His heart is trying to escape from his chest, and it hurts. Resting his eyes on the pipe one or two meters ahead of where his feet are, he takes a step forward... then another... and another. *I can do this, I can do this*. Another step... another. *Don’t look down*. He keeps moving. His eyes locked on the pipe. Sweat runs down the back of his legs. *Keep going*. He takes more steps, one after the other. And then he’s there - on the other side of the gully.

‘You the man bro,’ the teenager grins.

From the alleyway the other teenagers also congratulate Danny.

‘Chur little bro.’

‘Chur!’

‘Shot little dude.’

But it's not over yet. The older boy turns and Danny watches him make his way along the face of the bank to their final destination. Mark stands at the end of the bridge. The other boys however, are walking up the steep alleyway. Danny's rapt. His body feels light and his brain tingles. The pounding in his chest is easing.

Leaping over the small wire fence, the teenager then looks back to check on the boy. The kid is managing the bank okay, and he looks happy with himself. He waits for the boy to climb over the fence, then swings his right arm backwards, palm cupped. Danny recognises the movement immediately – he and Mark have been practising this at home. He follows suit. Their arms swing in and their cupped hands connect, creating a nice hollow handclap. *Pop!*

'See ya bro.'

The high school boy flicks Danny a head-salute and disappears up the alley.

'Oh man! That was *meeeeean*,' screeches Mark as he jogs over carrying Danny's school bag.

'*Oh man*, that was *wicked*,' Danny shakes his head slowly in disbelief, 'I was so scared but that was amazing.'

'You gonna to do it again?' Mark asks.

'*Yeea bro!*'

∞

### Commentary

This narrative is about fear and embodies the adage, 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. Danny has been told more than once not to use the isolated shortcut, but continues to do so. Then, not only does he ignore his mother's ruling he deliberately puts himself in harm's way. Standing at the edge of the gully, he experiences some of the physical sensations and emotional turmoil associated with fear. However, with support, he manages to subdue this fear long enough to cross the gully – quite possibly Danny's first foray into edgework.

For the research participants the rush associated with conquering fear was a reality in both sport and crime. Playing regular combative sport they became familiar with the symptoms of anxiety and fear, and learnt how to manage it. Their spontaneous stories revealed two concerns: the fear of injury and the fear of performing poorly. Calvin for example, contrasted the elation of winning with the embarrassment of losing, which he believed impacted on his family's sense of pride: *...when you win it feels like you're **kings**. But when you lose, far, it's not just the teams that feel it; go back home "did you lose?" - "yea" - "eh!"*

Similarly, fear of criticism and the way in which it impairs performance damaged Evan's relationship with his mother:

*Definitely get butterflies when someone you love turns up, "oh why did they have to show up? Why did they have to show up!" I was like that because when my mum came and watched I was never good enough for her, so as soon as she got there I freaked out... she was quite critical... so she stopped coming to my sports cause I didn't like her there, I ended up having domestics on the field with my own mum.*

Bruce too, dreaded humiliation. The following excerpt describes the first time he was 'hit' hard in league. Notice how he chooses to include information that explains his poor performance:

*It was the biggest hit I've had in my life, it really shocked me. I had a break for a year and a half and I went back and played for the next grade up... 16 at the time, they were all 17-18. I was out on the wing... unfit, struggling to keep up. ... [T]he ball bounced right in front of me so I just ran straight up the middle, got a real big tackle, popped the ball, I dropped the ball, first biggest tackle I've had in my life, first time I had been tackled and popped... I was embarrassed, cause I ran it straight up thinking I could get through, and I got a smack from the first fulla... pretty embarrassing in front of a big crowd, but stuff happens, so I got up and played the game.*

While the research participants understood the inherent risks of their respective sports, they continued to play; pursuing the thrill associated with feeling the fear, doing it anyway, and being victorious. Here, Adam explains why

surfing is more frightening, and therefore more thrilling than league: *I don't think [league] was very risky... it was good sidestepping, out thinking them, [and] when your team was working really well, that was a good buzz... but the only risk I can see is some really big guy wasting you, [and] that wasn't a risk for me.*

*[But there's a] Big rush in surfing, big waves come in and break in front of you. Lot of excitement. Lot of fear. **Lot** of fear.... Could drown, seen a lot of people get hurt surfing... taking off on big waves... you might go from the top and boof! go right to the bottom. Fear of getting hurt, fear of coming off, get into a big barrel – might not come out, haven't come out a couple of times just got wasted... but then you come up – it wasn't **that** bad, [and then] “oh man that was awesome!” You need a good set of lungs, got to be strong, fit, gotta have guts... it's no place for chickens.*

For the others, however, rugby league is a hazardous sport. These different views stem from each participant's unique social, historical and cultural locations:

*... every time you get on the field there is such a high risk it could be your last game... That's why you go hard out in training... if your friends hit you really hard, a stranger isn't going to hurt you... [and] you'd rather get hurt by a mate, than a stranger... (Evan)*

*You can do head-highs, too hard, too fast. I've seen people get paralysed... this fulla I used to play with... he got hit head-high from three people... his whole back just bent, he just dropped, [and] they had to call the game off... [and we] waited for the ambulance.... It happens aye, you stop to think about it – and that's about it. ...[But] that's what trainings are for, you build up all those techniques, how to get tackled, how to tackle, warming up and warming down, stretches, so when you do get hit it's not as sore on your body... (Bruce)*

Here, Calvin explains how prisoners condition their bodies so they can survive compulsory games of crash<sup>17</sup>, where you can punch, kick, headbutt, [even]

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<sup>17</sup> Compulsory in that new prisoners are pressured to play by the 'resident' prisoners.

*people in your own team can give you a crack... its like rugby, and be solid enough to play on one of the exclusive inmate rugby league teams:*

*... kicking, hitting, punching, you just stand there and bang bang bang.... up in here [armpits], shoulders, knees, legs, calf muscles.... and you gotta take it too. First day, wake up and you're like this [acting sore]. Couple of weeks later, na, you're just shrugging it off... I used to do it every second day.... just stand there with my arm up and 20 [hits] each side, three sets... eventually your muscles do tend to get used to it.<sup>18</sup>*

The participants expressed similar sentiments when speaking about their criminal pursuits. Their stories revealed that to achieve the thrill of criminal success – measured by ‘getting away with it’ – one must learn to ignore fear, as well as any feelings of guilt or regret: *The first couple of ones you're looking at photos thinking “oh man I'm ripping you off” but you blank it out, bam-bam, do your thing... no mucking round. (Adam)*

*It's an adrenaline rush... it can feel really great. It's like that one time where you get to not care about being yourself and letting the bad side out of you – but it does have consequences, [but] you don't think about it at the time, when you're in it.... Sometimes I was thinking “Yeah! Smash this person” and then watching that person in pain was quite haunting... you'd feel bad in that you could've been different about it. (Evan)*

*... you always worry about who owns the wall and what they're going to do [if they catch you], people driving past – what they're going to do. If there's security guards, police around or near, guard dogs... you just can't hesitate – if you see it, you go do it, don't think about it twice... it's a lot harder if you stop and think about it... you think about all things that can go wrong. (Bruce)*

*[Drugs] If it's good, man it's good. Weed's like 20mins... mushrooms are 5hrs... it's risky man [laughs] cause if it's a bad one, its 5hrs of*

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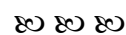
<sup>18</sup> This style of personal training is a punishable offence.

