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PARENTS' DISCURSIVE ACCOUNTS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY LEAGUE

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Science (Social Science)

Thesis submitted by

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Abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Applied Science (Social Science).

Parents' discursive accounts of their children's participation in rugby league

By Megan Apse

In Aotearoa New Zealand, sport is highly valued as a means by which children can access health and wellbeing benefits, and parents have a range of options when considering sport and physical activities for children. This thesis uses the voices of parents whose young children participate in rugby league to explore their views on the sport, and their accounts of how it benefits children. The aim of the research was, through discursive psychological analysis of accounts, to investigate the role of any societal discourses co-opted into those accounts, and the ways in which these featured in parents' discussion of their children and rugby league. Discursive devices used within parents' accounts were identified and analysed using the discursive action model (DAM) as a guide. This called attention to the precise ways in which words are used to actively construct versions of events as plausible and factual. Discursive psychology influences the methodological and analytic framework, which, alongside the DAM and reference to Foucauldian notions of discourse, provides focus at both a micro and at a macro level. Twenty-one parents of rugby league players/ex-players aged five to ten years were interviewed using conversational style semi-structured interviews. The interview data revealed that decisions around children's rugby league were justified with the recruitment of several prominent societal discourses, including those around the benefits of physical activity, responsible parenting discourses and masculinity discourses.

The ways in which parents talked about their young children's participation in rugby league revealed several aspects as significant. Specifically, that there is awareness that certain practices are considered good for children, that parenting is subject to both conflicting best practice advice and social judgement, and, that dilemmas arise when attempting to reconcile parenting preferences that differ from prevailing social norms.

Keywords: discourse, rugby league, children's sport, physical activity, discursive psychology, critical social psychology, Foucault.

Dedicated to Andrew Hensley, who helped and who cared.

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

In the context of sport as a “lens through which to view the world” (Ryan & Watson, 2018, p. 2) children’s rugby league (RL) provides a unique opportunity to examine prevailing social practices, attitudes, and values. Hence, the social practices of sport and parenting are central to this research, with discourse the chief method by which associated phenomenon are examined. This research focuses on discourses at the societal level about parenting and sport, with attention to how parent’s discourse at a micro level both locates them within, and reinforces these societal discourses. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 parents of young RL players. These data provide the basis for analysis.

Organised sport in Aotearoa New Zealand is a social practice afforded a high degree of cultural value (Ryan & Watson, 2018). Some sports, such as the nationally loved game of rugby union, are elevated to such heights that in the event of a loss on the world stage the country is said to be in collective mourning (Sydney Morning Herald, 2003, November 16). Participation in sport is viewed as a right of childhood, and those who participate are thought to benefit in a variety of ways. Even though there is widespread belief that sport provides the ideal opportunity for children to access health and wellbeing through physical activity (Hardy, Kelly, Chapman, King, & Farrell, 2010), scholars have noted that there is a lack of research on young children’s sport (Walters, Payne, Schluter, & Thomson, 2015).

Through analysis of the intricacies of discourse, it is possible to understand the ways in which various truths about the world are considered and constructed. The ways in which specific discourses are recruited, contested and generally navigated can reveal how accepted various practices are to members of social groups, and thus what is deemed ‘normal’.

1.1 Research aims

This research was borne of a personal interest in RL, a sport I am involved with because of children in my family who play, and my own previous role as a junior team manager. In addition, the local provincial RL body, Canterbury Rugby League (CRL), had an interest in how parents assessed the benefits of RL for their child(ren). It pleased me that the research might also have an immediate practical application and support the work of an organisation largely run by volunteers. To this end, I reported relevant findings of the research to the CRL board and club captains in early 2018, after which time my involvement with the organisation ended and I was able to examine the research data for research purposes.

This study examines parents' accounts of their young children's participation in RL in reference to societal discourses about both parenting, and sport and physical activity. The aim is to understand more about which social norms are operative, how these are reinforced or undermined through talk, and what this tells us about parenting and the role that children's sport plays for this group of people. Social psychological and sociological methods of enquiry are used together to understand associated phenomena and to accommodate discursive enquiry at both the micro and macro levels.

Examination of parents' discourse for what is considered 'normal' and how this is accounted for or defended, and how departures from normative behaviours are justified has the potential to make a valuable contribute to social scientific knowledge.

Several questions helped me focus on aspects and functions of discourses in this context.

i. What societal discourses are parents drawing on when talking about their children's participation in RL?
ii. How do specific discourses indicate social norms (i.e., what are considered normative sporting and parenting practices for this social group?).
iii. What truths about the world are parents constructing when they talk about children's participation in RL?

1.2 Thesis structure

The present chapter introduces the research topic and describes the aims and scope of the research.

Chapter Two provides background and contextual information about RL, including a brief history of RL and its place in Aotearoa New Zealand. Following this is a literature review of relevant societal discourses around sport, physical activity and parenting. Literature is from a wide variety of fields including sociology, social psychology, developmental and educational psychology, critical theory, and the medical sciences. Literature is critically examined from the perspective of its relevance to societal discourses and corresponding social norms around sport, physical activity, RL and parenting.

Chapter Three outlines the conceptual frameworks that underpin the research, analysis and reporting. Social constructionism orients the research towards the historically and culturally situated nature of social actions, including talk. The concept of discourse is defined, and discursive psychology (DP), the Discursive Action Model (DAM), as well as Foucauldian notions of discourse are described and placed in the context of this study.

Following this, Chapter Four presents the methods used in the research. Project design, data collection, analytic approach, and reporting are described to make clear all aspects of the research process. Because DP is considered both a methodology and a theoretical framework, and because both micro and macro approaches to discourse are used, this section also describes how the various aspects are used in combination and how this contributed to a thorough and robust research process.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven present results under the three following discursive themes: health and wellbeing, parental responsibility, and masculinity. Each theme includes analysis of interview extracts using DP and the DAM as a guide to explicate how parents' accounts are constructed to appear valid, neutral, and how they attend to various aspects, including accountability. Participant quotes are included, sometimes at length, to illustrate how the intricacies of talk relate to broad societal discourses.

The final substantive chapter, Chapter Eight, discusses the results. This chapter explores the significance of the results, and considers them in relation to theory. Discussion of the results marks a shift from focus on micro level discourse analysis to the macro, with Foucauldian and sociological notions of societal discourses brought to the fore.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis, giving a brief summary and discussion of the findings and their implications. I offer suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

2. Background and context

Parents involved with children's rugby league (RL) are engaging in a social practice. Sport for children is said to be valued by parents for the perceived benefits that it confers on their children, as well as fulfilment of certain societal expectations that children ought to be physically active through sport (Neely & Holt, 2014). However, sport also comes with risks. Parenting in post-industrial societies is beset with conflicting best practice advice, and as a social practice itself, is intertwined with issues of responsibility and blame (Gillingham & Bromfield, 2008; Mainland, Shaw, & Prier, 2016).

The first part of this chapter provides a brief overview of the history of RL its roots in northern England and its inception in Aotearoa New Zealand. The literature review that follows outlines the prevailing discourses around sport for children and around parenting best practices. Discourses were identified by searching scientific and social scientific literature for research on children, children's sport, and parenting in Western, post-industrial societies.

2.1 Rugby league

Rugby league originated in Britain and is marked by its roots as a 'northern' sport populated by working class players; it is a sport that today is still strongly associated with low socioeconomic status and class, for both players and followers (Coffey, 2013; Collins, 1998). The sport is physically demanding and is characterised, like its parent sport rugby union, by running, passing and tackling. RL developed in 1895 as a separate and distinct form of rugby in protest to the representative body for British rugby union barring the compensation of players for their time spent playing. Northern rugby players at this time were predominantly working class, and were financially disadvantaged by taking time off work to participate. This was in contrast to Southern players and officials who were predominantly the educated middle class and who had historically viewed rugby as a strictly amateur recreational activity for the promotion of health and vitality in boys and men (Collins, 1998). In the decades before the split of rugby into two branches, the sport was championed as a vigorous yet gentlemanly pursuit, and a vehicle for moral improvement. This was in part because its predominantly middle class players had moved away from physically taxing jobs to roles of a more sedentary nature and physical health and vigour were entering the collective consciousness as worthy of pursuit.

Once rugby's popularity had spread to the north, "working class cultural practices became part of the fabric of the sport" (Collins, 1998, p. xv) and a clash of values arose regarding how the game ought to be played. The 'great split' of rugby into two branches occurred in 1895 and eventually led to the formation of the Northern Union which, in 1922, formally named their sport 'rugby league'.

Aotearoa New Zealand's close ties with Britain at the turn of the 20th century meant that many sociocultural practices were transmitted from what was referred to as 'the motherland' to this country. Sport was no exception. Much as it had been viewed in Britain, RL arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand as a niche sport of and for the working class. Sociologist Mark Falcous suggests that Aotearoa New Zealand shared with northern Britain a "hostility to class privilege" (2007, p. 423) which enabled RL to take root here and thrive, despite rugby union being by far the dominant code. The first game played under what were then called Northern Union rules was in Wellington in 1908, and less than two years later a national governing body was formed. The amateurism/ professionalism debate still existed and, mirroring the situation in Britain, there was hostility to the game being played under Northern Union rules. The rugby union had a strong presence in Aotearoa New Zealand as well as strong ties with government agencies and local bodies such as management of the sports stadiums in the main centres. Between 1921 and 1989 the biggest sports stadiums in Auckland, Wellington Christchurch and Dunedin refused hosting rights to RL matches, frequently on the grounds of RL's professionalism (Coffey, 2013).

As in Britain, schools were the setting for much of the marginalisation that RL faced in Aotearoa New Zealand. There was little opportunity to play RL for schoolboys, and girls were not welcomed into the sport generally (Coffey, 2013). Sport historians Greg Ryan and Geoff Watson (2018) support this position, noting that in Aotearoa New Zealand the failure of RL to welcome female players can be attributed to historic views of women as frail and in need of protection from activities of a strenuous nature. Even today, girls' involvement at club level is restricted by a ban on mixed gender teams from the age of 13 years (Canterbury Rugby League, 2017).

Currently, RL in Aotearoa New Zealand is one of many sporting codes trying to attract and retain players. Although children's participation in scheduled activities is rising, participation in organised sport is in decline (Neely & Holt, 2014). Rugby league in Canterbury is no exception, with reductions in junior club level numbers consistently reported (Canterbury Rugby League, 2017). Children are significant to the sport at a club level as it is they who will go on to populate clubs into their teens and, ideally (for the clubs), adulthood. In spite of RL's increase in popularity (due in part to the development and successes of the New Zealand Warriors in the Australian national premiership), the marginalised status of RL in relation to rugby union marks it out as a practice of interest for sociological enquiry, and as a practice with its own set of distinct discourses. These, and other societal discourses related to sport and parenting, are discussed next.

2.2 Sport and parenting discourses

2.2.1 Rugby league discourses

Rugby league is positioned in sporting and national identity discourses as marginalised, and as a working class alternative to rugby union (Falcous, 2007; Haynes, 1996). Consequently, a dominant discourse associated with the sport is that RL is by and for groups of low socioeconomic status (Light, 2013). This sentiment is made explicit with the game often referred to as 'state house[1]' rugby, a direct reference to the socioeconomic status of its players and supporters (Smith, 2009). The association that RL has with lower socioeconomic groups has an influence on other discourses about RL, first, that of RL as a 'rough' sport. The view that RL is a rough sport is perhaps bolstered by the rules for the children's game which allow contact tackling from the earliest grades (ages 3 and up). This is distinct from rugby union whose rules indicate that young children play a non-collision version known as 'rippa' (where tags are worn at the waist, and chasers tear off a tag to indicate a tackle has occurred). Second, RL has an association with aggression of a more overt nature, by way of on- and off-field violence. This reputation is despite the sport taking action to eliminate the on-field violence that characterised adult participation in the sport in the 1970s and 1980s (particularly in Australia) (Hutchins & Mikosza, 1998). Third, in addition to player behaviour, unruly spectator behaviour at children's games is an issue that some RL clubs have addressed with the use of signage reminding spectators by numbered points that: "these are kids, this is a game, the coaches are volunteers, the referees are human" (Batten, 2016, 1 April). Such reminders are directed at tempering inappropriate or aggressive behaviour towards children, game officials and other spectators (Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2009).

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[1] State housing refers to housing provided by the state, similar to what is referred to in the United Kingdom as council housing.

It follows from the association with the working class that, by way of professionalism, the sport is often talked about as an avenue to prosperity. For this reason, a prominent RL discourse is the 'rags to riches' discourse (Coffey, 2013; Holt, Mangan, & Lanfranchi, 2013). That is, the sport is viewed as a viable and prosperous career path. Stories of high-profile RL players help to entrench this narrative, such as that of Sonny Bill Williams whose sporting career is often framed with reference to his state house beginnings (Wigmore, 2015). This 'rags to riches' discourse persists in spite of research findings that show only a very small percentage of players from a club level reach elite levels (Jones, Mahoney, & Gucciardi, 2014). Interestingly, this narrative also persisted throughout the twentieth century in Britain, where the sport's very existence depended upon its commitment to remunerate players, yet where it was not until the 1990s that professional players could use RL as their sole income (Light, 2013). This serves to illustrate the complex nature of societal discourses, and their potential for influence by idealised or mythologised notions.

Rugby league in Aotearoa New Zealand differs markedly from British RL in that players here are predominantly of Māori or Pacific Islands descent (Falcous, 2007). (This is in contrast to the game in Britain, which is viewed as predominantly 'white' (Long & Hylton, 2002).) The overrepresentation of Māori and Pacific peoples in RL can be explained in part by the prominence of Māori in RL's early development here. In addition, Falcous (2007) claims that Māori participation in a code rivalling that championed by the Pākehā middle class is very revealing of the ethnicised nature of the sport. Given that Māori and Pacific peoples are disproportionately represented in lower income groups (Mariott & Sim, 2014), the participation of Māori and Pacific peoples acts as an identifiable marker contributing to the discourse of the sport's association with lower socioeconomic groups. (This occurs despite the class and ethnic factors confounding each other. I.e., there is difficulty disentangling whether RL is dominated by Māori and Pacific Island players because of ethnicity or because those ethnic groups are over-represented in lower classes.)

