# *I9* and the Transformation of Youth Sport

In this article I present an analysis of how traditionally-run competitive, organized team sports reproduce multiple socio-negative effects for youth who play them. After explicating how the structure and culture of traditionally run competitive team sports operates in western cultures, I explain that cultural resistance toward changing sport is beginning to wane. I analyze a consumer-oriented neo-liberal approach to transforming these negative outcomes of youth sport through the creation of a new sporting organization, *i9* sports. I draw on this example to conclude that structural and cultural changes to youth sport are increasingly viable for at least middle and upper class parents who are critical of traditional sport options and to initiate a conversation about consumer-led social change initiatives in youth sport.

Keywords: Youth, Children, Sport, Transformation, Play

1

A prevalent perspective on competitive, organized team sports in western cultures maintains that they contribute to youth health and moral development. But Coakley (2011) suggests that those who espouse the goodness of sport generally promote this approach through anecdotal examples, rather than systematic observations and empirical scrutiny (see also Carlson, Scott, Planty and Thompson, 2005; Laurson and Eisenmann, 2007). The socio-positive message of sport is so predominant it is frequently taken for granted, even among scholars. Evidencing this, in the *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, Friedman (1998) reports that participation in sport not only contributes to psychological wellbeing but "also affects other areas of human development, including moral development, social development, and career development" (p. 585). This perspective is partially responsible for the development of elite level team sport athletes as role models, which Kraeger (2007) shows leave to elevated rates of masculine violence among younger athletes.

The consequences of this monolithic message are politically significant: principally, it is that public funds are diverted away from public health and education into sport (Kay & Bradbury, 2009). But the consequences also manifest among sports participants, in the rates of injury that make young athletes' visits to the emergency room medically costly (Abernethy & MacAuley, 2003). The result of this hegemonic 'sport as good' perspective for participation is that, in the United States alone, over 41 million girls and boys play organized team sports (Hyman, 2009). I have elsewhere argued (2010), that they do so mostly because they and their parents have been sheltered from critical narratives of the institution 2010), hearing instead only from those Giulianotti (2004) calls 'Sport Evangelists.'

There is, however, some research that claims to provide evidence of the socio-positive benefits of sport. For example, researchers find that the most salient benefits of organized sport participation are to be found in elevated self-esteem, better school attendance and

educational aspirations, higher rates of university attendance and perhaps even post-schooling

employment (Carlson et. al., 2005). These quantitative investigations are somewhat

misleading, however, as they fail to demonstrate that sport is a causative factor. It is unclear

from this research whether the benefits associated with sporting participation result from

something gained in sport, or if these benefits instead reflect the physical, symbolic, and

emotional dominance that a socially elite group of people exhibit over marginalized lesser-

than-athletes in youth culture.

In addition to this inconclusiveness, studies that examine the socio-positive attributes

of team sports participation (Miller et. al., 2005) often examine variables that lend themselves

to quantifiable analysis, like disciplinary referrals; failing to examine the more important

socio-negative variables that are not easy to quantify, like the volitional and unintentional

damage inflicted upon those who do not fit the athletic mould, or the emotional and physical

damage that sport often brings to young bodies and developing identities (Kelly and

Waddington, 2006; Maffulli et al. 2010). These sport-supporting studies also fail to examine

the way sport is used to indoctrinate youth into a working-class ethic of hard work, sacrifice,

and stoicism that benefits corporations, religion and the military (Savage, 2007).

The negative social effects of youth sporting participation are not inevitable, however.

Instead, they result both from a culture obsessed with winning, alongside more embedded

structural sporting practices. In this article, I argue that in order to change the culture of sport,

we must not only address the attitudes of parents and coaches, but we must also reconsider

the structure within which we play these sports—not necessarily the rules of the games

themselves (although sometimes this is required to remove violence), but the way we

organize, control, and determine who plays, and when. To explicate my argument, I first

highlight six areas where the traditional structure of youth team sports participation promotes

a culture of social exclusion and broader socio-negative outcomes. I then discuss the structural changes made by one American youth sporting organization, *i9 Sports*, as an example of an organization likely to deliver produce more socio-positive outcomes within the context of market-driven change.