*bad and there's been people who have had bad trips and never been the same again... just weren't the same... they just lost confidence in themselves or something, like this guy who was playing league, best league player... he became a shell of himself, skinny, withdrawn, stuttering, he got wasted.... I felt I could manage it, you know when too much is too much, but even then you still try to go it all. It was a really good challenge. (Adam)*

*[My first time] I just grabbed me a chocolate and walked out – put it in my jacket and walked out. I didn't get caught from it, thankfully... I had the shakes when I left the shop cause I thought that they was going to follow me or something. I was like really nervous when I was doing it too... I just did it more and more and more, and I just kept getting used to it... It didn't phase me cause I had never been caught, it was a cocky kind sort of thing, that I could just keep doing it and doing it, and I could keep getting away with it and no-one will know... (David)*

As do all three collective narratives, *Crushing Butterflies* also makes reference to the 'bro-hood', a social grouping that encourages and supports its members to take risks. This stands in contrast to the protective instincts of the central character's mother, who to some degree attempts to shield her son from the harsher realities of life. *Crushing Butterflies* also highlights the belief that inflicting pain produces respect:

*It's no secret, if you fear someone, you're going to respect them, it's the easiest way to make someone respect you, listen to you and that, by making them fear you. Cause if you make them love you it's a lot harder, you got to compromise... with loving, it's hard, you're always having to work on it. If you make your kid fear you, they're not going to love you but they will respect you. That's where I was back then, if I make people fear me I'll get what I want, cause loving you is too hard. (Evan)*







*It was a Thursday*

I didn't think, you know.

I just didn't think.

Well really... I didn't know it would happen like *this*.

*Wait a minute!*

*Of course you knew, dummy!*

*He announced his decision yesterday.*

*Pleading guilty,*

*taking responsibility for what happened.*

*Why delay the inevitable?*

9:00am

Our lawyer is impressed by his bravery; choosing no bail and Christmas in jail. It could be months before sentencing. My mind freezes, a possum caught in the headlights as he explains that remand is much worse than mainstream. *What?!*

*You did know you stupid woman!*

*He's going to jail today.*

*You should've fed him (he hasn't had breakfast)*

*Fussed over him (like when he was small, remember?)*

9:30am

The large open waiting area is like a doctor's surgery. Well worn carpet and chairs. Artwork once new and interesting, now drab and unappreciated. People start milling in and sitting down. Talking privately. All waiting, for potentially bad news. The woman on the intercom begins to read out names, and sounds bored already. The summoned go in. Not all come back.

10:30am

'Mum, I'm hungry.' He takes five dollars and with a younger cousin crosses the street to the gas station. I wait and watch. Listening for his name. I blink, and the doctor's surgery is now a hospital. Like us, there are families here: sleeping and wriggling babies, children, partners, parents, and grandparents too. Paying their last respects. Here to console the 'patient' and grieving family. Intermittent conversation. Quiet smiles. Hand holding. He returns with a pie and coke.

11:30am

‘Sorry about the wait. The strikes have really slowed everything down, but the judges still take their tea breaks...’ The lawyer sounds annoyed, but I think he’s used to this. I blink, and the emergency staff become suits, lattes in hand. Just too relaxed for my liking. Just another day.

*And you didn’t feed him!*

*Why didn’t you think of taking him out for a big breakfast?*

*You stupid, stupid woman!*

1:30pm

I’m eating but everything tastes like paste. Bland, gluggy, and unsatisfying. Everyone at the table is quiet. Caught up in their own thoughts I suppose. This isn’t right. Somewhere in the basement of that cold stone courthouse is my hungry son. Hungry, alone and scared; while I sit just across the road eating hot food. This is sick. I close my eyes.

*Dear Lord,*

*Please forgive me for being a bad mother.*

*Today I didn’t feed my son.*

*He did the right thing but I failed him.*

*He’s a good kid Lord.*

*Never been in trouble.*

*But here we are.*



## Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter symbolises the gathering and merging of voices and realities. First there is the literature – a selection of past and recent theories, models and perspectives. Second, are the voices of the research participants (the boys) – their performative versions of self and others. And then there is my voice – my personal interpretation of the literature and of the boys’ individual realities. Here, these voices are united and woven together in an effort to create a richer understanding of the issues, and while this chapter is presented in three parts, in reality, the foci and interpretive narratives overlap to create a whole.

### Perception, Coaches and Dropout

The interpretive narrative *Taken for Granted* (see Chapter 4) highlights several points of interest to this study of sport attrition and deviance. Initially, it illustrates differing and competing realities, in that the character Sam (representing the research participants) appears to treat sport as just a game, while his father and coach perceive sport to be a long-term investment – each party positioned at opposing ends of Huizinga’s (1955) paradox of freedom and order, the balance between play and seriousness. Sam is obviously a talented young player capable of developing a career in rugby league, and his father and coach assume that Sam will do just that. Of course, the story then reveals that Sam drops out; leaving his father confused, disappointed, and asking *Why?* In reply, the literature provides a number of possible scenarios. Vallerand (2001), for instance, would argue that Sam, or rather the research participants, were amotivated or extrinsically motivated athletes who felt less autonomous, competent and related (feeling connected to others) than intrinsically motivated athletes, and thus prone to depression and disobedience. However, the analysis suggests otherwise. For one, all of the boys thoroughly enjoyed their sports and were competent and successful players, and whilst they were perhaps disobedient outside of sports (in that they participated in criminal deviancy), they were generally respectful of coaches and officials – even though some coaches did not deserve that respect: *he pushed us way over the boundaries, cause he’ll yell and swear at you... so I just hacked it, and did my parts and that was it (David).*

In fact, all of the boys had experienced authoritative and intimidating coaching styles, but had also experienced “cool” coaches. What is interesting is that the cool coaches were responsible for inducting them into sports, during what Côté (1999) terms the *sampling years* (age 6-12), while the “stink” coaches predominated during the *specialising years* (age 13-15). For three of the boys, this pattern reflects the progressive age and weight-based competition structure common in junior rugby and rugby league, while the other two boys had moved to different towns during this period. This developmental coaching pattern raises some questions and points that may provide some ideas for future research. How consistent is this trend, or is it specific to this study only? How do coaches of 6-12 year olds differ to coaches of 13-15 year olds? Are they perhaps more tolerant, patient and fun? Moreover, what role do parents play in selecting coaches and clubs (if at all), or is it a case of simple convenience and cost?