2.2.2 Physical activity and sport discourses

Western industrialised societies place value on children being afforded the opportunity to engage in regular physical activity (Hardy et al., 2010). Sport is generally viewed as an ideal form of physical activity for children, upon whom increasingly sedentary lifestyles are forecast to confer major health risks in future (Coakley, 2009; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). As a consequence of the projected poor health outcomes from inactivity, organised sport has come to be viewed as a health intervention, and the idea that sport is good for children is a narrative entrenched in New Zealand society (Ergler, Kearns, & Witten, 2013; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Messner & Musto, 2016; Sport New Zealand, 2016).

The discourse that sport is good for children is supported by scientific studies, particularly those from medical and health promotion literature. Sport is claimed to: facilitate physical health in children (Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010), foster community connectedness (Hardy et al., 2010), facilitate mental good health (Biddle & Asare, 2011; Holder, Coleman, & Sehn, 2009), combat child obesity (Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2014; Nelson, 2016), boost self-concept (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), and furnish children with life skills (Kremer-Sadlik & Gutierrez, 2013); all of which are said to contribute to the health, wellbeing and the optimal development of children.

Following Foucault (1971), psychologist Derek Hook notes that "the strongest discourses are those which have attempted to ground themselves on the natural, the sincere, the scientific- in short, on the ...'true' and reasonable" (2007, p. 6). The aforementioned benefits of sport are claimed as established scientific fact and, as facts, they support and uphold the narrative of sport as beneficial to children. In addition to being backed by science, sports sociologist Jay Coakley (2011) notes that the neoliberal political environment has helped to entrench ideas about purchased sport experiences being central to child development. With these forces acting to uphold sport as ideal, it is not surprising that sport is viewed as requisite for children, and so vital that "...the fact that a third of [Australian] children do not participate in a sport is of concern” (Hardy et al., 2010, p. 3).

There is debate about the extent to which children benefit most from commitment to one particular sport or physical activity or to involvement in a variety of sports. Early specialisation promotes commitment to one sport at the exclusion of others and, although not supported by research, is regarded by many as the way for children to achieve long term proficiency (Gould, 2010; Read, Oliver, De Ste Croix, Myer, & Lloyd, 2016). The idea of trying a number of sports and/or activities while young is referred to as sport sampling or early diversification. Western industrialised nations in particular regard sport sampling as appropriate for young children for both physical and psychological reasons, and as a practice which, perhaps counter-intuitively, does not hinder later proficiency in any one sport or activity (Coté, Horton, MacDonald, & Wilkes, 2009). This is in contrast to countries such as China and Russia, where specialisation is believed to be best for children and to enhance performance (Lidor, Côté, & Hackfort, 2009).

There also exist several counter-narratives to the idea of sport as universally good for children. The risk to children of injury, particularly from participation in collision sports, is well documented (Boufous, Finch, & Bauman, 2004). Australian research shows that parents are concerned about risks of injury to children who participate in RL to the extent that 23.2% of parents interviewed actively discouraged or prevented their child(ren) from participating (Boufous et al., 2004). The same study found that RL was the sport most associated with safety concerns and perceptions of risk of injury (more so than rugby union, roller blading, soccer and Australian Rules football). The ability of children to assess risk and learn their physical limits is in some cases discussed as a useful developmental phase for childhood; increasingly though, risk of injuries from collision sports, particularly head injuries, are viewed as unacceptable even when the benefits from sport are considered (Quarrie, Brooks, Burger, Hume, & Jackson, 2017).

Another study questioning the benefits of sport involved young children from Aotearoa New Zealand (Walters et al., 2015). This study focused on children's experience of playing team sport and highlighted a number of potentially harmful societal discourses that children were said to be subject to, one of which is the win-at-all-costs discourse. The study highlighted that children were not overly motivated by winning, rather, they found meaning in fun and fair play.

Notwithstanding the risks of injury, and under-examination of the potential downsides of participation in organised sport, the societal discourse persists that sport is beneficial for keeping children not only active, healthy, and fit, but also in ensuring they are safe, occupied, and to assist in their optimal development (Coakley, 2015; Walters et al., 2015). Jay Coakley's (2015) use of the phrase "the great sport myth" (p. 402) captures the range of societal discourses running counter to the dominant one, it challenges the widely held belief in sport as inherently good, and inherently good for those who participate.

So, in spite of the counter-narratives, sport remains to a large extent unquestioned as the panacea for a range of social and physical problems. The societal discourse that children should participate in sport is a dominant one, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ryan & Watson, 2018). With sport viewed as an essential part of childhood, the obligation falls on parents to facilitate this practice. It is in this way that children's sport becomes enmeshed with issues of parenting, including a responsibility on parents to facilitate sporting experiences for their children.

2.2.3 'Good' parenting discourses

Cultures characterised by individualism, such as Western post-industrial nations, have seen parents (over children or communities) increasingly held accountable for the actions and developmental outcomes of children (Ergler et al., 2013; Wall, 2010). One result of this accountability is that parents are under increasing levels of scrutiny regarding the care and safety of their children; consequently, issues of risk, responsibility and blame have come to characterise parenting in post-industrial nations

(Henderson, Harmon, & Newman, 2016; O'Reilly, 2014; Sutton, 2008; Witten, Kearns, Carroll, Asiasiga, & Tava'e, 2013). Research shows that parents feel the pressure to fulfil societal expectations of being a 'good' parent (Assarsson & Aarsand, 2011; Green, 2015; Schiffrin, Godfrey, Liss, & Erchull, 2015).

However, what constitutes 'good' parenting differs between groups, each with their own set of relevant discourses. Good parenting ideals in Western industrialised nations are said to be those which apply mainly to two-parent, white, middle class families, and are at least partly comprised of what "parents think other parents consider good parenting" (Pynn et al., 2018, p. 2). This can be considered within the context of 'intensive parenting', which has been identified as a dominant child-rearing style in Western industrialised countries (Wall, 2010). Intensive parenting is typified by high levels of parental supervision and guidance from experts, both of which are viewed as requirements for optimal development and consequent wellbeing in children (Daly, 2001; Romagnoli & Wall, 2012; Sayer & Gornick, 2011; Schiffrin et al., 2014). Related phenomena are that of the 'helicopter parent' (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011), and the 'tiger mom' (Chua, 2011) which encompass a child-rearing pattern in which many aspects of children's lives are extensively managed by parents. Intensive parenting styles contribute to discourses about the responsibility of parents to ensure their children develop optimally across a range of benchmarks, including educational success and, physical, social, and emotional safety and wellbeing (Berndt, 2002; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Mainland, Shaw, & Prier, 2015; Wall, 2010). Mothers are said to come under amplified scrutiny in this regard, which contributes to the parenting discourse of the 'selfless mother' as one who consistently prioritises the child's needs over her own (Daly, 2001; Green, 2015; McGannon & Schinke, 2013). Adhering to practices consistent with dominant parenting ideologies has the effect of guarding against accusations of irresponsibility and/or negligence, and can be 'proof' of good parenting. This is of particular relevance in societies characterised by uncertainty (Lee, 2001), and risk cultures in which parents are held responsible for their children's outcomes (Jenkins, 2006). In light of intensive parenting styles and good parenting ideals, the enrolment of children in supervised activities designed to enrich them in some way, such as organised sport, is seen as fulfilling a moral duty (Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014; Daly, 2001; Trussell, 2009). The discourse that sport is good for children indirectly implies that restriction of access to sport equates to withholding the health and developmental benefits sport is said to confer.

A strong counter-discourse to the 'children need sport' discourse is that of 'let children be children' (Isaacs, 2017). This societal discourse emphasises the value of fun and freedom in childhood and is permeated with notions of nostalgia, evidenced by the abundance of literature on the importance of free play for promoting wellbeing in children (Elkind, 2007; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Sutton, 2008). However, unwillingness to structure children's time can lead to the moral worth of parents being questioned (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2011). The moral worth of parents is mainly addressed in the literature in terms of discourses around what constitutes 'good' parenting. Consequently, sport is not only valued by parents for its health and wellbeing benefits to children but also for its ability to demonstrate responsible or 'good' parenting.

Social and technological changes have elevated the role that social media plays in how parents view, and are viewed in, their role as parents. The media and social media are identified as prescribers of good parenting ideals, with material consequences for not living up to expectations cited in the form of increased instances of depression and anxiety (Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2013) and stress (Knight et al., 2009).

Parent's fear of judgement and evaluation (e.g., on social media) has been identified as a factor limiting children's access to unsupervised outdoor play (Pynn et al., 2018) and some commentators go so far as to claim that parents use social media to promote their child(ren)'s sporting successes to prove their own moral worth (Coakley, 2009; Gould, 2009). Coakley goes on to claim that in promoting sporting successes, parents are in effect boasting about their own good parenting.

Parenting ideologies are said by some to be a reflection of class-based differences in child-rearing practices. There are several class-based discourses identified in the literature. Gunilla Halldén (1991), for example, considers the idea of the child as 'being', and the child as 'project'. This distinction reflects the ways that working class and middle class parents view the role they have in their child's development. Halldén's (1991) research claims that working class parents are more likely to perceive development as naturally occurring (i.e., the child as 'being'), while middle class parents are likely to perceive development to occur as a process that must be facilitated by parents (i.e., the child as 'project'). Sociologist Annette Lareau argues that the middle classes place great importance on the "concerted cultivation" (2011, p. 1) of their children's talents through organised activities, such as sport. Similarly, cultural anthropological researchers have posited that middle class parents have the desire to strategically furnish children with skills that will best prepare them for a future where their social standing is not guaranteed (Ehrenreich, 1989; Kremer-Sadlik & Gutierrez, 2013). Partaking in a range of activities and maintaining a visibly busy schedule has also been referred to as a middle class trait, the idea being that conveying the impression of time scarcity confers status on a person (Bellezza, Paharia, & Keinan, 2016).

Parents are often said to want the best for their children (Schiffrin et al., 2015). Parents' different views of what 'the best' refers to, and how this might be provided, depends on a variety of factors such as class, as previously discussed, and other cultural factors such as identity.

2.2.4 Sport and identity discourses

Identity is central to a person's lived experience. People and society have particular ideas about what it means to be a child/family in Aotearoa New Zealand, and identity, as a socially important mode of presentation of self, forms a large part of that.

Young children, as subordinates, can be said to have their identities heavily influenced by the people in their immediate surrounds, most often the family unit. The family unit is itself part of other groupings (identifiable at various spatial levels such as suburban, provincial, or national, as well as other groupings such as religious, school, social class or ethnicity) all of which are constituents of individual and collective identities. In keeping with the notion that identities are marked by "common attributes or beliefs" (Parker & Harris, 2009, p. 1), sport is a practice that has an enduring relationship with identity.

In spite of the sociohistorical differences between RL and rugby union, they do share many characteristics, and many of the discourses associated with one apply to the other. Consequently, the discourses discussed in this section are often researched in relation to rugby union, and mainly concern masculinity. There is a large volume of published studies on masculinity and identity, discursive approaches to which are well-represented in the work of Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (2014). These researchers suggest that masculine identity positions (such as the hegemonic, subordinate and complicit masculinities identified by Connell (1995)) are not fixed, but are negotiated in talk and are contingent on the social situation in which the speakers are situated. They go on to show how inconsistencies in accounts are partly the result of shifting identity positions, which are subject to constant revision during talk.

Sport is said by many scholars to provide opportunities for the formulation or consolidation of various forms of individual and collective identities (MacClancy, 1996; Parker & Harris, 2009). The social practice of sport facilitates the reinforcement of particular discourses by providing the setting for the 'performance' of these identities; in relation to gender, social theorist Judith Butler provides the pioneering and authoritative account, stating that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (1988, p. 520). This concept, consistent with social constructionism, emphasises the role of others in shaping gender identities while acknowledging that the individual has a degree of agency in the presentation of themselves, which will be considered acceptable only so long as this occurs within the boundaries defined by normative behaviour. In the context of sport, this results in team mates, coaches, parents, spectators as well as societal expectations all contributing to how a gender 'plays out' on a rugby field.

Masculinity and its relationship with sport is a topic well-researched worldwide (Claringbould & Adriaanse, 2015; Miller, 2005). In addition, collision sport as a site for the reproduction of discourses of masculinity has been widely discussed (Messner, 1992). In Aotearoa New Zealand this academic space is predominantly occupied by rugby union research, such as that conducted by Richard Pringle (2001, 2004, 2008; Pringle & Markula, 2005). Research claims that collision sports (such as RL and rugby union) provide opportunities for men and boys to display traits associated with traditional manliness, and that, in doing so, men are reinforcing and consolidating the already ingrained societal view that masculinity in this form is the ideal (Pringle, 2001, 2005; Walters et al., 2015). Indeed, within Aotearoa New Zealand there are historically grounded conceptions of how masculinity is and ought to be performed (Falcous, 2007; Ryan, 2005). Many of these conceptions centre on a version of masculinity that combines traits of stoicism, emotional detachment, aggression, and domination, which, in the context of collision sports such as rugby union and RL are viewed as assets, but which have come to represent an idealised version of males in this country. Scholars working in this space frequently refer to the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987). The hegemonically masculine discourse is argued not only to leave little space for the display of alternative forms of masculinity, but to promote hyper forms of masculinity which are visible both within sport and in wider society (Light & Kirk, 2000; Messner, 1990; Pringle, 2005, 2017; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Implicit in the discourse of RL as a (very) masculine sport is the notion that women are unsuitable participants. The discourse of 'RL is for men/boys' is underpinned by strong historical notions of women's role in society. Women in the first half of the 20th century were deemed, by varying degrees, unsuited to, incapable of, and irresponsible for engaging in such physical pursuits as RL (Messner & Musto, 2016; Ryan & Watson, 2018).