## Socio-Negative Outcomes of Sporting Participation

1) *Sport and the Reproduction of Patriarchy*

Men and women occupy separate spaces in the sporting world. Few other contemporary western institutions naturalize the segregation of men and women so near perfectly as team sports (Hargreaves, 2002). This is justified through notions about boys' athletic advantage over girls (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008; Sykes 2006), as well as by the argument that females need or want protection from male violence (Kreager, 2007). Indeed, it is argued that female-only sport also empowers girls and women by promoting skill development and solidarity in a setting free from intimidation and harassment (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2008). Accordingly, Messner describes sport's sex segregated nature as being "grounded in a mutually agreed-upon notion of boys' and girls' 'separate worlds'" (2002: 12). Fielding-Lloyd and Meân suggest that separatist policies, "can hinder gender equity as they re/produce separatism (2008: 37). The privilege men maintain from segregated-sport extends far beyond the institution of sport (Travers, 2008).

When boys are socialized into sport for the perceived 'character building' benefits, the aforementioned working-class ethic of hard work, sacrifice, and stoicism, they also construct a language specific to sport; language that earns them human capital that is inaccessible to girls (McDonagh and Pappano, 2008). In team sports, boys and men learn to bond, relate to each other and to work and solve problems in specific ways, all without the presence of girls and/or women. Women therefore have a harder time acquiring the cultural

4

codes and behavioral conduct deemed necessary to impress masculine gatekeepers in other social institutions dominated by men (Cunningham, 2008).

In the gender-segregated arena of sport, men are not introduced to the sexual/gendered narratives of women; nor do they experience women's physical and intellectual skills. Instead, in the homosocial world of men's team sports, males are socialized into an ethos in which women are devalued as athletes and leaders and often heterosexualized in hateful ways. I have previously shown (2008) that bereft of alternative gender narratives, the hegemonic form of masculinity in team sports remains predicated in anti-feminine and sexist thinking Without having women as teammates, men are denied opportunities to see them as capable athletes and potential leaders and are immersed in a culture that denies women power in negotiating sex and relationships.

2) *Team sports and the Reproduction of Classism*

The meritocratic belief systems of most neo-liberal western societies is a common sense assumption that the harder one works, the more successful one will be. Applied to sport, the belief is that those who succeed have done so on account of their own effort. The emergence of modern sport is entangled with that of capitalism, imperial expansion and liberal democratic ideology and its mythical power reflects this entanglement (Carter, 2008). Modern sport trumpets the capitalist possibility of easy mobility from 'rags to riches,' promising that anyone can become successful or rich—in this case via a career as a professional athlete – if s/he simply labors (practices) hard enough. Clearly, however, success in sport – as in other dimensions of social life – is not the product of effort alone. Access to quality training and expensive sports are limited according to class and talent - and sheer luck counts, too. Accordingly, despite the efforts of a class of underprivileged youth to earn a university scholarship, or secure a professional playing contract, only a few

5

This is the accepted version of:
Anderson, E. (2013). i9 and the Transformation of Youth Sport. Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 37(1), 97–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723512455925

sportsmen/women out of a few hundred thousand will manage to escape poverty via this form of social mobility (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell and Sabo, 2005). This has not, however, stopped disenfranchised youth from seeking social mobility through sport, often at a cost to educational attainment with its higher odds of success (Hoberman, 1997).

I have elsewhere argued (2010) that this blindness to the odds is produced by a narrowing of one's internal and external master identity while progressing through sporting hierarchies. Overly-emphasizing winning elevates the emotional experience of sport, and this has a latent effect on early sporting success: when a youth wins at sport, it brings individual praise and social capital which encourages further sporting pursuit. Role specialization then trains the young athlete to focus not only on a specific sport, but upon a specific sporting position—with the goal of making him/her the best at a particular position in that particular sport/event. S/he begins to view a sporting career as a viable opportunity, even if aware that hundreds of thousands of other youth are doing the same.

With exceedingly few professional career opportunities in sport, these youth are channeled into pursuing a career path with a dramatically decreasing opportunity structure. While this has less impact on youth with higher socioeconomic status, it can have dire consequences for those enduring economic deprivation (Eitzen, 2003). Hundreds of thousands of socioeconomically marginalized youth are misled into narrowing their identities and over-dedicating themselves to sport. Rather than using sport as a recreational pursuit, it is instead viewed as an instrument for social mobility. This collective belief further disadvantages those already economically marginalized. It promotes a focus on sport for social mobility instead of education (Hoberman. 1997).