*When I was younger growing up, they just put me in soccer, cause everyone was in soccer back then... I don't know, it's like mums gathered together, their kid was playing that sport, so their kid had to play that sport. Never really liked soccer.... Soon as I got a job, it was like boom, you got a job you pay your own way... so I paid for everything if it wasn't done through the school... [got there] by bus, friends, walking... cause they [parents] were busy working or didn't have time for me. (Evan)*

The questions above resonate with Côté's developmental model of sports participation (DMSP; 1999). Although, Côté and his colleagues (e.g., Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008a, 2008b, 2005; Wall & Côté, 2007) tend to focus on the experiences and perceptions of *specialising* persisters and desisters in order to provide recommendations for purveyors of sport – particularly coaches.

Given the discussion thus far, it should be noticeable to the reader that *Taken for Granted* does not particularly focus on Sam's coach. This is because, in spite of their bad coach experiences and the numerous studies and writings that state otherwise (e.g., Bruner, Strachan, & Côté, 2011; Engh, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008a, 2008b; Gilroy, 1993; Wall & Côté, 2007), none of the boys specifically cited poor coaching as a cause for their withdrawal. Instead, they spoke about having other interests and doing other things, in such a way as to give

the impression that sport *is just a game*; simply another activity that they did. In other words, it was easy for them to drop out because sport was not *that* important – as demonstrated by Sam. This is not to say that their coaches' attitude did not contribute to this position or creation of meaning however, as some argue that advocates of the '*it's not just a game*' mindset, do often turn kids off sport (Coakley, 2006; Coakley et al., 2009).

For instance, in studying dropout and prolonged engagement in competitive swimming Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008b) found that dropouts were particularly conscious of coach favouritism toward the stronger swimmers whose successes, one would suggest, are considered to be a reflection of the coach and club's ability and status (respectively). Similarly, Coakley (2006) argues that (some) parents 'enlist' their children in sports in order to meet a perceived standard of good parenting, "in short, when children play sports, mothers and fathers feel that they are meeting their responsibilities as parents" (p. 155): *They put me into judo because, like I said we were in a poor area, rough neighbourhood, and it was good for the self-defence (Evan)*. However, children can be quite astute, and may recognise that their sport participation is more about mum, dad, or the coach looking good. Thus, one could argue that the '*it's not just a game*' philosophy – often exemplified by coaches, parents, and spectators on the sideline – could be interpreted as '*this is not about you*', which given all the espoused benefits of sport, young athletes could very well find demoralizing, insulting, and/or hypocritical.

### Sport, Family and Deviance

The narrative *Sport for All* (see Chapter 4) was designed to illustrate that the catch-phrase "a kid in sport stays out of court" (Becroft, 2012) can be challenged. For in spite of the plethora of espoused benefits of sport participation (see Chapter 2), this study found that all of the research participants participated in criminal deviancy whilst playing sport. Adam and his team mates used a variety of illegal drugs and burgled homes and businesses to order; David and a team mate shoplifted, burgled homes, and were trialling gang membership; Calvin and Evan were involved in gang-related activity including retaliation and drugs; while Bruce was on the streets tagging and bombing public property in the darkest hours of the night. These are hardly images one would generally associate with

sportspeople. In an attempt to explain such behaviour, some theorists might argue that the boys are neurologically impaired and as a result have not developed a social conscience (e.g., Eysenck, 1977); while other theorists might argue that the boys were socialised by deviant families and/or friends (e.g., Akers, 2009; Harris, 1998) – two contrasting viewpoints reflecting the ongoing nature versus nurture debate. In this case, however, the findings support the latter perspective and in particular, Akers’ differential association/social learning theory (DA/SLT; 2009).

To explain, Akers’ (2009) fourth hypothesis states that people are more likely to be deviant if they already possess deviant *definitions*; that is, nonconformist or anti-social “beliefs, attitudes, justifications, and orientations” (p. 52). However, in contrast to the theories that state deviancy is learnt from deviant peers, Akers argues that children develop deviant definitions during their first phase of socialisation – whilst in the care of their family. Children from such homes then enter their second phase of socialisation (the world outside the home) with a disposition for anti-social behaviour and a tendency to seek out like-minded individuals (Akers, 2009; Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005). This theory resonates with the findings, in that Adam, Calvin and Evan experienced less than desirable childhood circumstances wherein anti-social definitions were rife: *When your father’s got 16 ounces on the table and he’s like “oh son you’re smoking with me” you kinda got no choice, it’s respect for your father (Evan)*. However, this does not explain why Bruce and David were deviant, as they were raised in relatively safe and supportive homes. Thus the argument that deviance can be traced back to a deviant home can be contested and may instead support literature claiming that deviance is learnt from one’s peers (e.g., Gifford-Smith et al., 2005; Harris, 1998).

This proposition is based on the assumption however, that Bruce and David were completely honest with me, or that I failed to consider all the possible influences in their homes. Like the character Matt, perhaps Bruce and David spent time with extended family members or with friends of the family who modelled deviant behaviours and attitudes; although one would need to take into consideration Aker’s (2009) position that the impact of content of exposure is more influential than the amount and length of exposure. Furthermore, Akers (2009) argues that any form of human communication can increase a child’s familiarity with anti-social definitions. Perhaps Bruce and David had access to



television shows and movies, computer games or music that carried anti-social messages. The argument here being that the more a child perceives deviance as ‘normal’, the more comfortable they will be in violating social norms and associating with other violators of norms. Conversely, the less familiar children are with deviant definitions the less comfortable they will be violating social norms and associating with deviants (Akers, 2009). Therefore, differential exposure may explain Bruce’s relatively minor offending (tagging) and the extreme guilt David experienced post-event – suggesting that Bruce and David’s internal balance between their prosocial and anti-social beliefs, attitudes, justifications, and orientations (definitions) were slightly more balanced than those of the other boys – but not enough to stop them from participating in deviant activities.

In light of these findings, the catch-phrase ‘a kid in sport stays out of court’ is clearly not accurate; yet, this message permeates society even though it may be another example of “vague and unexamined claims about sport’s ability to address issues of anti-social behaviour and crime” (Coalter, 2007, p. 115). Here in New Zealand the media, politicians, and various sports groups and organisations use this and similar phrases to justify their interest and investment in youth sports, often citing Principle Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft as the source<sup>19</sup> (e.g., Bennett, 2010; Key, 2008; R. Smith, 2008). In a presentation delivered New Zealand wide, Judge Becroft (personal communication, May 7, 2012) states that sport participation promotes “community connectedness [as] involvement in any form of organised group activity, sport included, builds resilience, is a protective factor, and exposes the young person to good role models, team or group discipline and shared goals etc.” And the literature shows that there are a number of theorists and writers who share his position (e.g., Australian Institute of Criminology, 2000; Cameron & MacDougall, 2000; Carmichael, 2012; J. D. Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2006; Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Nichols, 2007). However, proponents of sport crime reduction models often fail to acknowledge that there are studies that have found otherwise.

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<sup>19</sup> Even though Judge Becroft acknowledges that he picked the mantra up from Blenheim airport many years ago – a slogan and sign supplied by Sport Blenheim.