Hyper-masculine discourses, although prominent, operate alongside other, sometimes contradictory, discourses. The existence of conflicting discourses can lead to uncertainty and dilemma for the people navigating them. One such conflict has been termed the "crisis of masculinity" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985, p. 556) and is concerned with the changing roles of men in society. What it means to 'be a man' is not a fixed concept; the traditional hegemonic masculinity which characterised male societal positioning until the first half of the 20th century continues to be challenged by social factors (for example, empowerment of women, as well as increasing acceptance of non-normative masculinities). Crises of masculinity describe the various ways in which masculinity is performed, and how acceptance of these ways change according to contemporary expectations about how men ‘should’ be and act.

Sporting discourses serve not only to shape notions of masculinity and identity at an individual level, but also create idealised notions of collective identities. Rugby union is often singled out as the national sport of Aotearoa New Zealand, and whether or not actively followed, the sport has a ubiquitous presence (Bruce, 2013; Pringle, 2004). So strong is its effect on the ‘national psyche’, it is claimed that effective sociocultural analysis of RL can only occur with consideration of the context that rugby union provides (Light, 2013). Viewed with this in mind, it cannot be discounted that participation in RL can in itself be considered a strong statement of identity in that it is demonstrably not the nationally celebrated game of rugby union.

2.3 Conclusion

Sport and parenting are associated with strong and culturally specific societal discourses. Discourses, particularly dominant discourses, are significant because they both reinforce and, in some ways, prescribe ways in which people think about and participate in sport. RL discourses function in Aotearoa New Zealand within a broader set of societal discourses about physical activity, rugby union, sport and identity; and because of the young age of the children playing, parenting discourses also become relevant. The extent to which parents co-opt societal discourses when talking about their children’s participation in RL could create a clearer picture of the influence that such discourses have on the social practices of sport and parenting.

Chapter Three

3. Conceptual frameworks

This chapter describes the conceptual and theoretical frameworks within which issues around parenting and sport are examined in this study. All research is carried out with a number of inherent academic and personal assumptions which, whether made explicit or not, influence its direction and the ultimate outcomes (Crotty, 1998). On this basis, it is important to note that the theoretical frameworks guiding this research are underpinned by social constructionist principles.

Social constructionism is an epistemological stance which emphasises the social/shared nature in which knowledge is produced and understood (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 1985).This view has many implications for the ways in which we understand the world around us. For example, social groupings (such as peer-groups, or residents of a town or city) and historical context become relevant as distinct entities within which different claims about truth and knowledge can be made. Consider, for example, how child-labour is viewed by Western legal systems today, compared to one hundred and fifty years ago, when children as young as three years old worked collecting scraps in factories (Turmel, 2008). This “historical and cultural specificity” (Burr, 2006, p. 3) is but one of the several tenets defining the orientation of work carried out under the broad banner of social constructionism. Other core assumptions, following Gergen (1985), include: that subjective perceptions must play a part in how mainstream scientific knowledge is produced; and that social processes uphold and sustain knowledge, and that these processes are necessarily entwined (e.g., understandings of what constitutes knowledge are generated and sustained by way of shared consensus between group members).

Because of the central role that language and ordinary talk play in negotiating consensus (and thus in shaping people’s lives) language is a key component of the social constructionist ethos. As such, the next parts of this section outlines the concept(s) of discourse relevant to this research. These concepts include discursive psychology (DP), the key theoretical (and methodological) framework that guides the research.

3.1 Discourse(s)

Discourse is a concept with multiple meanings and applications. The term “discourse” is used, for example, to refer to the following four quite different concepts. First, it can refer to situated talk as it occurs in conversation (Potter, 2004; Wiggins, 2017). Second, discourse can refer to systems of talk such as culturally-specific repertoires, the sets of words used within societies to talk about certain topics in certain ways (Edley, 2001). Third, the term is used to describe broad societal narratives, including Foucauldian notions of discourse, described in more detail below (Hook, 2007). And, lastly, the concept of discourse is even used to describe non-verbal aspects of meaning-making in society, including “a whole range of different symbolic activities” (Edley, 2001, p. 191) such as how we dress, the visual arts and literature. Because of the variety of ways in which the term discourse is used, I will now outline how the concept is used in the present study.

The current study has a dual focus on broad societal narratives at a macro level, and on the micro level discourse (talk) that both constructs and reconstructs them. Note that broad societal narratives are most frequently referred to in the current study as societal discourses (Gillingham & Bromfield, 2008; Locke & Yarwood, 2017); this is for the descriptive properties of that name, and to avoid confusion with the multiple interpretations available for the concept of discourse. While this study uses the term societal discourses, other studies use a variety of terms to refer to a similar concept, including the following: discourses (Potter, 2004; Tileagă & Stokoe, 2015); societal narratives (Wardle, 2006); macro discourses (Moberg, 2013; Seymour-Smith, 2015); cultural/sociocultural discourses (Kerr & Moore, 2015); and, macro discourse analysis (Horton-Salway, 2001).

Approaching the research in this way involves a measure of interdisciplinarity; societal discourses are largely a sociological area of study, while the micro discursive work used in this research is rooted in critical forms of social psychology. The combined use of sociological and psychological approaches is not new; the influence of sociology is particularly visible in social psychology, and critical strands are even more committed to inter- (or trans-) disciplinary research (Fairclough, 2010; Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009; Parker, 1999). This approach is supported by the 2014 special issue of *Sociology of Sport*, which is introduced with a piece titled “Toward new conversations between sociology and psychology” (Thorpe, Ryba, & Denison, 2014, p. 131). The examination of social issues within broader theoretical parameters is thought by researchers within social constructionism to enable complex issues to be examined from multiple perspectives, and ultimately provide more realistic explanations of the world around us (Babbie, 1999).

The current study's use of social psychological and sociological concepts and frameworks is described next through the explanation of micro and macro discourses.

3.1.1 Societal discourses: macro level

Many scholars use the work of French theorist Michel Foucault to frame their work on discourse and, indeed, his work encapsulates one aspect relevant to this research. That is, the notion that there is a pervasive sociocultural system which both mandates, and reinforces certain truths, and which regulates the ways that those truths are talked about (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1971; Hollway, 2011; Hook, 2007). Accordingly, societal discourses, for the purposes of the present study, are those "based upon the major foundational narratives of a society" (Hook, 2007, p. 9). According to Foucault's interpretation, societal discourses become powerful when they are reinforced not just socially, but also institutionally (thus making any contrary discourses open to criticism, judgement, or even penalisation by the state). This is described in Foucault's (1977) concept of 'regimes of truth', whereby the things that we 'know' about the world are in part established within and legitimised by discourses. Societal discourses are thus embedded with notions of truth, and right and wrong, and are characterised by actions and behaviours that are considered normative and/or conformative. It is on this basis that such discourses are indicative of social norms and have the power to regulate social practices, including parenting (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Lukes, 2008; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017).

Foucault notes that social norms applicable to certain historical periods make relevant the issue of silence itself in the context of discourse and discourses. He adds that "the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is the less absolute limit of discourse" (Foucault, 1999, p. 518). Although much of this work concerned 18th century sexuality and morality, the propriety of the discussion of certain topics remains representative of normative values within given spatial and temporal locations.

It is generally agreed that Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse is inextricably tied to notions of power, knowledge and materiality; this and the ability of societal discourses to shape social practices is what warrants their deeper investigation. It is important to note that although the work of Foucault can and has been applied to many aspects related to this topic, particularly sport, Foucauldian principles apply here primarily in relation to the theorist's notion of discourses. Micro level discourse will be analysed for aspects which relate to broader societal discourses, and for features which are otherwise significant or revealing.

3.1.2 Discourse: micro level

In addition to the concept of societal discourses as powerful overarching societal narratives, discourse can also refer to speech, talk, and written texts. This facet of the concept of discourse frequently refers to the linguistic aspects of speech - what is said, how it is said, who says it, and how shared understandings of words convey meaning (Moberg, 2013). Methodologies such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and DP focus heavily on specific aspects of speech for what they reveal about social actions and psychological concepts. Discursive psychologist Sally Wiggins places DP near the mid-point on a continuum from micro to macro approaches to discourse analysis, stating its key aim is to "examine how psychological concepts are used and managed in discourse" (2017, p. 33). This approach is relevant to the research for its ability to illuminate in detail how parents navigate the realities of parenting today, and what their ordinary talk reveals about both societal discourses which, whether or not understood as such, serve to regulate the ways in which people act.

Discourse can be analysed any number of ways, to meet any number of research ends; consequently, it is necessary to focus attention on aspects of speech relevant to the research objectives. To this end, DP and the Discursive Action Model (DAM), which operates within DP, are used. Both of these are outlined next.

3.2 Discursive psychology

Discursive psychology was derived from discourse analysis by design to yield results of a more nuanced nature than achieved through other psychologies (Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993). The approach formed part of the turn to discourse that social psychology took in the 1980s and 1990s and provided both a theoretical and methodological framework which enabled discourse to be examined and understood in ways that cognitive approaches had not (Davies & Harré, 1990). The impetus for increased attention to language arose from claims within critical strands of psychology that an alternative was required to mainstream cognitive psychological approaches (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007). Cognitive approaches to understanding people hold that experimental subjects (people) can report objectively on the contents of their minds. This view is criticised on the basis that language itself cannot be ignored as a practice that both shapes, and is shaped by, psychological and social processes.

To better account for what is happening during talk, discursive psychologists stress the actions that are performed in speech, and that these actions function in certain ways. So, consistent with its constructionist underpinnings, DP emphasises the role of discourse in constructing the world, as opposed to being a reflection of it (Hepburn, 2002). One of the founding authors of DP, Derek Edwards, describes the approach as a way “to examine how psychological concepts (memory, thought, emotion, etc.) are shaped for the functions they serve, in and for the nexus of social practices in which we use language” (2012, p. 427). This aspect of discursive psychology sets it apart from discourse analysis which, without the social psychological emphasis, focuses on the specific linguistic features that constitute language.

DP is particularly well-suited to examine issues within or at the heart of personal accounts (Harré, 2001; McGannon & Smith, 2015; Wetherell, 2003). In a spoken personal account the speaker selects words which are used to present a version of events, usually as factual. Although open-ended interviews are said by some to be ubiquitous in qualitative research, and that narratives delivered “under conscious control” (Hollway, 2011, p. 12) can stifle innovation in analysis (Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007; Potter, 2012b), interviews are nonetheless interactional encounters. Data from open-ended interviews has utility in that the extended periods of talk from participants allow “us to understand the sense-making practices of the person” (Seymour-Smith, 2015, p. 378). This is precisely where the value of this qualitative approach lies. The interview setting allows parents to present ‘consciously controlled’ verbal accounts, the intricacies of which can illuminate the ways in which various societal discourses are accepted, contested, or, represent an area of tension for parents.

Crucially, words are analysed to account for what is *achieved* by their use. It is not the aim of discursive psychology to uncover the facts or ‘truth’ of accounts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; te Molder, 2015); in fact, a fundamental component of DP is its concern with how accounts are constructed, and how they are mediated psychologically (that is, to achieve psychological and social psychological ends). The DP framework shifts the focus from what a person ‘thinks’, to the person’s *reported account* of their motives, reasons and attitudes on a topic. Analysing the construction of such accounts reveals certain discursive devices which work in speech to accomplish social acts. These devices can be systematically identified, and analysed for what they achieve in context. Therefore DP is argued by practitioners as more objective than subjective, and that criticisms levelled at DP of its openness to interpretation are ungrounded (Edwards, 2012). DP conceptualises such devices as delivered with a measure of intentionality, for it is the speaker who selects the words they use. This active aspect of talk is brought to the fore with the use of the label ‘discursive work’ (Nicoll & Harrison, 2003); it describes the overall efforts people make to present accounts as reasonable and factual and is used throughout this thesis.

Talk as a social action is a key principle of the discursive action model which acts as a set of guiding principles directing analysis to relevant aspects of talk.

3.2.1 The discursive action model

The discursive action model (DAM) aims to identify specific features of language and describe the significance of their use in a given context (Edwards & Potter, 1993). Identifiable features of language are claimed by practitioners of DP to be used by design, function in certain ways, and achieve certain ends. This process is not necessarily conscious, however, and social psychologists suggest that such features of language are in part a process of trial and error, contingent on the social situation in which they are deployed (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003; Edwards & Potter, 1993; Moore, 2012; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). When talk is analysed using the DAM, several broad and specific features can be identified. The model groups these into three themes: action, fact/interest, and accountability.

The action component of the DAM conceptualises discourse as a social practice wherein people actively construct representations. At the time this model was developed the aim was for a clearer distinction between talk as cognition and talk as a social act. Cognitive approaches conceptualise language as a resource which can be used to gain insights into what people think, in contrast with the DAM which stresses the active role that language plays in the construction of representations. Attribution forms a part of representation as the speaker accounts for their actions and presents their version of events in such a way that causes and reasons are distributed to the speaker's advantage.

The second theme is related to that of "fact and interest" (Edwards & Potter, 1993, p. 14), and is framed as a dilemma. This aspect of the DAM addresses the existence of certain desires, motives or allegiances within accounts, and that the speaker's acknowledgement of such can be dismissed with the use of rhetorical techniques that both undermine alternatives, and appeal to reason, fact, or some other 'natural' state of affairs that renders any other position unthinkable. This aspect is of great relevance to this research, as people often present their actions and decisions as inevitable, and certainly the most reasonable, given certain 'facts' about the world.