3) *Othering*

The playing structure of competitive, organized team sports normally clusters youth into consistent groups for long seasons of play. Yet rather than the collective enjoyment of the specific sport generating inter-group cohesion, athletes are taught to view the opposing team as the 'enemy' and to regard individuals from other teams as adversaries (Miracle and Reese, 1994). Some coaches actively create faults in the opposing team even if they do not exist, as this is believed to inspire performance from one's teammates. Through this process, youth are taught to judge, criticize, and out-group those from other affiliations. Essentially, we teach tribal ethnocentrism through use sport. When this tribalism is exacerbated by racial, ethnic and class differences across teams, competitive organized sport serves to entrench racial and class division.

4) *Masculinity Hierarchies*

Even though athleticism has little practical value in modern western societies, team sports participation remains an apparatus for social stratification among school-aged boys (Adams, 2011). In American schools, for example, (where competitive sport is combined with public education), the most athletic boys gain social prestige and marginalize less able boys. The least athletic are positioned as unmasculine or, 'worse', gay. Homophobia has measurable costs for students in school systems, particularly concerning bullying (Rivers, 2011).

I have previously shown with my work on closeted gay male athletes (2005) that among the social privileges obtained by boys earning high masculine capital, there is near-total immunity from homosexual suspicion. This effect is largely a product of the association between athleticism and heterosexual masculinity. The better the athlete is—and the more masculine the sport he plays—the less homosexual suspicion there is about him (Adams, 2011). Consequently, American football players are protected from homosexual suspicion in a way that musicians and actors are not.

5) *Sport and Over-Adherence to Authority*

The widespread belief in the socio-positive attributes of team sports provides undue power for those advocating them (Coakley, 2011). In sport, athletes are made docile to a coach's power and authority. I have suggested (2010) that this occurs for several reasons (including the lack of professional training, peer monitoring, or formal evaluation), but a coach's power is also enhanced via cultural narratives of the coach as mentor, and the decreasing opportunity structure upon which sport operates. These variables influence youth to suppress their agency, so that they might impress their coach in order to earn playing time and/or make the next level of play.

Coaches use power by offering players social promotions, more playing time, or public praise. Coaches also use their power in punishing athletes with the opposite. Children, desiring to excel in their chosen endeavor, normally look to the coach as a mentor, sometimes even a parental substitute. This gives coaches undue power in helping them achieve *their* adult goals of victory, simultaneously setting the stage for coaches to abuse this power. Measurable abuse comes in many forms, including influencing youth to learn to accept and inflict violence and injury (Gervis and Dunn, 2004) and sometimes sexual abuse (Kirby and Wintrup, 2002).

6) *Accepting and Inflicting Violence and Injury in Sport*

Traditionally-run competitive team sports programs institutionalize, sanction, and normalize violence against others as a necessary component of winning. Here, violence is naturalized as normal, even necessary (Adams, 2011). The structure of competitive sport therefore teaches youth that committing violence against oneself and others is not only permissible, but expected. And because violence is naturalized as unproblematic in team

sports, youth are also taught to be receptive victims of violence (Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010).

Coaches exploit their athletes' fears of emasculation (for boys) and over-dedication to the system by pushing them too far and by knowingly having them play with injuries. Sacrifice becomes part of the game (Adams, 2011). Athletes, particularly those with low self-esteem or poor social support networks, are willing to risk their health because they are so eager to be accepted by the team and their peers. Finally, the structure of many team sports leads to bodily injury. This is certainly the case with contact sports, like American football. Highlighting this, in the United States, sports injuries account for just over half of all reported injuries among secondary school children, causing significant disruption to school and sport and have important implications for the wider family (Abernethy & MacAuley, 2003).

Collectively, the pressure to make a team, train through pain, accept pain as part of the game, and use one's body against another for the sake of victory, makes some sports very violent social activities. Despite social (Hyman, 2009) and academic (Kreager, 2007) recognition of this violence, however, structural, or even cultural, changes to sport have been slow to materialize. Sport has largely retained its exclusive and violent structures and culture, regardless of the particular western culture it is played in. Sport's structures have remained stable because they are highly associated with masculinity-making and the maintenance of western hierarchies of wealth, status and power. These are often masked as 'tradition' in order to justify resistance to change.