By example, in examining the sport club initiation ceremonies conducted at a British university, King (2000, cited in A. Smith & Waddington, 2004) describes scenes of “nakedness, drinking urine, physical abuse and encouraging novices to vomit on one another” (p. 280). Haray (2001) provides an in-depth review of violence among American athletes across all age groups and competition levels, citing cases of common assault between players leading to serious long-term injuries and even death. And, there are many examples of poor athlete behaviour here in New Zealand, most notably in rugby and rugby league. Such realities suggest that exposure to combative sports be added to Bruce and David’s list of possible anti-social influences. Perhaps ‘good’ family members watched televised boxing, wrestling, or rugby and cheered when athletes were injured. Perhaps they and other parents did this from the sideline during their children’s games. Further, the reviewed literature and the findings indicate that one must also take into account the beliefs, attitudes and orientations of coaches. These points and the examples of violence in sport lead one to ask: Are children and youth with a deviant disposition drawn to sport and particular sports because they carry deviant definitions? This question warrants further investigation. Crabbe (2000) for example, argues that sport should not be used as a therapeutic substitute for drug use, as it can “replicate the experience or excitement of drugs” (p. 390).

In summary, it can be argued that the phrase ‘a kid in sport stays out of court’ is misleading, and has perhaps given parents and society in general a false sense of security. What appears to be missing is a balanced representation of all the potential outcomes of sport, good and bad – an open acknowledgement that sport has the potential for positive effect *if* “properly conceived and conducted” (Siedentop, 2007, p. 19).

### Sport, Fear and Deviance

Finally, the findings indicate that regular exposure to sports where athletes are prone to injury may reduce an individual’s natural propensity to avoid dangerous situations. The interviews revealed the more the boys played and trained, the easier it became for them to face the dangers of their respective sports (or to crush their butterflies). Three times a week Calvin braced himself while another inmate systematically kicked and punched him to condition his body for rugby league;

while the other boys made it clear that, *that's what trainings are for, you build up all those techniques, how to get tackled [and] how to tackle (Bruce)*. Such perspectives indicate that they were all aware of the risks and actively prepared themselves to face them. And while Gray (1987) and other neuropsychological theorists (see Corrs, 2008) argue that humans are born with a high or low propensity for recognising and responding to signs of danger, and thereby experience differing levels of fear and anxiety, the findings suggest that human beings may have the ability to adjust or rewrite that neurological 'wiring'.

According to Gray's reinforcement sensitivity theory (RST; 1970, 1987; Corr, 2008), being attentive to signs of danger indicates that one relies on one's behavioural inhibition system (BIS) more than one's behavioural approach system (BAS), which is associated with a general optimism and impulsiveness. However, because the boys did not appear to be typically anxious individuals, displayed forethought, and possessed a 'can-do' attitude, it is possible that their BIS's were counterbalanced by an active or an activated BAS. In other words, rather than being driven by our neurological systems it may be that these systems are responsive to the will of the individual. Perhaps one's inclination to 'feel the fear and do it anyway' is an indication that one has manually overridden or adjusted one's approach and defence mechanisms. By example, in the narrative *Crushing Butterflies* (see Chapter 4), eight-year old Danny stands on the edge of a sheer bank and in willing himself to cross the suspended pipe he crushes his butterflies/fear – just as the boys did when they went out onto the field or into the surf again, knowing that the next tackle or the next wave may be their last.

The inclination to be physically and mentally prepared for the worst (or chaos) is indicative of an edgeworker. As Lyng (1993) puts it, edgeworkers have the unique ability to "deal with any contingency, to respond creatively and effectively to a unique sequence of events that cannot be fully anticipated or planned for in advance" (p. 114). Rugby, rugby league and surfing clearly align with the three characteristics of edgework. First, these sports possess an edge or a line between *sweet* and *smashed*. Second, the boys were confident that they could successfully negotiate the associated dangers (e.g., drowning, paralysis). Third, they were enthralled with the sensations of their sport: *I love tackling, that 'huh!' sound (Calvin)*. With regards to the second characteristic, time and again the boys proved to themselves and to others that they had 'the right stuff'; the necessary

sport-specific skills as well as the innate ability to survive the chaos by ignoring or subduing their fears and therein continue to perform. In fact, if we consider the number of times that each of these young men suppressed their fears in the name of sport, one could suggest that sport may have dampened or dulled their sensitivity to fear in the process. This apparent lack of fear manifests as a perceived bravery or fearlessness and a heightened sense of immunity that can be transferred to other contexts (Lyng, 1993): *it's a lot harder if you stop and think about it.... If you want to tag, you go out there to tag – if you go out there to play rugby, you go out there and play rugby (Bruce)*. After all, this is a founding principle of physical education and all forms of sport participation: that behaviours and attitudes developed through sport (e.g., obedience) spill over into other life domains, such as education and employment. If this is the case, then why not to acts of deviance?

The assumption here is that fear stops people from violating social norms (McCarthy & Hagan, 2005); the fear of being caught, the fear of being sanctioned, and the fear of the associated dangers (e.g. falling off a building while tagging). However, if one possesses an inflated sense of immunity and perceived ability to successfully walk 'the edge', such assumptions are just that, assumptions. From the ages of five, six, and seven these young men became accustomed to being pursued with the threat of physical pain, were encouraged to pursue others with the intent of causing bodily injury, and learnt how to take a 'hit' – and get up and do it again. Moreover, their behaviours were differentially reinforced; when injury and pain was inflicted upon them or they inflicted it upon others, the players experienced more positive sanctions (e.g., cheering) than negative sanctions (e.g., disciplinary action), which may have created a distorted sense of right and wrong. Thus, when faced with the opportunity to be deviant young sportspeople may be more prepared and therefore more tempted than non-sports people to 'give it a go'. Not because of neurological impulsiveness or an absent social conscience, but because they have a distorted sense of adventure, have the ability to overcome their fears, and believe they are talented enough to get away with it. In short, sports that fit the edgework model have the capacity to prepare individuals for deviancy – another intriguing finding that warrants further investigation.

## Summation

This study expands and deepens our understanding of what sport was like for five young men. Their performative stories informed interpretive narratives designed to highlight themes of significance to the research question: Why do youth step out of sport and into court? The interpretive and collective narrative *Sport for All* demonstrates that the boys had interests outside of sports, in this case criminal deviancy. *Crushing Butterflies* exemplifies the thrill experienced when they conquered their fears, giving them a sense of accomplishment and bravery. While *Taken for Granted* communicates their sense of independence and confidence, which ironically may have been developed in the face of coach intimidation and threat of physical injury. Considered together, these narratives illustrate that the boys thoroughly enjoyed sport, but had a lot of other realities to deal with as well (e.g., pushy coaches, friendships, being a bro). In considering these narratives alongside the literature, unexpectedly, a smaller theme has the potential to become a major theme; that is, the experience of bullying and intimidation at the hands of coaches and perhaps the perception that such behaviour is acceptable given that parents and society in general encourage and allow children to be in the care of such individuals.