The third theme is that of accountability. The DAM directs researchers to investigate the ways in which versions of events are constructed to imply responsibility. As discussed previously, issues of responsibility and blame are central to parenting. Because of this, participants' accounts of parenting often contain elements that are identifiable and relatable to this aspect of the DAM. These accountability elements, when related to broad societal discourses, can reveal a lot about how parenting and sport are viewed, both individually and societally.

It is important to note here that the DAM is not a model that can, or is intended to be applied as such, rather, it is a set of guiding “principles at a meta-level” (Edwards & Potter, 1993, p. 24). The model developers themselves urge practitioners to resist attempts to apply it in the traditional sense of a scientific model, viewing it most effectively applied as “a set of higher order principles that orientate…[users] to important features of everyday reports and explanations” (Edwards & Potter, 1993, p. 155).

The DAM is concerned with how attribution and factuality are managed in talk. Its authors highlight that the model has been usefully employed in the identification of activity sequences involving blame (i.e., assigning attributional responsibility) and with how factuality is discursively managed (amongst other aspects). Given the relatively marginalised nature of RL, its associations with low socioeconomic groups, violence, and risks of injuries to players, parents’ accounts justifying young children’s participation can be reasonably anticipated to be constructed to deflect (perceived or actual) accusations or blame. In addition, an inherent focus of the DAM is the identification of discursive features which signify objective factual reporting. The ways in which this is achieved in accounts varies greatly; features can be very subtle and easily dismissed as inconsequential, yet still be effective in the establishment of a believable account.

Thus, DP and the DAM are used in the research as guiding principles to direct focus toward relevant aspects of discourse at a micro level. This, coupled with attention to societal discourses, significant for the latent power they have to shape social actions and be (re)produced by talk, forms the basis of the dual approach to examining issues related to parenting and sport. There are several benefits to using this dual approach, which are outlined next.

3.3 Using micro and macro approaches together

To date, DP research has most often targeted either micro or macro level discourse(s) (Seymour-Smith, 2017); or discourse(s) at one point on the continuum from micro to macro (Wiggins, 2017). Work at the micro level has been described as ahistorical for its “focus on *current* discourse practices only” (Gough, 2009, p. 532 emphasis in original), while Foucauldian discourse analysis is generally removed from the intricacies of everyday talk (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). Yet, the two systems are undoubtedly linked, and the ways in which talk at the micro level relates to societal discourses operating at the macro level is an area which is largely unexplored in the literature, but which has the potential to “strengthen social analysis” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 39).

A notable and relevant example is the recent work of Locke & Yarwood (2017) whose study of ‘involved fatherhood’ examined how societal discourses operate to limit the ways in which (micro level) talk occurs. This research is significant because of the unique nature of its “dual analytical focus on micro and macro discourses in action” (Locke & Yarwood, 2017, p. 5), and perhaps represents an increasing interest in the application of the more critical strands of DP in the analysis of social situations. Critical DP is described as having the aim to “identify the culturally available repertoires that shape our understanding of a particular topic” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 33). The ways in which people talk about a topic (e.g., in everyday conversation) are both limited by and reinforce the societal discourses that constitute these culturally available repertoires.

The current study similarly uses macro and micro approaches together to examine how parents discursively negotiate sometimes sensitive parenting issues within the context of their children’s participation in RL. The dual focus has the aim to explicate the links between the increasingly popular social practice of children’s sport, and the sociocultural system of discourses that appear to uphold such practices. The ways in which the research was conducted are outlined next.

Chapter Four

4. Methods

Discursive Psychology (DP) is a framework which guides both theory and methodology; the conceptual elements of DP which underpin the current research were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter discusses the methodology used, all aspects of which were undertaken under the broad banner of qualitative research, within which DP is positioned. Using DP as both a theory and a methodology means that there is a consistent philosophical basis to the research, which, theorists have pointed out, leads to findings that can be considered more valid (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2003).

DP influences methodology at every level of research. Central to a DP project is the dataset (Wiggins, 2017). Because this particular study has a focus on the voices of parents, it is their words (ultimately transcribed into text) that become the analytic focal point. The practical elements involved in collecting this data are described next. Following this, the process of analysis is described and, finally, this chapter concludes with a brief outline of the role of the researcher in the research process.

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 Sample

Parents of young children aged between 5 and 10 years old were sought for this research. This is because that age range represents the age at which children often try a team sport for the first time, and, parents are still greatly involved in their children's lives at this point (Neely & Holt, 2014). The sample was drawn from three Christchurch (New Zealand) rugby league (RL) clubs, based in the suburbs of Halswell, Hornby and Aranui. They represent a diverse sample of participants for the following reasons: they draw members from spatially separate areas within Christchurch (two clubs are based in the South/South West suburbs, and one in the East), they are based in areas of disparate income (O'Connor, 2014), they comprise both large and small club membership numbers and, finally, the clubs have differing rates of attrition (S. Collins, personal communication, May 3, 2017).

Halswell is the largest of the Christchurch clubs (Halswell Hornets Rugby League Club, 2017) and therefore offered a large sample of potential participants. In addition, as a parent of two children who played for the club during the research process, I had existing links with the club. These connections gave me the ‘insider knowledge’ recognised by some qualitative researchers as beneficial to the research process for expediting the process of recruiting participants (Kerr & Sturm, 2018). (This is discussed in greater detail in the following section.) However, to ensure sample diversity was maintained, I went beyond immediate social contacts within the club for participants.

Hornby is another well-established and well-populated club, one identified by Canterbury Rugby League (CRL) as active in its initiatives to recruit and retain young players and is of particular interest to the research for this reason (S. Collins, personal communication, May 3, 2017). Additionally, as is the case with Halswell, this club’s home ground was largely unaffected by the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/2011, which garnered fruitful comparisons with Aranui, which experienced significant disruption to its home ground.

The Aranui club is a smaller club, and one located on the other side of Christchurch from both Halswell and Hornby clubs, offering diversity of location. Furthermore, this club is located in a low-income suburb with a high proportion of Māori and Pacific Island residents (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). In addition, this club’s grounds and surrounding residential areas were adversely affected by the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/2011, potentially affecting access and consequent enrolments. The Aranui club was identified by CRL as a club with a relatively high attrition rate. For this reason, CRL had an interest in finding out from parents the reasons for their continued support of the club, and what types of sporting experiences parents are looking for then they enrol their children.

4.1.2 Participant recruitment

A total of 21 participants were interviewed for the research. I approached a total of 50 potential interviewees with a verbal invitation to take part in the research. The majority of these, 30, were approaches made to people unknown to me from the sidelines of RL games where team uniforms identified them as from one of the clubs being examined. It is not unusual for parents to have conversations on the sideline, and as a parent of young players myself, there was a valid reason for my presence and for the initiation of conversation. These random approaches resulted in successful interviews with 13 people. Note that although I refer to the approaches as ‘random’, it cannot be ruled out that I unconsciously approached people who appeared likely to be more receptive or friendly than others. It is interesting to note that 23 people initially agreed to be interviewed but that ten of these either cancelled, were not able to be contacted to confirm a location for the interview, or did not arrive at the agreed-upon place for the interview.

Other methods of recruitment included, in order of the most fruitful: approaching personal contacts within the Halswell Hornets Rugby League Club (this resulted in five successful interviews from seven approaches); placing messages on my children's team Facebook pages asking for participants, or for contact details of potential participants from any of the clubs of interest to the research (this resulted in two successful interviews with a total of four participants- one interview was with multiple participants); and, approaching CRL who consulted their player database (this resulted in one successful interview from three who had initially agreed).

Personal club connections were responsible for a good proportion of the interviews that went ahead without postponement, cancellation or non-attendance; I attribute this in part to my insider status, which is said to facilitate easier access to participants (Kerr & Sturm, 2018). However, over half the interviews were with people who were unknown to me and who were approached anonymously at games. My status as insider with regard to these people was limited to the fact that my children were involved in the sport, as theirs were. In this sense, my status as insider/outsider was not clearly defined. The propensity within qualitative research to limit positionality to this insider/outsider binary is argued by Kerr and Sturm (2018) to be an inaccurate reflection of the nuanced ways in which researchers are positioned. Even so, my position as both insider and questionable outsider afforded me the dual benefits of access to participants that insider status is said to confer, as well as objectivity to the data that outsider status is thought to allow (Kerstetter, 2012).

In spite of my partial insider status, difficulties were encountered in securing male participants. Female participants out-numbered males four to one. Eleven males were approached in total, nine of whom were approached from the sidelines of games, and two of whom were personal contacts. The nine random approaches to recruit male participants resulted in only one successfully completed interview. Seven men either declined outright, or remained silent while their female partner responded to my request. One male agreed to be interviewed but did not arrive at the agreed time and place for the interview. One of the successfully interviewed male participants was a chance encounter who happened to be present when I was conducting an interview with his wife; after expressing an interest in the research, he was briefed on the project, and agreed to participate.

In total, 21 parents were interviewed, in 19 interviews (one interview was conducted with three participants).

4.1.3 Interview design and process

In keeping with ethical guidelines and qualitative research best practice, prior to being interviewed participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and provided with a research information sheet outlining this (see Appendix A). Participants were asked to sign a form showing that they consented to taking part in the research, that they did so voluntarily, and that they understood the process and their ability to withdraw up to a specified date. Their anonymity throughout the research process was explained. A copy of the signed consent form was given to the participant or mailed to them in the case that they were interviewed over the phone (see Appendix B). The research and the processes previously outlined were reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Interviews took place in a variety of settings. Seven interviews (one of which was with three people) took place in the participant's home; four took place at a café identified by the participant as convenient to them; four took place over the telephone; three took place at the participant's place of work; and one interview took place at my home. In all cases, interviews were digitally recorded.

The DP approach requires data in the form of discourse. To this end initial interviews were designed to elicit the maximum amount of talk; I assumed that the less I said as the interviewer, the better. This style aligns with that of narrative enquiry, where interviewers "encourage the participants to provide an extended account" (Murray, 2003, p. 117). The narrative style was initially used on the basis that qualitative approaches emphasise placing the participant voice at the fore, deeming this the method by which participants are afforded the most dignity and respect (Flick, 2009). However, prioritising the participant voice to this extent resulted in lengthy interviews with large amounts of off-topic discourse. Once transcribed, I identified moments in the initial interviews which would have benefitted from me talking more, for example, to direct the topic of conversation towards more fruitful areas. For this reason, in subsequent interviews I made more use of my prepared set of open-ended questions, designed to prompt or direct conversation toward relevant topics (see Appendix C). This approach still allowed participants to provide discursive accounts of their thinking in their own time, in their own way, and is considered a method respectful of participants (Babbie, 2016; Ritchie et al., 2003). Because of its ability to both focus attention on topics of interest to the research and allow participants the freedom to speak at length, this approach is common in qualitative research (Flick, 2009; Potter, 2004).

The open-ended questions allow participants to provide extended accounts on certain aspects of their lives, in this case the circumstances under which they enrolled their child(ren) in RL, and their reasons for their child(ren)'s continued participation. Its utility also lies in the un-fixed nature of questioning, allowing participants to talk freely, yet also allowing interviewers to probe for more or deeper information where relevant. In my case, where participants touched on topics of interest but did not elaborate, I used basic probing questions such as, "can you tell me more about that". This was sometimes met with blank looks, pauses, a simple repetition of the answer, or a response akin to "I don't know"; but, as often, this was the point at which participants appeared to think more about their reasons and because of this were able to give more nuanced response. Even when participants were rewording an earlier response, their discourse was sometimes more articulate, more succinct, or more emphatic than in earlier answers. This, according to Ritchie et al., is the precise objective of the in-depth interview, where "breadth and depth" (2003, p. 148) of content are sought. Participants appeared to be working out their position through the process of speaking it aloud, and once transcribed, provided rich and useful data for analysis.

4.1.4 Transcription

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed as soon as practicable afterwards. This was to ensure that information of potential import to the interview was noted on the transcript (e.g., interruptions, or emotional tone, where significant.). Because it is participants' psychological processes and their accounts of these which were of interest in the research, less attention was paid in the transcription phase to the specific linguistic features of talk than would be the case when using a discourse analysis approach (which can note precise details such as speed of speech, length of pauses, or intonation, for example). Therefore, transcriptions were not "excruciatingly accurate" (Babbie, 2016, p. 387).

In addition, a departure from traditional qualitative methods was made in that the transcribed interviews were not presented back to the participant for confirmation of accuracy. The rationale for this follows. It has been noted that there is a danger in talk-based methods of the participant consciously controlling their responses in a manner that levels out inconsistency and conflict (Hollway, 2011). However, it is these very responses that are of interest to this research. The research is concerned with people's discursive accounts, not with uncovering any so-called 'truths', so eliciting clarification from participants would not only have been redundant, but any changes made to transcripts (whether through the participant changing their mind about something they said, or attempting to clarify an inconsistency) could have lowered the quality of the data and reduced the possibility of meaningful insights being gained through analysis. For similar reasons, interview extracts quoted in this theses are included verbatim, no changes to grammar have been made or mistakes acknowledged.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Familiarisation with data

Transcripts were systematically analysed both for features of micro level discourse that revealed specific linguistic techniques put to use for a purpose (i.e., discursive devices), and for evidence of reference to relevant societal discourses. In addition, a third sweep of the data took place specifically for the preparation of a report for CRL which, although not directly relevant to this thesis, did result in greater familiarity with the data.