### Theorizing Resilience to Change

Sport sociologists critical of mainstream sports have long advocated for structural and cultural changes to sport (Miracle and Rees, 1994), and continue this call today (Travers, 2008). Kian and I have argued (Anderson and Kian, 2012) that the gatekeepers of sport have

traditionally resisted calls for change for a variety of reasons. Principal among them is that changing sport to make it more inclusive and less physically damaging is seen as a feminine/weak proposition that runs counter to the historical foundation of competitive team sports (Hyman, 2009). After all, team sports were initially institutionalized to make boys harder, tougher, and less sensitive (Adams, 2011); changing sport's structure contests the fundamental masculinity-making, heterosexualizing utility of sport.

When it comes to resisting or changing sport, however, it is corporate interests that have the most power. While the governing bodies of sport are normally reluctant to change sporting structures/rules in order to promote a sense of history—which helps maintain fandom—they oftentimes find the need to change sport. This necessity is borne out of either an attempt to change the culture of sport in order to keep pace with cultural determinants of entertainment more broadly, or to ward off law suits. In the first, a number of United States sports have changed the rules of their games in order to improve the speed, or scoring of a game in attempt to maintain fans. Basketball has, for example, included a three point line and a shot clock, and even baseball has implemented rules against stalling between pitches. The National Football League has several times changed the rules about tackling in the game, and the increased use of safety equipment – helmets grew even larger last season – as a way of warding off injuries and their potential for accompanying lawsuits (Anderson and Kian, 2012).

But sport is not immune from cultural pressure. I have elsewhere (2009) argued that as young men's masculinity grows more inclusive and embraces cultural practices and codes once associated with homosexuality and/or femininity, organized sport will either have to change its culture or risk being seen as archaic (McCormack and Anderson, 2010). My thesis is that sport structures and culture are becoming amenable to change as we are less culturally

concerned with masculinity-making. I offer here an example of a consumer/market-driven, corporate model of change for child and youth sport in America. This is reflected in the formation of a new corporate sporting franchise, *i9 Sports*. This American organization reflects a growing movement of parents less concerned with masculinity-making and more determined to find a healthier and more enjoyable sporting experience for their children.

In order to analyze this franchise I began by scrutinizing their website (*i9*sports.com), where the organization' nine pillars of virtue are listed (the reason for the name *i9*). I next analyzed media accounts of the organization through interviews with children who play, and internet media on the franchise. Here I coded for dominant themes. I next interviewed the organization's CEO. It was my methodological intent to understand the corporation's mission and stated values, not to measure their success in achieving those outcomes, although such research is very much required. This franchise provides an interesting example of an alternative child and youth sport consumption model operating within a neoliberal corporate context.

### *I9 Sport*

Founded in 2003, *i9 Sport* is an American corporate franchise with its head office located in Florida that claims to be dedicated to improving the socio-positive outcomes of youth sport. The organization promises a different sporting experience for children and youth through the following structural and cultural changes: 1) revising how coaches are recruited and trained to eliminate competitiveness; 2) removing body contact; 3) gender-integrating sport; 4) learning to play multiple positions within the same sport; 5) decreasing over-conformity through a policy of permitting all participants to play all positions; 6) removing uniforms modeled on those of professional franchises; 7) placing all parents on one side of

11

the field and encouraging them to cheer for all youth; 8) Removing playoffs and championships; and 9) disentangling the relationship between sport and the child's school.

*i9 Sport* exists as a for-profit business with 120 franchises that serve 350,000 boys and girls in America, aged 3-14. Each franchise costs $40,000 to $80,000 and the owner of each franchise profits from finding parents to volunteer to coach (*i9* pays for their training), and also by charging parents a fee of $99 to $135 (per child) to participate in an eight to ten week sport league. There are no try-outs – every kid whose parent signs them up and pays the fee makes the team. And because parents pay for their kids to play, they are not asked to partake in fundraisers or to provide any other service, as is traditionally the case in mainstream children's sporting leagues in the United States.