While abusive coaching may have been in part responsible for ‘toughening’ the boys up, I think the experience also led to an emotional disengagement from the sport, making it easier for them to drop out when competing experiences beckoned. This disengagement was perhaps added to by a sense of independence developed through dealing with their coaches without parental support. This observation points to a culture of complacency – a blind faith perhaps that sport is entirely wholesome and will deliver the promises of character building, cooperation, and all the other espoused benefits. This faith is reflected in and reinforced by the phrase ‘a kid in sport stays out of court’, and the complacency in the saying, ‘she’ll be right mate’. In short, it seems that some parents believe that putting their child in sport is enough – then they walk away. However, as this study illustrates exposure to this type of coaching – potentially a source of deviant beliefs, attitudes, justifications and orientations – and participating in sports where players are prone to injury, may in fact increase a child’s chances of being involved in criminal deviance.

In closing, the implications of this study are not entirely new. Sport practitioners and theorists have long argued that the power and potential of sport is being thwarted by poor administration and delivery (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008a, 2008b, 2005; Ginsburg, Durant, & Baltzell, 2006; Siedentop, 2007; Thompson, 1995). However, perhaps new is the recommendation that parents practice due diligence for the *full* duration of their child's sporting experience, both code and coach, in an effort to ensure that their child is having a quality experience that will prolong their enjoyment of sport and restrict their exposure to deviant beliefs, attitudes, justifications and orientations (definitions).



## Venetian Blinds

‘Bro!’

Zane’s thunderous voice startles me, each and every time.

‘Bro!’ replies Gary, grinning.

We step into the house and immediately I light a cigarette, so I can breathe. Zane’s ‘scent’ is suffocating; a stifling warm vomit and urine tinged musk that coats the inside of my mouth and throat, and last for hours. I’m pretty sure the stink comes from his patched leather pants and vest. I’ve often wondered if there’s a list of rules somewhere forbidding patch members to clean their ‘uniform’.

‘Howz it girl?’ Zane throws me a head salute.

‘All good.’

I raise my eyebrows and make sure to smile, briefly. The guys make their way over to the round kitchen table. I walk pass them, and through a doorway without a door to the living room. On Mondays this is where I wait while they ‘do business’. I know the cold tan vinyl couch in the corner of the room well. Before sitting, I reach underneath to retrieve the large glass ashtray that lives there.

‘Give us some extra this week bro,’ I hear Gary say as he sits down.

Chair legs slide loudly on an unvarnished wooden floor. Gary passes Zane a white envelope.

‘True bro.’

The back of the envelope is open and Zane silently counts five hundred dollars.

‘What’s on bro?’

The envelope is folded in half, then stuffed into a leather pocket.

‘Got some people going to that Metallica concert.’



‘#\*\*\*!’ Zane’s shout is amplified by the acoustics of the naked kitchen.

‘That’s gonna be mean bro, yous going?’

‘Nah bro, can’t be bothered.’

*Whatever*, I roll my eyes. Gary hates heavy metal. Zane leans to his right and opens one of the sky blue cupboards beside him. He pulls out a white shopping bag and drops it onto the table. Inside it are a bunch of clear plastic bags. Zane passes one to Gary. It’s the same every week. We all know that the bag contains exactly twenty-five tinfoil bullets, but just as Zane counts the cash, Gary counts the foils – just in case.

‘So whatcha need G?’

‘Just another five bro.’

‘Sweet-as.’

Zane grabs another bag, opens it and makes a withdrawal. He passes five more to Gary who tops up his bag. Then, from the very bottom of the shopping bag Zane extracts one, two, three, four, five... six extra bullets for Gary’s personal use.

‘Chur bro,’ Gary smiles.

He stands them in the top pocket of his denim jacket. They look like silver cigars.

And that’s the way it works folks. That’s why we’re here. Free weed. For every five bullets a seller takes from Zane, they get one free. On top of that, at the risk of losing his regulars, Gary also taxes them. Tonight he’ll sit at our kitchen table and take a pinch of weed from every bullet. Then, he’ll cut new rectangles of tinfoil to repackage what’s left. I don’t think Zane would approve, but I’m pretty sure he knows that everyone does it – as long as he gets his money aye.

‘Drink bro?’

‘Yeah sweet bro.’

Gary looks over at me through the doorframe with an apologetic look. *What a pig!* I grit my teeth and give him ‘the evils’. He knows I don’t like coming here. But he knows that I know that he’ll never pass up a free blow.

‘Missy!’ barks Zane, ‘put the jug on!’

Seconds later I hear her, Zane’s partner, in the kitchen.

‘Hiya Gary.’

‘Hey Miss.’

‘Three coffees,’ orders Zane, ‘missus’ in the lounge.’

The sounds of cupboards, cups, spoons and running water echo in the kitchen. Eventually, Missy appears in the doorway.

‘Hey girl.’

Missy’s tiny frame moves silently across the living room towards me. We exchange smiles and kiss each other on the cheek.

‘You wanna a milo?’

Missy knows I don’t like coffee.

‘Yes please.’

Behind her, Zane and Gary have entered the room and are about to sit on the larger couch opposite me – a warm chocolate-coloured lounge suite. Missy returns to the kitchen.

‘He’s a useless #\*\*\* bro,’ bellows Zane as he drops his huge frame onto the couch.

Gary chuckles. Zane then produces his metal stash box and places it on the coffee table in front of them.

‘Bro, take a look at this bro.’

Gary leans in.

‘Scored it yesterday, but it’s not for sale, not wasting this on just any

#\*@\*,’ Zane explains as he reveals a thick head of marijuana tinged with gold.

‘Yeea bro,’ croons Gary, ‘niice.’

Zane grins, clearly enjoying Gary’s response – then begins pulling and tearing the head apart. I make a point of watching Gary; his brown-hazel eyes are fixed on Zane’s fat tattooed fingers. And I can say with some certainty that his mouth is watering about now.

‘Here you go babe.’

Missy returns to the room carrying two large mugs. She puts one in front of Zane, the other in front of Gary and returns to the kitchen. She then reappears with two slightly smaller mugs, and joins me on the couch.

‘Smoke?’ I offer Missy my packet of Rothmans.

‘Oh ta,’ she whispers.

She takes the packet, plucks one out, puts it in her mouth and lights it. Then, with my milo in the other hand, I pull a smoke from the pack with my mouth. Missy reaches over and lights it for me. I suck on it, inhaling deeply, like it’s the first cigarette of the day. On the other side of the room, a thicker smoke is being inhaled.

‘Useless bro! Bloody useless.’

They’re talking rugby league now. Sounds like the Warriors lost again.

‘Mummy?’

It’s Aaron, Zane and Missy’s six year old son. It sounds like he’s in the kitchen.

‘Here I am boy,’ calls Missy.

She walks quickly to the kitchen and returns with Aaron in tow. Aaron is a big boy; round and heavy. He’s wearing blue flannelette pyjamas and joins Missy on

the couch. Promptly snuggling into her side and chewing on one of his thumbs. Hmm, he smells like soap, all squeaky clean.