Qualitative approaches hold that familiarity with data is the key to gaining insight from it (Lofland, 2006; Murray, 2003). To this end, I strove to immerse myself in the data from the earliest possible stages. This immersion began during the interview phase and was consolidated with each successive analytic step. The transcription process is itself an initial analytic step; transcribing all interviews myself (as opposed to outsourcing the process) was my first chance to pay close attention to the intricacies of what participants were saying. With the first reading of the transcribed data, my methods of familiarisation became threefold: auditory (when conducting the interviews), physical/sensory (through the act of typing out participants' every word), and visual (by reading transcripts). Reading and re-reading transcripts, alongside the reading and re-reading of relevant literature, meant I achieved a high level of immersion in and familiarity with the data. This iterative process is regarded as both thorough and robust (Babbie, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.2.2 Coding and themes

Identification of discursive devices occurred through in-depth and repeated reading of interview transcripts. This was a relatively simple process involving detection, followed by coding to a pre-existing coding schedule (i.e., where instances of hedging, extreme case formulations, and vague reporting etc., were found and then 'filed' under appropriately titled code names). Although not analysis in itself, this process was a first step in that direction and enabled me to isolate individual devices and start to examine how these functioned in context.

In contrast to this, coding for societal discourses was conducted in an inductive way. Although I had previously identified potentially relevant societal discourses (see literature review), these were not set out in a schedule to ‘code to’. Initial analysis involved combing transcripts for any talk which appeared to refer to either a) a prevalent theme (i.e., something talked about by more than one parent), or, b) a parenting style or practice related to sport and discussed as such. This meant that when I came across a parent who spoke about RL injuries, for example, I gave this theme the meaningful title ‘injuries’ and coded all instances of such talk into that theme. After more incidents of this topic arose, and consideration was given to the context in which injuries were raised, I modified the theme to one related to the broader topic of parenting. Themes, once identified, were arranged and rearranged under broad headings on an ongoing basis, until dominant themes emerged. This process was aided by mind-mapping, following Braun and Clarke (2006), who recommend this as a useful way to determine meaningful groupings of themes.

Themes and topics were linked to a relevant societal discourse on an ongoing basis, with this process also shifting throughout. For example, talk of injuries might well have been linked with discourses of health and wellbeing, however, it became clear that the context in which parents spoke about injuries was more relevant to parenting (e.g., issues of responsibility and guilt) than of health. The process of coding and re-coding that I used offers a traceable progression from the raw data to findings/results, and was undertaken with intent to pay the greatest respect to the source material. This process is consistent with inductive methodologies in qualitative research, and indicates rigor in analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

Qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, was used to store, manage, and code data once transcribed. The software was not relied upon to conduct analysis in and of itself, but was a useful tool to perform a number of functions, particularly given that I coded for both themes relatable to societal discourses, and for (micro) discursive features (as well as for themes of interest to CRL, reported separately). NVivo software allows large volumes of data to be stored, sorted, and coded with relative ease, all while keeping source documents (interview transcripts) unaltered and retrievable. In the case of manual coding where sentences are pulled from transcripts in isolation, it can be difficult to retain and/or retrieve valuable contextual information. With the use of NVivo, surrounding text is readily available. This is especially important when analysing discursive data as the meaning of what is said is often embedded within the context of a broader narrative. In addition, NVivo’s word search function was used to verify that certain themes included all examples from the data, though this was employed as a confirmation process only, for, as with analysis of any spoken material, meanings cannot always be taken literally.

4.3 Researcher reflexivity

It is commonly asserted within the social sciences that the researcher is unable to be completely detached from their research (Babbie, 2016). Consequently, social scientific researchers frequently refer to the concepts of reflexivity and positionality in order to account for and consider the implications of any influence the researcher has on results. Reflecting on the bearing that one's identity and presence has on the research process can be difficult; even small or seemingly inconsequential decisions can define the path the research takes. This applies to decision-making at all levels, from choice of research topic to the analysis and writing phases.

In methods using discourse as data, the researcher's role becomes particularly relevant in the data gathering phase; in my case, interviews. I discussed earlier my turn from a narrative interview style to one making more use of open-ended questions. However, the approximately fifteen open-ended questions I had prepared for interviews were not the only words spoken by me in these social interactions. I attempted a relaxed, conversational style for its ability to engage participants, and put them at ease, in the hope this would enable them to feel comfortable sharing their stories (Ritchie et al., 2003). Because of this, some of the words that I spoke were (inadvertently) not neutral in nature, and although may have improved the companionability of the encounter, will have led the participant to believe I was agreeing with them, spurring them on, or otherwise not being impartial.

The following extract is an example of such a statement. This discussion was preceded by an explanation of how the parents of other children at sport yell at their children (e.g., to take certain positions on the field). The parent had stated that they asked the other parent not to yell, and was then yelled at herself. She reported the exchange as follows:

> **P17** …"We're only trying to support and encourage them!" I said "you're not, you're saying horrible things".
> **MA** That's pretty full on.
> **P17** Yeah, but it can't only happen to us. Cos there's signs now that you see at sports games now, this isn't an NRL[2] game…

As the interviewer, my response was not impartial. My assessment of her account as "full on" (i.e., an intense situation) effectively validated her account, and may have influenced the way in which her following statements unfolded.

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[2] NRL refers to Australia's national competition, the National Rugby League

In addition, the use of leading questions has the effect of limiting the response to the parameters set by the question, potentially rendering the data invalid (Ritchie et al., 2003). This is a mistake common in interview settings, particularly for the novice researcher who may defer to normative social “rules” of conversation once comfortable in the social setting. My interview technique improved with regard to this aspect in each successive interview.

Analysis is another aspect of the research process deserving of scrutiny with regard to reflexivity. Transcripts were read for evidence of broad societal discourses, and for discursive devices deployed by participants (as well as for topics of relevance to CRL). Scouring transcripts for evidence of societal discourses is a highly subjective process. Who is to say, for example, that the phrases which attracted my interest would attract the interest of others? The role that intuition plays in the analysis process is acknowledged by Wetherell and Potter (1988), who state that this is in fact a valuable aspect of qualitative research, as what is identified as a hunch can later develop into a meaningful piece of analysis for reasons which are unclear in the early stages. The constant revision of themes and coding meant that misguided hunches could be abandoned, “progressively leading to refined focus and understandings” (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 77).

Chapter Five

5. Results: Health and wellbeing discourses

The following sections include results of the analysis of participant interviews. Results are grouped and presented under three broad societal discourses presented in successive chapters: health and wellbeing; parental responsibility; and masculinity. Within these broad categories results are discussed by themes identified during analysis as significant or prevalent. Results are presented to make explicit the 'discursive work' being carried out by participants. This 'work', as described earlier, encompasses the overall efforts of people to present accounts as reasonable and is accomplished with the use of various devices. As well as the specific discursive features, analysis focuses on broader patters such as word-use, placement, and what is *not* said. What goes unspoken is said by Billig (2002) to be an important signifier of which discourses are accepted, which are contested, and which are considered taboo.

5.1 Physical activity

Physical good health is widely accepted as achieved (in part) through regular physical exercise, aspects of which also contribute to psychological and social wellbeing (Messner & Musto, 2016). Rugby league (RL), as a physical activity, and as a team sport, was spoken about by participants in various ways which relate to societal discourses around health and wellbeing. Physical activity was a frequently cited benefit of RL by parents. Sport is generally viewed as an ideal form of physical activity for children, upon whom increasingly sedentary lifestyles are forecast to confer major health risks in future (Sport New Zealand, 2016).

Across interviews, three particular aspects of parents' discussion about physical activity were apparent. First, physical activity was the most frequently mentioned benefit; no parent made claims that physical activity is anything other than beneficial for children. Second, its place within the narrative was frequently prominent, and third, it was often the least elaborated-on benefit of RL for children. Consequent to this last point, the lack of supporting talk around how or why physical activity is beneficial for children indicates that parents accept this notion as 'common knowledge', indicating a societal discourse that is strong. Access to physical activity was spoken of by parents as the key benefit from their child(ren)'s participation in RL, showing this aspect of children's lives as non-negotiable for parents.

Parents spoke approvingly of physical activity in terms of fitness, health, and the need to keep children active. The following parent stated the necessity of physical activity definitively:

> **MA** And you said before that kids should play sport, what do you reckon is so good about it? Why should people?
> **P14** Well just the exercise in general, I mean, obviously New Zealand's due to have an obesity epidemic. Isn't that because people don't get out and do stuff, so you know, there's that side of it.

The parent has responded to the question about the value of sport with "exercise in general". They went on to use the word "obviously" to preface their supporting point, which in addition to rendering contradiction socially difficult (for to rebut, one would have to openly contest the speaker's point), underwrites their following argument as one that is generally agreed as common knowledge. The invocation of common knowledge is a rhetorical device which functions to strengthen an account's factuality (Wiggins, 2017). In this case, if something is "obvious", the point needs no further explanation, in addition to this, the speaker is not responsible or accountable for items of discussion prefaced as such. The speaker reduces personal accountability again by locating the narrative outside of their own personal experience. The parent's discourse distances them from the issue by reporting 'someone else's' fact - NZ's looming obesity epidemic - one which is given even more credence for its medical overtones. In addition to the distancing devices, the use of a rhetorical question as an effective persuasive device serves to further reinforce and justify this parent's opinions about the value of sport to facilitate physical activity for children. By invoking a looming obesity epidemic as justification for having a child enrolled in RL, the parent displays intent for their child to maintain a healthy weight. In doing so they attend to the role of attentive caregiver, one who facilitates conditions for optimal physical health, thus acknowledging accountability for that aspect of child-rearing.

Another parent focussed less on the value of physical activity from sport, claiming only that it is "good physically for them" (children).

> **P15** …I think sport's great for children.
> **MA** So what is it about sport that you think is good, for kids, or for your child?
> **P15** Um, OK, I think physical, health, is important. Because it's good physically for them.

The lack of supporting evidence offered here, and above with the “exercise in general” comment, suggests that “physical activity” in itself is a valid enough description, and that no elaboration is required to defend the position: sport is assumed to be beneficial for children on one front because it allows them to access physical activity. The following extract is rather longer, and includes repeated instances linking participation in sport to physical health. The first example of which (see first underlined section) is mentioned as an aside.

> **MA** You mentioned before that your older son was a bit chubby when he was little, did you want to get [other son] out there for…
> **P7** Yeah- to keep fit. I mean my son’s lost a lot of weight now, cos he’s gotten taller, he’s like 6 foot. Towers over me. Um so he’s sort of thinned out quite a lot, but he still wants to go to the gym, to keep fit, cos he’s probably not as fit as what he could be, you know, if he played a sport.
> **MA** So you reckon [son] will get fit by playing league, is that one of the things you care about?
> **P7** Um, well mainly it’s the doctors that say it to you, you know. Like, oh, "you need to get your kids into a sport or something". Well our one does, down at [name] Health Centre. He’s quite um, he’s quite…I dunno, he goes on and on about smoking, he goes on and on about, your weight, and um, he says it in front of the kids, which I think is probably not that great. Because he’s told my son in front of him, oh “you’re too big”, you know, “you need to lose weight”, “you need to get fit”. And, I think it’s cos *his* kids play sports. So, I’ve just given up smoking, and I wanna try and lose weight too, so we’re trying to ‘push play’ a bit.

In the first underlined section sport is linked with physical fitness. When asked to elaborate on this, the parent relayed the words of the family doctor, who, in “going on and on” about weight is urging the family to be more active, with sport identified *by the doctor* as the way to do this. The parent used “reported speech” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 166), which as a discursive device boosts an account’s believability by virtue of distancing the speaker from the information being conveyed. This bolsters the factuality of the account by making the speaker appear neutral in the account. In this example, the speech reported is from a medical professional, and as such its message carries even more weight, further strengthening the account and the position of the parent that RL is the ‘right thing’ to do. Any actual or potential undermining of the parent’s decision to have their child participate in RL is easily countered by being seen to be acting on the advice of a doctor.

The account concluded with a declaration that the family has an aspiration for increased fitness, invoking the “Push Play” (Bauman et al., 2003) advertising campaign in the description. It is interesting to note that the colloquial use of this phrase is proof of the pervasiveness of the “Push Play” initiative, and that as such, it is assumed that no further explanation is needed. When relaying examples of their own health initiatives, the parent changed pronoun-use mid-sentence from “I”, to “we”, an act which serves to include the whole family in the push for increased fitness. Pronoun shifts “highlight the relationship between the speaker and the account they are providing” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 123); in this instance, this broadens the parameters of who could benefit from increased fitness, and infers a targeted family effort to do just that. Making fitness a family priority over an individual act affirms the commitment to follow the advice of the doctor, that is, to make healthy choices, one of which is to play sport.

In the previous extract, sport is reportedly viewed by the participant’s doctor as something the children need; sport as a requisite aspect of childhood is a prevalent theme within interview data, and a societal discourse that appears to go relatively unquestioned.

5.2 The ‘great sport myth’

Some parents described sport in passionate and enthusiastic terms and conveyed a determination that their child(ren) would participate, if not in RL then in another organised sport. Societal discourses on the value of sport are equally assured, with team sports in particular held in high regard not only for physical health benefits, but also for benefits perceived to optimise children’s development in a variety of realms including social, emotional, and educational (Coakley, 2015; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Team sports are particularly relevant because of their highly organised nature, which, in Western industrialised nations is valued as a supervised and scheduled activity that is seen as involving reduced risk to children (e.g., of injury or predator danger) (Ergler et al., 2013). The New Zealand government body Sport NZ speaks of sport’s un-specified benefits to the nation that are in need of fierce protection: “so, if we don’t act now, our sporting culture, and all of the benefits it provides to New Zealand and New Zealanders, could be lost” (Sport New Zealand, 2016, p. 13). This urgency reflects the notion of sport as vital for children, and indeed, the nation, and is part of the broader societal discourse referred to by sociologist of sport Jay Coakley as the “great sport myth” (Coakley, 2015, p. 402); that is, the notion that sport is unquestionably beneficial to children who participate.