In addition to adding this corporate, pay-and-play regardless of ability model, *i9* makes a number of other changes. The most significant concerns gender integration. Because *i9 Sports* participation is limited to those 14 and under, where gender/ability differences are less pronounced if they exist in average terms at all (Sykes, 2006), most (but not all) of their franchisees are gender-integrated. *i9* also makes American football easier to gender-integrate because the organization offers only flag- American football, requiring no body contact.

The seasons of play in *i9* are relatively short and there are few practice sessions. While scores for each game are kept, there are also no championship series or playoffs. Rosters are rotated more frequently this way. Essentially, most youth will be with their team only a dozen or so times before the season of play ends; at which time they can join another sport, or if choosing the same sport again, will find themselves with new teammates as the rosters of the teams are shifted. Also, for most *i9* teams, players are rotated evenly across the roles. This means that all kids (male or female) will play goalie in soccer or quarterback in

American football regardless of ability and regardless of whether a team needs a 'star' player in such a crucial role to secure a victory.

All parents enrolling their children in one of the many *i9* sessions are aware of the ethos of sporting participation for fun, signing a pledge (available at *i9*sports.com) saying that the most important element of sport is having fun, regardless of what happens in the game. Parents pledge to refrain from using derogatory language and to encourage all children in the game. Coaches also take pledges. Their instruction includes not placing a victory over the well-being of an athlete; making a 'big deal' out of a child's improvement (however small) and remaining positive when losing. Other coaching requisites include instructing their athletes for a few minutes before each competition with a weekly value: staying positive, helping a friend, etc. Coaches are encouraged to call the league official if any problems or difficulties occur with a child or parent.

**Analyzing *I9 Sport***

1) *The Privatization of Sport*

The founding principle behind *i9* sport is that youth sport normally places too much emphasis on winning, which reduces sporting character and promotes role specialization (Miracle and Rees, 1994), ultimately causing various forms of harm to youth who play them (Hyman, 2009). *i9* represents a consumer/market-driven approach, creating a pay-for-play, corporate franchise structure to sport. The fee (inclusive of jersey, participation medal, and trained officials), mostly goes to the franchise operator, with a portion to the central administration. Barry Sanders, *i9* CEO, argues that the franchise structure provides an added layer of accountability in maintaining the stated objective of promoting fun over victory. Unlike a privately owned sporting league without franchises, or a government sponsored

13

youth sporting league, the corporation can unlicense a franchise for violations of their rules. This business model, Sanders contends, demands customer satisfaction.

Such a consumer/market-driven model of sport, does, of course, raise important questions about access to sport; questions similar to that relating to the privatization of education (see, for example, Tozer, et al, 2010). I acknowledge both the problematic and the interesting dimensions of this model. It is problematic because it is elitist, and interesting because it is a potential example of the abilities of consumers to initiate social change. Further research on the potential impact of middle and upper class parents opting out of traditional child and youth sport activities is warranted. After all, as Connell (2009) observes, the main recruits of professional sport and other occupations that require the use of force are working-class boys. With the recent and highly public concern over concussions in sport, it seems possible that middle and upper class families may seek to preserve their children's greater access to 'brain' over 'brawn' jobs through the sourcing of safer sporting opportunities. This line of inquiry, however, is largely out of scope of this particular article.

*2) Promoting Gender Equality*

With the exception of some of its flag football teams, *i9* gender integrates all of their sports. As McDonagh and Pappano (2008), have suggested, once boys and girls play on the same teams, they must work together for the outcome of a common goal. Supporting this supposition, my research on the sport of university co-educational cheerleading (2008) shows that when men must rely on women for athletic success, they learn to see women as competent leaders, able athletes, and worthy friends. *i9* also promotes gender equality through their policy of inclusive play. Despite the gender composition of a team, no boy or girl is ever cut from play for any reason apart from unsportspersonlike conduct.