‘Hi Aaron.’

He wiggles the fingers of his free hand at me and then looks away.

‘Still quiet as,’ explains Missy.

‘Good bath boy?’ grunts Zane from across the room.

Aaron looks at his dad and gives a small nod. Then, noticing that the blinds beside us are open, Zane decides to give his son a task.

‘Close the blinds boy,’ he says, pointing at the white Venetian blinds.

Aaron looks at his father, then the blinds, then back at dad again.

‘See those strings, pull one.’

Aaron doesn’t move.

‘You can do it,’ Missy coaxes him, helping him to his feet.

‘Pull the strings,’ Zane’s beginning to sound agitated.

I avoid looking directly at Aaron. Instead, I look at the colour of my milo and take another puff. The room is silent.

‘Hurry up boy.’

Aaron sniffs and Missy tries to reassure him.

‘It’s ok Aaron, here, I’ll show you.’

But Zane is suddenly on his feet, storming toward us.

‘No you #\*\*\*’n won’t woman!’ he roars.

I look up just as Zane reaches the boy and grabs the back of his neck with one of his huge hands.

‘For #\*\*\*’s sake!’ he shouts, driving Aaron towards the window.

He grabs the top of boy's head, tilting it up so he's looking directly at the cords.

'Pull one!' he yells down at him.

I can't take my eyes off father and son, and my heart pounds. *Pull the cord, pull the cord Aaron*, I plead silently. But Aaron's arms hang limply at his sides. And then, he whimpers.

'#\*\*\*'n retard!' yells Zane, as he slams the boy's face into the windowsill.

Aaron screams in pain.

I gasp loudly. Missy lets out a stifled wail. But no one moves. Then Zane is holding the boy's head in his hands like it's a basketball. He's staring down at his son; his nostrils are flaring wildly, tobacco-stained teeth bared and gritted, bulging eyes. I see blood. Aaron's broad little nose is bleeding; thick red blood running down over his lips, teeth, chin and onto his clean crisp PJs. Blood on the white frame of the window screams at me.

Aaron gurgles a cry.

Silent tears roll down my face. I quickly look away to wipe my eyes and face with the cuffs of my hoodie. Then I hear the Venation blinds snap shut.

'That's how!' Zane shouts down at Aaron as he releases his son in disgust and strides back to his seat.

'#\*\*\* me! Simple-as aye bro! #\*\*\*'n simple!' he rants, picking up the joint that is scorching the wooden coffee table.

Gary's eyes are fixed firmly on the floor, but he gives a tiny nod. Missy rushes to her injured son and ushers him out of the room. I expect to hear crying. Something. But there's nothing.

Just smoke.

## Chapter 6: CONCLUSION

When I got the phone call, I was so sure it was all a big mistake. The police had got it wrong. My son, with fourteen years' experience in playing sports would never do that. But he had.

In bringing this exploration to a close I feel more informed, but don't have a definitive answer as to 'why youth step out of sport and into court'. This is because we all experience life differently, each with our own perceptions of reality shaped by a unique blend of social, cultural and historical experiences. Take for example the pain I experienced when I realised that sports participation had failed to protect my son from this particular path. Where did my presumption that sport could protect him come from? In part, most likely from my own experiences as an athlete, my perception that good kids play sport while naughty kids smoke "beneath the trees where the magpies nest", and from living in a society that promotes phrases like 'a kid in sport stays out of court'. In retrospect, I accept I was somewhat naïve, even after four years of sports studies, where I had examined and critiqued sports' purported potential to enhance and enrich people's lives.

The first take home message for the reader is that *sport is not just a game*; it is a state of mind that differs from person to person (Caillois, 1962; Coakley et al., 2009; Huizinga, 1955; Siedentop, 2007). Consequently, some people play sport for the 'right' reasons, some for the 'wrong' reasons, and some simply play because they have to. Further, not all coaches are athlete-centred; just because 'Johnny's' first coach was great doesn't mean his future coaches will be. In fact, who are we leaving our children with two to three days a week for two hours at a time? Which way do these coaches' internal scales of prosocial and antisocial definitions tip? Thus, I recommend that parents be diligent, be aware, and be informed that whilst sports can do great things for young people, sports may also dull their child's sensitivity to fear, as well as normalise and reinforce deviant beliefs, attitudes, justifications and orientations (definitions).

The second take home message is that *sport is just a game*. Is it really the end of the world if our youth don't enjoy sport? If, after years of sports-centred physical education lessons they don't want to play sport for their school or a club,

shouldn't that be their choice? Perhaps it is time to consider a middle-ground, where a disinterest in sport does not equate to affective, cognitive and behavioural apathy, helplessness or depression as implied by Vallerand (2001). In treating dropout as a form of deviance, we may in fact be exacerbating a salvageable situation, turning young people off playing sports with our 'get with the programme' and 'what's wrong with you?' attitude. In short, it is time for us to embrace other forms of sport and activity, and to share the power to define what sport is (Chalip, Csikszentmihalyi, Kleiber, & Larson, 1984; Ginsburg et al., 2006; Holt & Stafford, 2011).

Third, this study is *one* person's interpretation of the issues and has its limitations. Most notable is my decision to focus where youth, sport and deviance intersect, in that I don't give attention to gender differences and issues, nor reveal or consider the ethnic/cultural identity backgrounds of my research participants. The former decision reflects the types of literature I drew on, and the latter is based on my choice not to endorse the cultural deficit discourses. I wanted you/the reader to experience the participants simply as young people. The ramifications of adopting this position are that the findings are broad and do not reveal any gender or culturally specific themes. This means that part of the picture or the story is missing, however, this has been *my* performative story; my version of reality "produced in this particular setting, for this particular audience, for these particular purposes" (Chase, 2008, p. 65).

In closing, this study underscores the complexities of sport and deviance, to the effect that one should be able to appreciate that there are no universal answers. With this in mind, perhaps the best we can do is to continue gathering and sharing our performative stories in an effort to garner a wider and richer understanding of youth, sport and deviance. However, it needs to be more than a collection of voices and interpretations collecting dust somewhere. If things are to change and improve we really need our stories and views to reach all the concerned parties, otherwise studies like this one fall short of their potential. One possible solution is to make research engaging for the reader (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008) and to disseminate our stories and interpretations in different ways to different locations. At the same time we need to bring all the parties into the discussion; youth, parents, teachers, coaches, as well as those at the other end of the spectrum – people like Judge Becroft (personal communication, May 7, 2012) who states: "I

totally accept that there is not a shred of imperative evidence, of which I am aware, that would support the proposition [that a kid in sport stays out of court]”.