Parents reinforced ‘the great sport myth’ in the ways they discussed how RL benefitted their child(ren). The following parent showed a firm commitment to sport for their son, even though the child himself displayed little interest in sport.

> **P15** Um, for me it wouldn’t matter what sport it was, it was just him being involved in a team sport, because [son]’s not naturally a sporty person, it’s not an interest of his, um, he this year he’s kind of, as he’s gotten on he’s liking sport a bit more but definitely back then he would much rather be at home on Playstation or technology. So for me, personally, it was getting him out there, one for a team environment, and two sport, cos I think sport’s great for children.

In the extract the parent described a personal feeling that sport is “great for children”, and conveyed with a sense of urgency that their son be “involved”, in any type of team sport. The parent attended to their own accountability by providing an alternative for how time could be spent, i.e., that their son would “rather be… on Playstation”. Video gaming is a pastime widely regarded as unsuitable for children and has been shown to excite societal fear about increases in youth violence as a result of violence in games (Tavinor, 2007; Thompson, 1998). Declaring screen time as an alternative effectively justifies the act of having the child participate in an activity he reportedly has no interest in. The benefits from sport, however ill-defined, supersede any problems arising from their son’s disinterest in sport, and are presented as acceptable given the alternative.

Other parents spoke with certainty, yet in rather vague ways, about the importance of sport for children. One mother stated she wanted her youngest child to be involved in sport, as her older children are: “it’s a high priority for us, to have our children in sport. Whatever it may be, it doesn’t have to be rugby” (P9). The value to parents of organised sport as a scheduled and supervised (physical) activity was often in its perceived ability to simply keep their child(ren) occupied. Parents phrased this in a variety of ways, including valuing sport to: get children doing something (often paired with the less attractive alternative of “sitting around doing nothing” (P16)), keep children busy, keep children out of trouble/off the streets, and, to prevent children overusing screens/technology. In this sense, the sport itself was framed as less important than the scheduled and supervised nature of it. Parents inferred that wellbeing of children is at stake if their time is not used productively.

The following extract is from a parent who speculated about children’s outcomes it they were not participating in organised sport.

> **P8** I’ve just always believed that kids should be in sport, cos, I think it keeps them out of trouble. I dunno. I was a social worker so I just, you know, you know the old saying ‘kids in sport stay out of trouble’, I do believe that. [….] Something to do, and keeping them active, and you know, not lazing around sort of with nothing to do. And as they grow older too, you know, they’ve got training twice a week and, then they’ve got the game on the Saturday. It sort of keeps them occupied, you know?

The parent spoke of the types of occupations that children (in general) might engage in if it weren’t for sport. These ranged from “lazing around”, with its pejorative connotations, to the suggestion that children might engage in illegal activities if their time is unstructured (the reference to the axiom ‘kids in sport stay out of court’ evokes this notion). The idea that children should engage in structured activities is prevalent in Western societies where, it is posited, societal values are heavily influenced by Protestantism which promotes beliefs around the importance of productivity and the development of a strong work ethic (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2011). A discourse running counter to this also exists, that freedom and free play are not only beneficial to children, but are a right of childhood (Barnes, 2006; Gray, 2013). While many parents in the present study approved of children having fun, the idea of allowing their own children freedoms was rather limited, for example, children having freedom to roam about their neighbourhoods received little approval.

Parents who co-opted the 'great sport myth' discourse did so with faith in the ability of sport to prevent a range of perceived societal ills that often went unnamed. Such faith is referred to by sport sociologist Jay Coakley as a type of religious fervour with his use of the phrase "sports evangelist" (Coakley, 2011, p. 306). Indeed, many parents were unable to describe in any great detail the benefits of sport for their child(ren), yet spoke of sport in ways which elevated it in this way. The following extract summarises most aspects of the 'great sport myth' well. The parent was asked why they enrolled their child in RL. In response, they provided a list, employing a variety of discursive devices which work to strengthen their main point, that team sport is good for children.

> **P21** …Um, general fitness, general everyday life you've gotta be part of a team. It's not "me, me, me, I, I, I" like people like to think it is. Working in a team environment- you're not going to get anywhere in the world- and sport is the key to opening up the door. Educating our children on working collaboratively with one another.

The list includes many ideas presented in quick succession. The participant made partial use of proverbs ("not going to get anywhere in the world-"), axioms ("sport is the key to opening the door"; to what, is left unstated), and dictums ("you've gotta be part of a team"). Such clichés in effect co-opt discourses that are assumed to be collectively known; these are referred to in the discursive psychology (DP) literature as "commonplaces" (Billig, 2002, p. 141). Commonplaces are an effective rhetorical device which, by virtue of being assumed to be known, require little justification or explanation. The participant displayed such comfortable use of commonplaces that they are frequently left incomplete, with talk moving on quickly to the next partially complete idea. In doing so, they assumed the listener privy to a shared or common knowledge, presented here as self-evident.

In this instance, teamwork is the emphasised benefit of sport and RL, yet the extent to which this account (and others) can be said to represent any complex thought process is doubtful. Underpinning this analysis is the examination of talk as primarily a social act, with the assumption that talk is at all times performing certain functions (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). The discursive action model (DAM) highlights this aspect of talk with its emphasis on talk as action (over cognition). The participant has drawn on a series of “culturally available repertoires” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 10) which are described as sets of ways of speaking about topics, ways which go largely unchallenged within social groups of a similar nature.

The use of culturally available repertoires effectively convey the participant’s faith in sport generally. That, alongside other references to the ‘great sport myth’, provides evidence that the societal discourse of sport as beneficial for children is widely accepted.

5.3 Friendships and social connections

The previous extracts highlighted parents’ stated belief in the ability of sport to confer on their child(ren) a variety of broad benefits. Many parents reported the view that RL is beneficial specifically to facilitate friendships and social connections amongst children, cited in the literature as a vital component of child wellbeing (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). In many cases, parents viewed RL as a way for their child(ren) to expand social networks; in some cases RL was identified as useful where friendships were in some way difficult for their child to obtain or maintain. The ways in which parents talked about this topic ranged from explicit reference to the value of social connections through RL friendships to meet certain ends (such as to reduce the child’s vulnerability to bullying, or to foster an ability to work within a team), to statements which inferred that child(ren) are generally better off with more social connections.

Positive appraisals of team sport were ubiquitous throughout the interview data. Almost all parents spoke of the value of team sport or of RL teaching their children teamwork. The precise value of teamwork was rarely explicated; rather, the idea that it is good (sometimes specifically for boys) to be part of a team was frequently stated in simple terms and in most cases was listed amongst other aspects that were considered beneficial for children. The following parent linked team sport with the instilment of values, but did not articulate exactly how this connection is made.

> **MA**…what kinds of things do you think he gets out of playing league, things that are good for him?
> **P14** (pause) Me personally, I try and steer him towards the moral side of it, like being part of a team, and all the rest of it. That kind of- installing that kind of values, um, (pause).

The words display an intent (“I try and steer”) to help the child develop in ways which are deemed appropriate; however, attempts to explain how this will occur stall and “being part of a team and all the rest of it” are assumed to lead to the acquisition of morals and values. This participant is unique in that they made an attempt to define of the value of teamwork, most discussion of the value of teamwork simply associated it with learning to ‘get along’ with others, supporting and being supported by others, and concepts of camaraderie and commitment.

Friendship was raised as a specific benefit of RL by some parents. In the following extract the parent was asked about other benefits to their child from playing RL. Previously they had mentioned RL and general motor skills, and in this extract they subtly noted the importance to them of their child having friends.

> **P11** Um he’s broadened his friend base, so, meeting new people. Not just being stuck in a small country town and having a small group of friends, opened up doors.

This parent reported that they value their child having a lot of social connections, the small town in which they live is positioned as a factor limiting their son’s opportunity for social interactions. “New people” are deemed important for the child, as was the case with many parents, who consistently reported this as a desired outcome of RL. The importance of children having social connections in addition to those they had through school was reported in various ways, with the emphasis clearly on the notion that more social connections was equated with better outcomes.

In the following account, the parent based their account in the presumed reality of personal experience, the effect of which is to defend the position that sport is good for her son. Prior to this extract the participant had talked about wanting her children to play sport because she “found that the popular ones were the ones that played sport".

> **P7**...When I lived in the North Island, coming from there, it was a little town, I used to play netball and all that, and we found we were quite popular there, and then we come to the city, and, yeah, I was like, classed in the special needs class…(obscured)…so I was in the lower class to everyone else, I moved up one class and I found that I had to work hard! (laughs.) So I was sort of in between. Yeah, so they used to go, “urgh, you’re in the special needs class”. They were always quite mean, and I just thought, oh, maybe it’s because…
> **MA** …you’re not in with those groups?
> **P7** Yeah, not…I’m easy going. I’m easy to talk to and I do make friends, but…I made friends with my neighbour, but now she’s gone. Um, yeah, so like (pause)
> **MA** So you reckon that if [child] has sport, he might have confidence?
> **P7** Yeah yeah, and be more outgoing. My oldest boy has got a few good friends but he doesn’t really hang out with them outside of school. My daughter, she doesn’t have any friends, she says she’s got friends at school, but she never, goes and hangs out with them in the weekends or anything like that.

The extract relies heavily on descriptions of the participant’s personal experience of sport, which is attributed with enabling her to make friends. She recalled her own childhood, linking her experience of being bullied to her lack of participation in sport- this is contrasted with the recollection that she was not bullied at her prior school, where she did play a sport. She then went on to describe her older children's lack of friendships, who, as she had earlier explained, were not involved in sport.

The inference is that sport facilitates peer acceptance, and ultimately friendships. In the explanation, the participant has deployed a discursive device, referred to in DP literature as "description as attribution" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 104). The device is one in which descriptions are used to accomplish a range of social actions, in this case relating to the causal relationship between playing sport and having friends. The participant attributed children's ability to form and retain friendships with their participation in sport; in doing so she accomplished several things. First, she avoids raising the sensitive issue of what other potential factors may be preventing her children from making friends. Second, she has demonstrated that, in her intention to facilitate sport participation for her younger son, his outcomes will be better than those of her other children, thus she demonstrates she has learned from personal experience, and in addition, attends to her role as parent. The participant's youngest child, by playing RL, is assumed to be able to avoid the problems faced by his siblings.

It is widely accepted in society and in scientific literature that children with friends are socially and developmentally better off (Berndt, 2002). Sport, in particular team sport, is said to be viewed by parents to increase social networks for children, and is valued for its potential to facilitate friendships (Neely & Holt, 2014; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Participants' accounts upheld the societal discourse that children need social connections, with discussion predominantly centred on the assumption that, for children, more social connections, and connections across different groups, are valuable.

Concomitant with the notion that children will meet new people through RL is the notion that this exposure includes people unknown to parents. It was evident from the interviews that very few parents raised concerns about their children associating with children they deemed unsuitable. Given the association RL has with lower socioeconomic groups and the representation of these groups in violence (including domestic) (APA, 2019), and crime statistics (Young, 2012), it cannot be ruled out that some young RL players may come from potentially troubled family situations. One parent alone expressed overt concern about the RL culture, she was the mother of a child who had ceased playing RL because she (the parent) had found aspects of RL culture abhorrent. She spoke disapprovingly of parents of young players from opposing teams allegedly smoking marijuana in cars, of abusing children verbally and physically (for poor play, or crying), and of the "rowdy, alcohol oriented" (P20) atmosphere at her child's club. Prior to the following extract, I had summarised her previous points about dislike of the 'win at all costs' mentality she claimed RL operated with.

> **MA** …Was that the only thing about league that you didn't like?
> **P20** Um, and the culture. Um, in the club. It was very sort of rowdy, alcohol orientated. Um, we're not into that as a family really. Like I'll have a drink, absolutely, but, yeah. Um the other things is that the parents in the league, like a lot of the parents like, would quite openly give their children hidings on the sideline, or be yelling, you know, crap on the sidelines, um, it was a different environment- it was a real eye-opener.

The account begins with expressions of disapproval of the culture at the club her son played for, and goes on to extend this disapproval to RL parents in general. Her account is constructed in such a way to enhance the reasonable nature of it; she made it clear that she is no moraliser ("I'll have a drink, absolutely") while also disapproving of the drinking culture and condemning the illegal activities she had witnessed (she went on to state that she disagrees "with all that"). Later in the interview the participant contrasted the cultures at RL and rugby union, surmising that RL is rougher and tougher, and that this was not to her liking. She concluded that "with rugby [union], I guess the people are just (pause) different. So I guess rugby [union] would probably definitely suit us better." The participant attributed her dislike of the RL culture to its people, the behaviour of which she is clearly not familiar or comfortable with, as evidenced with the comment "it was a real eye-opener".

5.4 Conclusion

Health and wellbeing discourses were prevalent in the interview data, with parents frequently invoking notions of their children's physical and social wellbeing in discussion about their participation in RL. Parents valued RL, and sport generally, for its perceived ability to improve children's fitness and health, and for its social benefits to children. It is not surprising that aspects of parent's talk conveyed a sense of responsibility over children's wellbeing, this theme is presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

6. Results: Parenting discourses

Responsible parenting discourses in Western industrialised nations primarily refer to those which see the needs of the child prioritised (Daly, 2001). Intensive parenting practices, as outlined earlier, comprise many of the dominant parenting discourses. Intensive parenting has been linked in the literature with increased participation in organised sport (Neely & Holt, 2014). Organised sport, such as rugby league (RL), is supposed to meet intensive parenting expectations because: it has tangible benefits to children; it is a supervised activity so children are assumed to be safe; it has educative aspects; and, it fulfils the expectation that time and money spent on children equates to better outcomes. Sport is widely regarded, both in society and in academic literature, as beneficial for children in that participation results in a range of positive developmental outcomes.