*3) Reducing Over-Adherence to Authority*

14

*i9* sport makes several structural changes to their training and competition that should help eradicate several other negative aspects of traditionally run sport. First, the prevention of the development of a master identity as that of an athlete is facilitated by redesigning training and competition sessions. Children are not encouraged into over conformity the way Hughes and Coakley (1991) famously describe sport traditionally doing, because most teams have only one practice a week (which occurs before the weekly competition). If a coach chooses to hold practice on a weekday, attendance cannot be used against a child in the awarding of playing time (or position) that is given during the game. Furthermore, all children receive equal playing time, regardless of practice attendance or ability. This, combined with no identification of (and therefore no awards for) most valuable players, means that youth are not under pressure to attend practices so that adult coaches can develop their egos through winning. It removes some of the incentive for coaches to pressure their athletes into training harder. This might prevent sporting excellence from being recognized, but it is conducive to the ethos of playing for fun as opposed to playing for talent identification.

Also, in *i9* sport, there is frequent, compulsory, rotation of players in positions. This lack of role specialization should also deter the development of one's master identity as an athlete, as they never play one sport, or position, long enough to pursue it more fervently. Consequently, this should help prevent tracking them into sport over academics as a vessel for social mobility (Carlson, Scott, Plany and Thompson, 2005). This structural system also distributes role strain associated with positions central to the outcome of a game, and should reduce pressure on kids to perform (Hyman, 2009).

*4)  From Out-group to In-group*

Policies requiring inclusivity of all children (regardless of gender, ability, sexual orientation, or race) are in place with *i9* sport. That sexual orientation is included on the list

15

of inappropriate criteria for discrimination is particularly progressive for a youth sporting organization. While there is no explicit policy for transgender-identified or gender variant children, the gender integrated structure makes this less salient. The inclusion of all children who can pay makes sense given the corporate model but it is promising nonetheless that an anti-homophobia criterion 'made the cut. '

Team sports are also made more enjoyable for *i9* children and youth because they are permitted to sign up for a team with a friend. The frequent rotation of team rosters should theoretically reduce othering of other teams (as within a few weeks the members of those teams will be on one's own). Sanders claims that this is an intentional design to prevent perennial teams from dominating competition. Combined with short seasons and no championship matches, this reduces pressure on both the kids and the coaches to win. This structural change should positively influence the culture of participation over victory and inter- and intra backspace-group cooperation over the politics of othering.

Finally, because coaches, children and parents are not permitted to make derogatory comments about the members of another team, and because parents must cheer on the performances of all kids (whether on their own team or that of the team they are competing against), the development of hatred toward members of another team is structurally and culturally minimized.

### 5) *Promoting Inclusive Masculinities*

As a product of both the structural (gender integration and roster rotation) and cultural (valuing health instead of over-conformity) changes to sport in this organization, it is likely that more inclusive aspects of masculinity are promoted, compared to traditional sport. That is to say that *i9* sport does not require athletes to be tough, willing to sacrifice, or inflict injury upon another player in order to match the ethos of traditional sports (Morrison &

16

Casper, 2012; Messner et al, 2000). I have previously suggested (2009) that policies of acceptance of homosexuality promote sexual minority equality while simultaneously reducing the need for hyper-masculinity among youth which traditionally serves as a way to highlight one's heterosexuality through homophobia.

Also, with so few practices/games, youth do not have enough time to develop enduring intra-masculine stratifications. Social cohesion is further enforced by holding a 'jamboree day' at each season's start. Here, youth meet each other from all the teams, developing friendships with those that they will soon compete alongside.

*6) Promoting Health over Victory*

*i9* sport appears to take the mental and physical health of their children seriously in promoting a culture of fun and nurturance. If, for example, a parent yells at a child or even fails to cheer other children on (other than one's own children), coaches and referees are trained to intervene. If a parent repeats the violation, they are escorted from the field.

Should a parent complain to the *i9* corporation that matters are straying from the ethos of fun over competition; the corporation will deploy a compliance officer to ensure that the standards of a fun and inclusive culture are being upheld. If the compliance officer finds that children are being excluded, bullied, or that derogatory comments are being made (including against gay or lesbian youth) the franchise is put on notice that they have thirty days to rectify the situation, before losing their franchise license.

*I9* also benefits from being a new sporting organization. The organization is not imbued with 'tradition and history' and this permits the organization to make appropriate changes to their sports. For example, *i9* sport removes tackling from football (which should help reduce the violence associated with the sport).