### *Dear Son: An unsent letter*

It's almost midnight and I can't sleep. I keep thinking about how you are. After our last visit I got really upset and mad that you have been moved to a place where you don't feel safe. I'm angry that young men like you aren't kept away from the gangs, or in other words, career crims. Prisons shouldn't allow gang recruitment to happen inside their walls. People who choose not to be gang members should be kept away from that at all costs. The world doesn't need more gang members. Part of being put in prison is rehabilitation, meaning that they take in bad people and put out people who want to be good. Changed. It should never be the opposite. Yes you did a shitty deed but this is your first offence and being in prison should be enough punishment to make you never do anything like that again. How can anyone be scared straight at the first possible intervention point when they're surrounded by people who have chosen to do crime over and over again? Who wants crime to be a regular part of their life? It makes me so mad! I'm asking you to hold on – don't join any of them. Nothing good can come of it.

I know it's easy for me to be out here telling you that. Easier said than done aye. I can't imagine what it's like for you, day in - day out, surrounded by hate and anger. Fear. I got so upset I tried getting you help. I went online and looked for something that would tell me that you have rights, that you can stay in your cell without getting into trouble with the guards. I couldn't find anything related to NZ prisons but I did find that prisons worldwide are supposed to uphold International Human Rights including 'the right to life' which includes being safe. So it sounds like you're on-to-it when you tell those guards that for your safety you will not leave your cell. So keep doing that ok. I've also tried getting hold of PARS to see if they knew the answer about staying in your cell. The administrator said she thinks what you're doing's ok, but I couldn't get hold of [name]. So then I got really shitty and sent emails to the Minister of Corrections and our local MP. The MP's office is the only one who got back to me, rang me asking what I wanted to achieve. I told them I wanted you away from the gangs,



back to the place where you have been moved from. I wanted you back where you felt safe. He rang the prison and [name] and told me that they said that you were back in remand which didn't do anything for me because you have always been in remand!! So I'm asking you – where are you exactly?? Have you been moved back to the place where you are safe?

Please write me asap and let me know ok. I can't sleep thinking that you're being broken down till you join up. Please – don't give in....

It just doesn't make sense! The police, government and the public don't want gangs – so why enable them by putting non-affiliated people within their reach?! You don't go to prison to join a gang! You go there to be punished – to have your freedom taken away – to be shown the error of your ways. Who's running the prisons? The gangs? They seem to be the only one's benefiting. Do they give their members instructions to recruit while inside? Is it a membership drive? I'm so mad. IT'S WRONG.

Repeat offenders shouldn't be given access to first timers at all. Counterproductive is what it's called. No good can come of it. Some people say "oh well, its jail – what did you expect?" I expect my son to be able to say no to gang recruitment that's what! Yes you did wrong. Yes you should pay the price by having your freedom removed for a time so that you appreciate the good things that life has to offer. You should be punished BUT that shouldn't include signing up for future crimes by being bullied and conditioned by thugs who gave up on life a long time ago. There's still hope for you. Don't give in ok. When you get out they will hold you to your membership if you give in now. We love you – please don't come out a gang member.

I love you, mum. X

*Post-script: I never sent this letter to you because I thought it might hurt you more than help you. Please, never do this again.*

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Recruitment email

*[salutation]*

I am working on my Master of Sport and Leisure Studies thesis and I'm looking for four research participants. My project explores the reasons why young males stop playing sport and become involved in crime.

Do you know anyone who might fit the following criteria?

- Aged between 18 and 25 years old
- Participated in regular sport in their teenage years
- Has stopped playing those sports
- Has appeared before a court judge (but are not currently involved in court appearances)
- Live in the Hamilton area.

If you do, please pass on my contact details. I will then send them all the information that they need to know. The interviews will start as soon as possible.

Regards,

*[contact details]*

## Appendix 2: Statement of consent

### Personal Statement of Consent

This signed document acknowledges that my mother Gloria Reihana-Clarke has spoken about me in her Master of Sport & Leisure Studies thesis. I have read the pages where I am mentioned and she has explained to me that my incarceration was what moved her to research this particular topic, and, that this project is not about me personally, but five other young men.

I sign this consent form understanding that my name will not appear in her final report and that if I have any complaints or concerns I know that I can contact the project supervisor, Dr. Clive Pope, at the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies, University of Waikato (ph. 8384466).

*Sign* \_\_\_\_\_

*Date* \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 3: Letter of introduction

*[salutation]*

My name is Gloria Reihana and I am currently working on my Master of Sport and Leisure Studies thesis at the University of Waikato. I am sending you this letter because you have indicated that you have an interest in being a research participant.

My research project explores sport and deviant behaviour. Specifically, I will be looking at why young men who once enjoyed playing sport - stop, and how this might relate to deviant behaviour.

To participate, it is important that you meet all the following criteria:

- Aged between 18 and 25 years old
- Participated in regular sport in your teenage years
- Stopped playing regular or competitive sport
- Have appeared before a court judge at some point
- Live in the Hamilton area.

If you do meet the criteria, I invite you to read the following information and the consent form.

Participants will be:

- Interviewed two to three times, during November 2010
- Asked to supply basic demographic information (e.g. age, education, family)
- Asked to talk about their sporting experiences
- Asked to talk about their 'getting into trouble' with the law
- Given a koha for their time.

The project consent form (attached) provides you with more details to consider. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I will telephone you in 7 days to see that you have received this letter, whether you are interested in participating, and to answer any questions you may have.



## Appendix 4: Consent form

[salutation]

Thank you for considering participating in my Masters research project. Please read this consent form, and if you agree to all the points, sign it. If you don't agree to any/some of the points, we can talk about your concerns.

### Statement of Consent

- 1) I understand what this research project is about and the details of the study have been explained to me. I will be consulted should there be any change to the information provided.
- 2) I agree to provide information for the research project on the understanding that my name will not appear in the final report, and that I can not be identified in any other way (e.g. people, places and events that I talk about).
- 3) I agree to my interviews being digitally recorded and understand that the contents of each interview will not be used until I have had an opportunity to read and approve them. I also understand that I will be able to alter, delete or expand on them.
- 4) I understand that the research findings may also be used for future developments in sport and youth issues through conference presentations or publications.
- 5) I understand that once the thesis has been marked, that I will be given a copy of all my interview notes and recordings, and that the researcher's recordings will be destroyed.
- 6) I understand that once I have approved each set of transcriptions that they will belong to the researcher and The University of Waikato.
- 7) Should I have any complaints or concerns I know that I can contact the project supervisor, Dr. Clive Pope, at the Department of Sport and Leisure Studies, University of Waikato (ph. 8384466)

I agree:

- That I meet the research criteria set out in the project *Letter of Introduction*.
- That my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

- To participate and supply information to Gloria Reihana under the conditions set out above.

*Name* \_\_\_\_\_ *Sign* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date* \_\_\_\_\_

My contact details are: *(tick the one that is the best way, for me to contact you)*

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 5: Approved interview guide

### **Interview One/Part One: *Mapping the environment***

The first interview will focus on gathering background information for each subject. This will provide data that I can use to initiate more meaningful discussions relevant to the research topic. This interview sets the scene and names the key people involved in their lives. The first set of questions will provide me with:

- A list of places/locations they have lived.
- A list of the schools they have attended.
- The basic details of the people in their immediate family circle.