In the extracts discussed earlier, as well as in the following extracts, parents displayed faith that sport will confer on their children traits that will contribute to optimal developmental outcomes. Discussion of such can be linked to societal discourses of responsible, ideal, or 'good', parenting. Although participants rarely approached the topic of good parenting directly, they frequently spoke in ways which invoked notions of what it means to be a good or bad parent. Analysis of such talk within discursive psychological and discursive action model (DAM) frameworks makes explicit the ways in which positive accounts of children, including their activities and achievements, contributes to the positioning of parents as responsible, and therefore 'good'.

6.1 Safety and injuries

Given that children's safety is a primary concern for parents, the topic of keeping children safe is particularly relevant to discourses of parental responsibility. And, given the culture of risk and blame that surrounds parenting (Jenkins, 2006; Mainland et al., 2016), it is no surprise that participants' responses carefully navigated this aspect of their child's participation in RL.

In the following example the participant described a foot injury his son sustained during a training session, and its diagnosis.

> **P19** Yeah, I had to learn from [child's] broken foot. When it was (laugh) a real deal, actually! I felt really bad, he was walking across the whole field like right now, and the next day I was taking him to the doctor and then the doctor's "ah, I think it's a bruise as well" and then the x-ray proves that he's got a broken foot and I feel like the worst dad in the world (laughs).
> **MA** You were like, "you'll be right, you'll be right!"
> **P19** Yeah, "shake it off mate, you'll be fine"- and this is what happens. Um, but all credit to [child], he kinda like didn't use that again after that. Yeah, he'll still kinda like get knocked and he'll have a, a little bit of a cry here and there, but it wasn't nearly as much as what it started with previously that season, so.

Aspects of this extract attend carefully, yet subtly, to the participant's role as parent, and the caregiving characteristics associated with that role. The discursively significant feature which best represents this is the participant's reference to the words of the doctor. As noted earlier, quoting a medical professional is itself a device which lends authority and factuality to an account; in addition, invoking the doctor also meets the expectations of intensive parenting styles to involve experts in the upbringing of children. That the doctor in this extract is reported to have stated "I think it's a bruise as well" is significant for the underlined words. These words mark the parent's own assessment of the injury as professionally validated. The parent has effectively conveyed, without saying so directly, that his failure to seek medical attention sooner was a reasonable act given that a doctor also mistook it for a bruise (an injury not usually requiring medical attention). In spite of his son ultimately being diagnosed with a broken foot, the participant's positioning of themselves as a responsible parent is evident.

The participant is one of the few who talked about good or bad parenting directly. When the participant stated he felt like the "worst dad in the world", he effectively acknowledged that leaving a broken bone unattended goes against the precepts of responsible parenting. It is noteworthy to add that this was admitted only once it had been made clear that a doctor did not diagnose it immediately either. In concluding the account about the injury, the participant reframed the episode as a learning experience when he constructed it as having the positive outcome of teaching his son about situations in which is it appropriate to cry, again positioning himself firmly as a responsible parent (as well as adhering to gendered norms of the expression of emotion).

There were very few participants whose children had sustained injuries at RL, consequently talk on this topic was mostly about the potential for injuries to occur. In this context, head injuries were the injury-type most frequently raised and, interestingly, talk often immediately defaulted to the topic of protective headwear, known as headgear. Talk of injury in general appeared in many cases to elicit a response including the word headgear. This is a significant feature of the discourse in that it both marks the way that contact tackle sport is viewed in society (i.e., as carrying a high risk of head injury), and as a discursively robust response to any potential or perceived accusations of recklessness on their part in placing their child(ren) in a situation in which they may receive a head injury. For, in evoking the concept of headgear parents effectively demonstrated an awareness of risk, and offered a solution to it. The potential for injury (when acknowledged) was almost always mitigated in ways like this.

Alongside talk of protective-wear to reduce the potential for injury, parents also spoke in ways that diminished or minimised the risk of injury. They did this in a number of ways: by stating that risks were acceptable given the benefits of RL to children; by evoking the notion that risk is an important feature of, or inherent in, childhood; and, by reporting that the risks of injuries to children from RL were minimal or non-existent.

The key here is that the participants who discussed the risk of RL injuries to their child(ren) all attended to their own accountability. The DAM views accountability as related to attribution and responsibility but, more importantly, it focuses on how the construction of a version of events implies responsibility (Potter et al., 1993). In the extracts and examples cited in relation to injuries so far, parents' accounts suggest that if an injury should occur, they cannot be held responsible as they have either taken practicable steps to mitigate injuries (e.g., with the use of headgear), or have considered the risks and deemed them acceptable/minimal enough to be insignificant. In either instance, they have attended to the duty of care that is implicit in a parenting role.

Several parents actually emphasised their status as parents when explaining concerns about their child(ren) sustaining an injury at RL. In aligning themselves with the particular role of 'parent', participants evoked the traits associated with that role and in doing so addressed accountability. This is referred to in the DP literature with reference to role and trait talk (Edwards & Potter, 1992); it involves the description of actions as naturally occurring for anybody who can claim to be in that role.

> **P1** Yeah. So I think enrolling him in RL was probably a good outcome for him. I kind of was a bit nervous, you know he's my baby, and he's quite young and, but, sometimes as a parent you just have to let them go. To certain levels, you know…
> **MA** What were you nervous about?
> **P1** Him getting hurt [definitively].

In this extract, the parent explained the fear that their son will be hurt at RL. They used their role as a parent to justify putting their child in a situation in which they may be injured, inferring that this group of people (parents) must allow their children to do this as a natural aspect of their role. By framing the action taken as something parents necessarily must do (using the imperative "have to"), the participant becomes less accountable in the event of an injury occurring, and any injuries that do occur can be attributed to a source outside of the parent's control. The following parent highlighted their 'pre-school teacher' role when talking about RL injuries, and in doing so made relevant the traits associated with that role in their description.

> **P21** I guess it's the pre-school teacher in me, that you can't wrap your child up in cotton wool. Um, you can trip over your shoelaces and injure yourself in the carpark, in the middle of the playground or something like that. You can't protect your child 24/7.

The core function of a pre-school teacher is to care for young children. Speaking as a pre-school teacher, with its protective connotations towards children, the participant constructed themselves as someone entitled to know about risk- someone perhaps even more knowledgeable on the topic than a parent. In doing so, they set up their following statements as valid, and so successfully circumvented any potential accusations of recklessness in allowing their child to participate in RL. Risks are further minimised in the account by providing examples of innocuous situations in which children may become injured (i.e., in a car park) and the *reductio ad absurdum* argument that it is impossible to protect children from risks; an argument that is difficult to refute. The *reductio ad absurdum* argument deflects attention from the issue of whether or not it is reasonable, so far as predictable risks are concerned, to have a child participate in an activity known to potentially result in injury.

To emphasise the inevitability of risk to children of injury, the participant above has drawn on an "interpretative repertoire" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.149), one seen repeatedly in the data. Interpretative repertoires are identified by the recurrence of recognisable themes, patterns or terms in language. Consistent with one aspect of interpretative repertoires, this participant (as others did) arranged their repertoire around a trope: the notion of wrapping children in cotton wool. The cotton wool trope refers to an over-protective style of parenting characterised as both descriptive of the inevitability of risk in childhood, and as developmentally restrictive for children (Jenkins, 2006). Parent's use of or reference to the trope attended to their role as responsible parents, co-opting the societal discourse that children need exposure to risk to learn how to manage it. This societal discourse competes with another, which states that children must be protected from predictable risk.

The complexity for parents in navigating these competing discourses was made explicit by one participant who used the cotton wool trope to justify her son's participation in RL, and who then immediately went on to describe how her other child would be kept home from school to protect an injured arm. The participant acknowledged her own apparent contradiction, saying "so, yeah, keeping her off school and, wrapping in cotton wool after I just said that! (laughter)" (P21). It is a common feature of discourse that support can be given to opposing views even within the same narrative. Contradictions are consistent with core tenets of DP which conceptualise talk as the place where psychology is played out (Potter, 2012a).This example is also consistent with the DP principle that personal accounts are characterised by inconsistencies because people relay different versions of events "as the communication situation changes" (Wetherell, 2003, p. 289).

Potential contradictions can be managed in a variety of ways, one of which is to justify decisions or actions. A legitimate course of action in this regard is to examine one's own personal history for experiences that can help guide parenting behaviour. Parents' own relationship with sport or RL was frequently raised in discussion about children's participation.

6.2 Parents' relationship with sport or rugby league

The ways in which parents described their own relationship with sport and RL in some cases alluded to societal discourses of parental responsibility. Parents sometimes liked, loved, or disliked sport or RL, and were sometimes indifferent about sport. Research has shown that both parental support and parent's own participation impact on young children's participation in organised sport (Edwardson & Gorely, 2010; Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011); however, there is little research on how parents' personal enjoyment (or other) of organised sport influences children's participation.

For those who had no particular affinity with sport or RL in general, or who stated they found aspects of their child's participation in it personally unpleasant or inconvenient, descriptions of the benefits of RL for their children can be viewed as subtle positioning which orients themselves as a good parent. This is on the basis that they are acting selflessly, selflessness being a tenet of intensive parenting. The clearest example of this came from a mother of two boys, both of whom play RL.

> **P1** I get sick of it. I do get sick of it, when you're in an all-male household and you're the only female and, all you see is sport on the TV, and you're kind of- over it. And you've got rugby boots hanging around outside all the time and you're tripping up over the- But for me it's for the love of the kids. It's for them I'm doing this, it's not how I'd like to choose my time.

This mother describes RL as of no interest to her, but states directly that her involvement is strictly for the sake of the children. To argue her point, she uses, amongst other discursive devices, "extreme case formulation(s)" (Pomerantz, 1986, p. 219) (see underlined sections). This discursive device emphasises the pervasiveness of RL in the mother's life. The extent to which RL is enmeshed in her life is then contrasted with how much she dislikes it personally, thus amplifying that aspect and positioning herself firmly within the selfless mother discourse. Additionally, talk of this nature deflects responsibility since it removes any notions of self-interest on the part of the mother.

The selfless parent discourse also arose when parents referenced *their* parents' commitment to their own sport as children, which was frequently associated with the fulfilment of duty, again a key characteristic of the good parent. The following parent had earlier questioned the utility of "standing there at half past 8 in the morning and it's drizzling, cold, and they're out there in t-shirts piling on top of one each other in the mud and shit" (P14).

> **MA** So you think it's worth it? It's worth all the hassles?
> **P14** Absolutely, and it's for them, and my parents did it for me, as a child, so it's only natural that I will do that. I dunno, maybe I subconsciously know what I got out of it as a child. And just hope that they're getting the same things whether they tell us or not. I dunno.

In this instance, the parent's account begins with certainty that RL is beneficial for the child, with their own role in this process framed as fulfilling a parental obligation, a role that "my parents did… for me". Their talk aligns with discourses of conformity, where it is considered 'natural' to continue with parenting practices they experienced as a child. However, adherence to conformity discourses was quickly followed by uncertainty about what the quantifiable benefits from sport (for the parent) were, and what they are for the child. They surmised that although not immediately apparent, benefits will become evident as the child develops. The faith this parent displayed in sport being beneficial for their son, although tentative, positions their talk within the selfless parent discourse and again indicates the near-universal acceptance of the great sport myth, described earlier.

Participants, when asked about their own relationship with sport, sometimes gave negative appraisals of their parents' involvement in their sport. One participant lamented her parents' lack of emphasis on sport, stating "…my parents weren't sporty. They never pushed me, sadly." (P9). The phrasing indicates that for this participant, both sport and encouragement are important for children. Interestingly, this is the same participant (quoted earlier) who indicated that for her family (i.e., children), sport is a high priority. This pattern of discourse speaks to the issue of parental responsibility because the parent identified a perceived flaw in the way *she* was parented, and later in her narrative, her and her husband's approach to parenting demonstrates a commitment to remedy that with their own children. Their commitment to sport is a concerted effort to provide for their children in ways they were denied, and they anticipated that sport is an activity in which their children can develop and/or thrive.

The following parent discussed their own childhood sport participation in a similar context, stating that more support would have been appreciated.

> **P11** …I had to make my own way there, and from that age on, I had to- well I did, get there off my own back. I mean, dad never really put much effort in…so I sort of thought well, if the kids wanted to do something, I'd let them do it. But it's getting to the stage now where you can't do everything. (**MA** Yeah.) Um and yeah, we need to have some time for mum and dad, you know, away from sport.

The parent struggled to define the appropriate amount of time to devote to their child's sport, acknowledging "you can't do everything". Previous discussion had been about persuading their son to choose basketball over athletics, as the latter activity took place over a 6 hour period, whereas basketball was "nice and easy". It is noteworthy that this family drove a 150km return trip to get their child to RL trainings and matches throughout the RL season during which the research took place. Based on the lengthy commute to RL, and the other sports the child is interested in, the parent expressed the view that there needs to be a balance between sport and other family activities.

Scheduling was a concern for a number of parents. Several parents acknowledged that after school activities took time and organisation to facilitate, particularly in the instance where the household had more than one child.

> **P17** I don't particularly enjoy going into Hornby for practice two times a week cos I've got two other children, to get elsewhere, and I've got a part time job, and tea to get ready.
>
> **P8** Ah, its, it is a long way, 'specially cos training's at 5 o'clock, rush hour. But it's worth it, in my mind it's worth it. Whereas Addington was literally just 5 minutes down the road, so it was a bit of a effort, but (pause). It's worth it (pause).

Parents signalled their commitment to RL and its benefits to children in spite of scheduling difficulties and organisation requirements. They highlighted that their lives are busy, and there are competing commitments, particularly when the family has more than one child. Parents sometimes simply noted the busyness participation in RL involved, inferring that the inconvenience was worth it; others were emphatic that the benefits outweigh whatever demand is placed on parents. This is consistent with social scientific research on parents' experiences of facilitating sport for children, as reflected in the title of Wiersma and Fifer (2008) paper, "The schedule has been tough but we think it's worth it".