*I9's* flexibility was demonstrated when I shared with Sanders research about concussion frequency in soccer. When learning of the danger, he immediately banned heading in all their franchises and added a concussion policy and education program to their franchises. The policy is: 'when it doubt, sit it out,' and it requires a doctor's approval before a child can return to sport. This change did not require committees; nor was it slowed by traditionalists of the sport. Thus, this example shows that a progressive structural change can be made when a sport-provider puts children's health, before tradition. This change was likely fiscally responsible for the organization, too. *I9* has found a customer market interested in shifting the balance in favor of healthier, pro-social forms of recreational activity for children.

## Conclusion

The primary purpose of this article has been to critically examine the structure of children's and youth sport in western cultures, and to highlight six ways in which sport reproduces a great deal of social harm. Because sport is valued for its ritual and traditions, changing the rules and structures of competitive, organized sport has been difficult. I argue, however, that as orthodox notions of masculinity are increasingly less valued in Anglo-American cultures—oftentimes even stigmatized demands for alternative models in the emergence of consumer choice will play a role in changing the structure of child- and youth-centred sport. The emergence of *i9* may indeed be evidence of this.

While the ability for parents to purchase a better sporting experience for their children is a decidedly middle and upper-class solution to the problems that plague youth sport, the elements of play which this corporation have developed *are* consistent with I (2010) and other sport sociologists have been calling for (Coakley, 2004: McDonagh and Pappano, 2008; Travers,2008). I desire to be clear: this article *does not* serve as empirical proof that the *i9*

18

recipe delivers on its mission of generating safe and inclusive fun: the organization should also be examined for its stated outcomes (including whether girls have the same quality experience as boys).  Ostensibly, however, the *i9* model of sport seems to be one that all child and youth sports organizations would benefit from.

Above all, *i9* sport is a business; but it is a business that has grown out of consumer demand for a more inclusive, healthier, and more enjoyable youth sporting experience. While competitive organized sport is often thrust upon children and youth (such as in compulsory physical education in many nations) it is important to recognize that children and youth have agency in constructing and resisting sport's dominant themes (Rinehart, 1998). Accordingly, I argue that *i9* exists for three reasons. First, I have shown (2009) through extensive qualitative and quantitative research that masculinity is losing its orthodox prescription among youth in Anglo-American cultures. This means that the traditional operation of sport is no longer required to make boys into macho, homophobic, sexist, violent, and risk-taking men. Second, a growing number of parents are looking for a more inclusive and enjoyable sporting experience for their children. And finally, there may be merit to Sanders' corporate model with sport as a franchise. When head office 'calls the shots', the virtues of the central organization are maintained from the top down. This tension between corporate hierarchy and sporting inclusion is an interesting one, begging further investigation.

So while a pay for play system of sport is problematic in terms of economic exclusion, for those who can pay to play, they are guaranteed to make the team. And, when hitting, tackling or using your head as a battering ram are structurally removed from the game; when parents are encouraged to cheer for all children; when homophobic, violent, or sexist language is prohibited; and when an organization's livelihood is dependent upon

removing anyone who does not adhere to this policy, there may be more incentive to carry-through with a mission statement of promoting character over the development of characters.

Finally, it is possible that this alternate (and relatively elite) model of child and youth sport may contribute to structural and cultural changes to child and youth sport more broadly. It is likely that as parents emerge from their childhoods with more inclusive and positive attitudes and values of sport, they will enroll their children in these types of sport organizations and fewer and fewer will subscribe to traditional, socio-negative sporting experiences in organizations. The more children who play sport under this ethos the more culturally acceptable it becomes for others to adopt this perspective as well.

# References

Abernethy, L. & MacAuley, D. (2003). Impact of School Sports Injury. *British Journal of Sports Medicine,* 37: 354-355.

Adams, A. (2011). "Josh wears pink cleats:" Inclusive Masculinity on the Soccer Field. *Journal of Homosexuality,* 579-596.

Anderson, E. (2010). *Sport, theory, and social problems: A critical introduction.* New York: Routledge.

Anderson, E. (2008). 'I used to think women were weak:' Orthodox Masculinity, Gender-Segregation and Sport. *Sociological Forum*, (23)2: 257-280.

Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. London: Routledge.

Anderson, E. (2008). "Being masculine is not about who you sleep with...": Heterosexual athletes contesting masculinity and the one-time rule of homosexuality *Sex Roles,*(1-2), 104-115.