The second set of questions will focus on who they are now, such as:

- Where do they live and who with.
- What they do with their day (e.g. education, sport, hobbies)
- Who are their friends/mates (core group).
- Who are their peripheral groups (e.g. family, other friends)
- Who are their significant others (e.g. coaches, girlfriend, mentor)

The discussion will ascertain how their core groups were established (e.g. sport, school, family), and will map the shifts/changes of this group (i.e. the members who exit and enter the group). The discussion will then explore what the shifts were related to (e.g. sport, crime, moving towns, the influence of significant others etc.).

### **Interview One/Part Two: *Focus on sport***

The second part of the interview will focus on sport participation: To determine who influenced their (past) sport participation, and how they felt/feel about sport.

This will include asking:

- What sports did/do you play and for how long?
- How did you get involved?
- What role did (core group member) have on your sport and leisure experiences?
- Who was most influential in your sport participation?
- How did (core group member) leaving impact on your sport participation?
- What did your sport group think of, or treat, your core group?
- When and why did you stop playing these sports?

### **Interview 2: Deviance**

The second interview will focus on each subject's 'shady' activities. I will gather the details of their *first* criminal charge/court appearance.

- What were they charged with?
- What happened?
- What created the situation?
- What/Who influenced their decision to cross the line?

The following discussion will attempt to ascertain how this impacted on their sport participation and vice versa. I am particularly interested in knowing whether:

- One was at all related to the other, and
- was there an overlap or a clean break.

Following this, participants will be given transcripts of their data and will be invited to check the accuracy. They can add, amend or delete information. There will then be a break while I will take time to conduct an initial analysis.

### **Interview Three: Clarify and Elaborate**

During the third interview I will ask questions to fill any gaps in the data, to check my understanding of the information, to clarify points and themes, and collect additional data that will aid in the ongoing analysis. Again, the participants will be given the opportunity to check the final transcripts.

Appendix 6: Release form

*[salutation]*

Please find enclosed a copy of our recent interview transcript. I would be grateful if you could read it and make any comments, deletions, or changes that you feel are necessary. Feel free to write on the document.

Please be assured that the information shared in our interview will remain confidential. In the final report your anonymity will be protected by giving you a false name and that the events and people we have talked about, will not be written about in a way that they can be identified by the reader. It is my hope that my findings will help me know more about how young men experience sport and whether there is a relationship between sport and deviance.

Your contribution is appreciated. Please read the transcript, and if you agree that it is a true and accurate record of our discussion would you please sign below authorizing your release of the contents for this study. Should you have any concerns please note these or call me at [REDACTED] anytime.

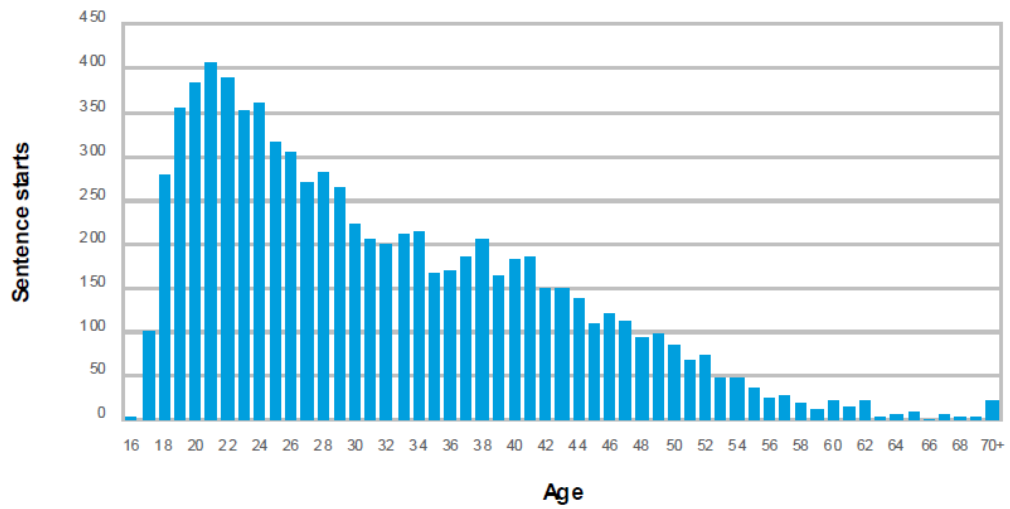
Sincerely,

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I have read the transcript and I approve of its release as long as my noted changes and additions are made first.

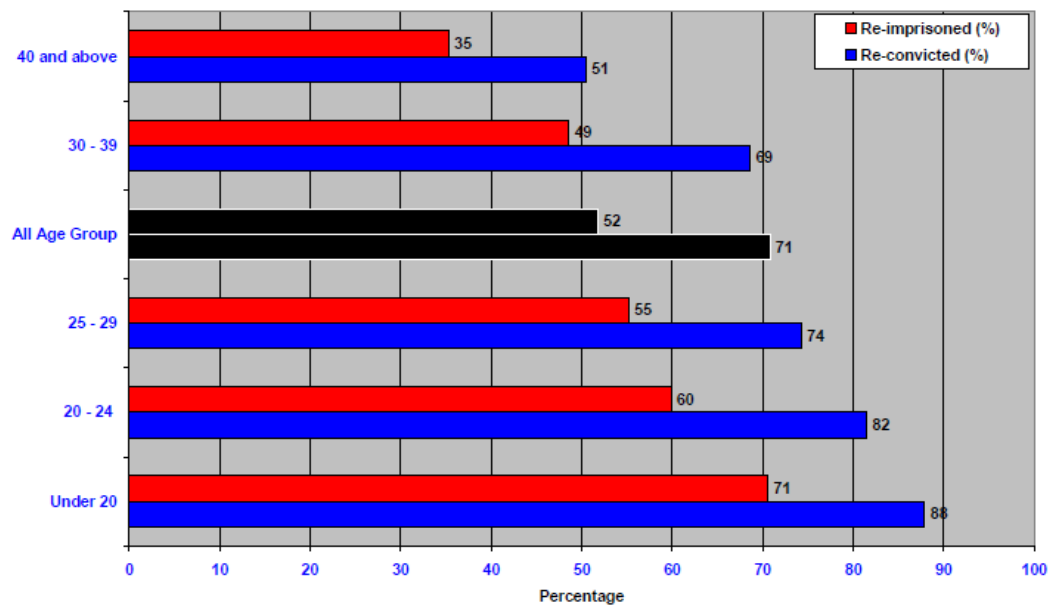
Name..... Signed ..... Date .....

Appendix 7: Age at reception to prison 2010/11



Source: Harpman, D. (2011). *Department of Corrections Offender Volumes Report 2011*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Department of Corrections. (p. 19)

## Appendix 8: Reconviction and reimprisonment rate by age at release



Source: Nadesu, A. (2009). *Reconviction patterns of released prisoners: A 60-months follow-up analysis*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Department of Corrections. (p. 7)