Anderson, Eric & Kian, T. Contesting Violence, Masculinity, and Head Trauma in the National Football League. Men and Masculinities, 15(2): 152-173.

Carlson, D., Scott, L., Planty, M. & Thompson, J. (2005). *What is the status of high school athletes 8 years after graduation?* Report released by the National Center for Educational Statistics, United States Department of Education.

Carter, Thomas. (2008). The Quality of Homeruns: the Passion, Politics, and Language of Cuban Baseball. Durham and London: Duke University press.

Coakley, J. (2004). *Sport in society: Issues and controversies* (7th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Coakely, J. (2011). "Youth Sports : What Counts as "Positive Development?" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues,* 35(3): 306-324

Cunningham, G.B. (2008). Creating and sustaining gender diversity in sport organizations. *Sex Roles, 58,*136-145.

Eitzen, S. (2003). *Fair and Foul: Beyond the myths and paradoxes of sport.* New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Fielding-Lloyd, B. & Meân, L.J. (2008). Standards and separatism: The discursive construction of gender in English soccer coach education. *Sex Roles, 58*, 24-39.

Gervis, M. & Dunn, N. (2004). The emotional abuse of elite child athletes by their coaches. *Child Abuse Review,* 13(3), 215-223.

Giulianotti, R. (2004). Human rights, globalization and sentimental education: The case of sport. Sport in Society, 7, 355-369.

Hoberman, J. (1997). *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Hughes, R. & Coakley, J. (1991). Positive deviance among athletes: The implications of overconformity to the sport ethic. *Sociology of Sport Journal,* 8, 307-325.

Hyman, M. (2009). *Until it hurts: America's obsession with youth sports and how it hurts our kids*. New York: Beacon Press.

Kay, T., & Bradbury, S. (2009). Youth sport volunteering: Developing social capital? Sport, Education and Society, 14, 121-140

Kelly, S. And Waddington, I. (2006). Abuse, intimidation and violence as aspects of

    managerial control in professional football in Britain and Ireland. *International*

    *Review for the Sociology of Sport,* 41, 147-164.

Kirby, S.L. & Wintrup, G. (2002). Running the gauntlet: An examination of initiation/hazing

    and sexual abuse in sport. *Journal of Sexual Aggression, 8*(2), 49-68.

Kreager, D. (2007). Unnecessary roughness? School sports, peer networks, and male

    adolescent violence. *American Sociological Review, 72*, 705-724.

Laurson, K.R. & Eisenmann, J.C. (2007). Prevalence of overweight among high school

    football lineman. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 297, 363-364.

Maffull, N., Giuseppe, L., Gougoulias, N.,  Caine, D., and Vincenzo Denaro. (2010). *British*

    *Medical Bulletin* 1(97): 47–80.

McCormack, M. (2012). *The Declining Significance of Homophobia: How Teenage Boys are*

    *Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality.* New York: Oxford University Press.

McDonagh, E. & Pappano, L. (2008). *Playing with the boys: Why separate is not equal in*

    *sports*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Messner, M. et al (2000). "The Televised Sports Manhood Formula," in Journal of Sport and

    Social Issues, 24 (380).

Messner, M. (2002). *Taking the field: Women, men and sports.* Minneapolis: University of

    Minnesota Press.

Miller, K., Melnick, M., Barnes, G., Farrell, M., & Sabo, D. (2005). Disentangling the links among athletic involvement, gender, race, and adolescent academic outcomes. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 22*(2), 178–193.

Miracle, A.W. & Rees, C.R. (1994). *Lessons of the locker room: The myth of school sports.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Morrison, D.R. and M.J. Casper (2012). "When Injured Brains Speak," *the feminist wire*, http://the feministwire.com/2012/05/when-injured-brains-speak, May 12.

Rinehart, R. E. (1998). *Players all: Performances in contemporary sport.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Rivers, I. (2011). *Homophobic Bullying: Research and Theoretical Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Savage, J. (2007). Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture. New York: Penguin.

Sykes, H. (2006). Transexual and Transgender Policies in Sport. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal,* 15(1): 3- 13.

Travers, A. (2008). The Sport Nexus and Gender Injustice. *Studies of Social Justice*, 2(1): 79-101.