6.3 Developmental outcomes

Parenting styles prevalent in Western post-industrial nations are understood to include a moral obligation to actively support children's development (Mainland et al., 2016). This is often viewed as achieved through enrolment in educative situations in which children can acquire skills or traits that will be beneficial to them as adults, particularly by the middle classes. Scientific literature cites various positive developmental outcomes for children who participate in sport, across a number of realms including confidence, competence, connectedness, emotional regulation, self-esteem and mental health (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). Parental perceptions of the benefits of sport for children are likewise reported in social scientific literature as being of a physical, personal and social nature (Neely & Holt, 2014; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). Participants in the present study regularly cited benefits of sport for their children in ways consistent with those cited in the literature.

Parents frequently spoke of RL in terms of its ability to foster optimal developmental outcomes for their child(ren). These included, in order of most prevalent: fostering abilities in children to work as part of a team; increasing children's confidence; helping with the acquisition of or improvements to motor skills; as a place where children can be encouraged to reach their potential; and, teaching children sportsmanship (i.e., the ability to accept losses gracefully and/or be a 'good' winner). Note that although any of these aspects could be explored in depth here, topics of discursive and parenting significance have been prioritised. Positive developmental outcomes of RL were discussed in ways which, because of their desirable nature, positioned the parents as responsible or good parents by way of having facilitated them (through the child's participation in RL).

A large proportion of parents highlighted that their child(ren) having fun was an important aspect of their participation in RL. In the following extract, the parent stresses that fun is essential for the youngest RL players (whose grade is referred to as 'nursery' and is for players around 4 years of age), they imply that fun enables the team to function.

> **P18** It has to be fun, and that's what [coach] always aimed for, that every game was going to be fun regardless, I mean it's not a competition for nursery. But like, every game they'd warm up and they'd be dancing, like they'd just be having fun. […] It just needed to be for nursery.

Another parent more explicitly linked fun with reduced attrition rates in RL. Just prior to the following extract, the parent had talked about how many children seem to leave the sport, a consequence, they reported, of children not enjoying themselves. The participant viewed fun as the factor encouraging children to remain with a sport, thus enabling them to gain various benefits from it.

> **P17** It's all about the kids just enjoying themselves. That's what it is, it's about the kids going out there being part of something bigger than them so that when they're an adult they will get up, and they will join a club, and they will be part of something. Whatever it be.

Note that the parent went on to state that participation will result in the desirable outcome of an adult who is engaged with their community. The value to parents of linking fun, which can be viewed as frivolous (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2011), with developmental outcomes of a more substantive nature is that it positions their talk within societal discourses of productive and responsible parenting, values consistent with dominant parenting discourses. The same parent went on to describe in passionate terms how much their son enjoyed RL.

> **P17** …But, seeing [him] play that first game, it was a tournament, he just came alive. He just loved it. He was so happy. He just enjoyed it, he just *really* enjoyed it, and I thought, this is his thing. We've *gotta* support this, and so whatever he wants to do, I'll support him. It just made him *so* happy, and I though this is just fantastic. And so from then on he just played.

There is repeated emphasis on how much the child enjoys RL (see underlined sections). Effusive accounts in praise of RL are significant as immediate pieces of discursive work which function to deflect questions of accountability over decisions made about their child's participation. 'Work' in this context refers to the primary component of the DAM, that is, action. As noted previously, the DAM conceptualises talk as a social action, completely distinct from cognitive conceptualisations of talk as representative of internal psychological processes (Potter et al., 1993). With respect to the DAM, the account can be viewed as constructed in a certain way which conveys a certain impression, namely, that RL is the ideal sport for the child. Regarding the remaining two aspects of the DAM, the enthusiastic praise of RL is organised rhetorically and carries with it heavy implications that to deny the child such heights of enjoyment would be detrimental to him. Thus, the account effectively undermines any alternatives (such as the child not participating in RL), and affirms the parents' choice to have their child play.

Analysis of the previous two extracts in sequence reveals that the initial extract sets up the importance of fun for children, while the following extract (which occurred fourteen minutes after the first) went on to fulfil this- further affirming the parent's course of action regards to RL. The interval between these two extracts produced other examples of the participant stating how much other children in the family enjoyed their respective sports. This participant's exuberant account of their child's enjoyment of RL was delivered passionately and with repetition. These features, as well as those mentioned previously, place the account within broader societal discourses around parenting.

Parents' accounts in some cases positioned them within discourses of parental responsibility that align with what other authors have argued to be class-based discourses. For example, some co-opted the societal discourse that children need to be allowed to ‘just be children’. Allowing children to ‘just be children’ is, according to values reportedly associated with working class families, an integral component of responsible parenting (Halldén, 1991). Other accounts were consistent with middle class discourses of intensive parenting, where parents are viewed as necessary facilitators in fostering children’s development and potential. Such discourses reflect the notion that children’s talents require cultivation in order to optimise developmental outcomes (Lareau, 2011). One component of this is evident in parents’ accounts of supporting/pushing children to meet certain goals.

One parent stated in relation to RL that “they just really enjoy it, they just love it” (P16). This person went on to relate their son’s enjoyment of RL to their own role as a parent: “So I’ll push them where I can push them.” Another parent was more explicit in how they set goals for their child.

> **P19** I said to him, “son do you wanna play league this season?” He says “yep.” I say “why do you wanna play league, what’s your goals? What do you wanna do?” He goes “I wanna be a professional league player.” (laughs kindly). “That’s what you wanna do?” I says, “OK. But to do that you’ve gotta get quicker, you’ve gotta get faster, and a lot more involved.” And he goes, “OK”. I said, “your skills, you’ve gotta get better at all that.” And all the rest of it, and so, what that meant was we started to plan what that could look like…

The parent went on to outline a training schedule involving the parent and 8 year-old child going for early morning runs, increasing in length and intensity to 2 kilometres. The runs were reported as “just supporting him” to reach the child’s stated goal of becoming a professional RL player. The parent introduced the notion of goal-setting for and with their child, to encourage him strive to reach it. This type of concerted cultivation speaks to discourses of intensive parenting, where parents are viewed as necessary facilitators in fostering children’s potential.

6.4 Conclusion

Parents talk was permeated with subtle and overt acknowledgements that they feel a sense of responsibility for their child(ren)’s wellbeing. Protection from injuries, exposing children to the ‘correct’ amount of risk, fostering opportunities for children to acquire skills, and providing children good experiences through RL were all of concern for parents. Decisions around RL made by parents on behalf of children were justified with reference to operative discourses, including masculinity discourses, discussed next.

Chapter Seven

7. Results: Masculinity discourses

Discourses around ruby league (RL) are strongly associated with masculinity, in particular, RL (and other rugby codes) as the setting for the performance of emotional or physical toughness can be said to reinforce hegemonic forms of masculinity (Hutchins & Mikosza, 1998; Pringle, 2001, 2004). Because of the physical nature of the sport, the discourse of RL players as ‘rough’, ‘tough’, and ‘manly’ persists in spite of the violence that characterised the game in the past no longer being sanctioned (Hutchins & Mikosza, 1998). Parents reinforced this societal discourse with discussion of how their child(ren) learned to ‘take the knocks’ in RL.

Participant discussion centred on RL teaching children, both boys and girls, personal physical limits that fell on a continuum from general resilience (e.g., to knocks or bumps), through to the sport conferring on children traits typically recognised as masculine, such as toughness, aggression, and emotional detachment (Pringle, 2001). Although both boys and girls were talked of as benefitting from increased resilience from RL, boys were far more likely to be talked about in ways which invoked masculine discourses. Both mothers and fathers saw benefit in their child(ren) acquiring an unspecified requisite amount of ‘toughness’.

7.1 Rugby league to toughen children up

Parents frequently talked about RL resulting in their child(ren) becoming tougher, or more robust. In the first extract a parent described resilience as one of the benefits of RL for their son:

> **P15** I also think, without saying being tough, but, obviously they learn resilience. Because they’re taking these- so maybe a little fall over or something, a trip over in the past, would have been tantrum crying, everything under the sun, they actually get used to it, they build up a resilience.

In the first part of the account, the participant attempted to avoid the concept of toughness (“without saying being tough”). This is significant as, discursively, the reticence is an acknowledgement that toughness in children is not necessarily a desired trait. Note that there is no single phrase which indicates a disclaimer is being put to use; in this instance, the participant stated "without saying being tough" which immediately marks out the following words as relating to toughness.

The participant's reluctant use of the word tough is tempered by the phrases either side of it. That is, "I…think", which introduced the topic tentatively, and the use of a related but far less controversial concept (resilience) that follows; both actively soften the impact. This hedging is a discursive device which, in this case, serves to mitigate the risk of the parent being viewed as someone who raises their child to be tough (Wiggins, 2017).

Use of the word "obviously" in the underlined section presents resilience as a natural, and therefore difficult to dispute, outcome of RL. Use of this word also obfuscates cases to the contrary, such as that RL might also "obviously" engender fear of injury (to state such a view, one would need to directly contradict the speaker). In addition, resilience is a generally positive yet vague concept, and as such lacks any specific qualities that enable it to be undermined as something one would desire for their child. This phrasing attends to the parenting choice of that parent to enrol their child in RL. With resilience presented as both a beneficial trait, and as a natural outcome of RL; the parent - the person who facilitated the child's participation in RL – is positioned as a person who has made a good choice, one resulting in that particular desirable trait being conferred on their child. Many parents spoke of resilience as a desirable trait available through RL. The participant went on to bolster their account with an example of how their son had previously reacted to physical pain/contact; it is strongly implied that he had changed for the better since playing RL and that now that he is "used to it" he does not respond in a way this parent would view as emotionally over-reactive. Indeed, the issue of crying frequently arose alongside parent's discourse about resilience, most often in the context of parents admiring RL as a practice in which their sons learn gendered notions about the appropriateness of (not) crying in different situations.

Other accounts were more explicit in their view of toughness as a beneficial aspect of RL. In the following extract, the participant began by describing their son's receipt of a "hard tackle". They went on to say:

> **P7** But he got up and he was fine, I was actually quite shocked cos he didn't even cry (laugh). Yeah, it's definitely toughened him up a bit, yeah.
> **MA** And you reckon that's good?
> **P7** Well, yeah cos, my oldest boy, he's not a fighter at all, and he's seen his friend, twice now, in front of him, get a hiding. (**MA** Mmm.) And my son hasn't stepped in, and he's felt bad for that. But it's cos *he* doesn't want to get hit too!

The account is constructed to show that the participant's child has, or will, benefit from the physical toughness that RL has engendered in him. The participant was asked directly if they think toughness is good, and replied in the affirmative, supporting their account by relaying a story of their other son who, for want of toughness, was unable/unwilling to go to the aid of a friend involved in a physical fight. The inference is that if a child is familiar with physical contact, such as during tackling in RL, they will be less threatened by the prospect of physicality in other areas of their lives. The participant reported wanting this for their younger son, and views RL as the channel by which this toughness is conferred. The account serves to defend the speaker's pro-RL position, again attending to their decision to enrol their young son in RL, while also qualifying that toughness, when used in the correct way (e.g., not for fighting), is a fitting trait to want for their child.

The above extract alluded to the masculine trait of chivalry, with the participant reporting their son's lament at not assisting a friend whose safety was threatened. One parent presented a more explicitly chivalrous masculine account, linking their son's participation in RL with the development of strength, and the consequent ability to display this strength to a future wife.

> **MA** Is there anything you think it's [RL] good for, for him?
> **P14** I think it ah, I don't know how to word it without it sounding a bit, I dunno, but it's good for, toughening him up a wee bit I think. You know learning to take a hit, not a hit but to be tackled, to tackle. At training they do wrestling practice, and god forbid he should ever have to get into a fight or anything, but all these small things might add up, I believe, and just make him more robust or I dunno, like…(**MA** Yeah.)
> **P14** I've seen guys go through their entire life not doing any physical anything, and only ever playing on computers, and they're really intelligent, probably making a lot of money, but can they open a jar for their wife? Maybe not. You know what I mean, I dunno if that's exaggerating, but.

The narrative is delivered haltingly. There are voiced pauses, various hedging devices referred to earlier (such as "I think", "might", and "a bit"), and significantly, an overt statement that the participant is unsure how to articulate the account. This indicates the matters about to be raised are of a sensitive, and potentially contestable nature. In this example, the participant appeared to be aware that it could be construed as inappropriate to want your child to become tough. This parent displayed additional hesitancy with repeated use of the phrase "I dunno". The reluctance of the participant to settle on a firm position could in part stem from awkwardness at displaying masculine attitudes to a female interviewer (Taylor, 2001). In addition, the tentative approach could be on the basis that his views have not been affirmed (by the interviewer) thus far. In the extract, I neither affirmed nor opposed the participant's views, leaving him unsure how what he has said is being assessed. This lack of commitment to a potentially controversial position is evident at the end of the extract where he occasioned a "second assessment" (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 59) by directly asking the interviewer, “you know what I mean?”. When still he did not get affirmation, the account trailed off and the subject changed.

In spite of these hesitancies, the narrative strongly reinforces the discourse of hegemonic masculinity; his narrative described men as tough, strong, and chivalrous, with these concepts laid out to justify his child’s participation in RL. For example, he dismissed the worth of men who lead sedentary lives (e.g., using computers) implying that this results in a regrettable lack of physical strength. He prioritised the ability to display physical strength (in aid of a woman) above a man’s ability to earn money- itself a dominant masculine discourse, that of “the breadwinner” (Locke & Yarwood, 2017, p. 10).

Other competing discourses are being navigated here; as in the previous extract, the participant avoided transgressing the societal discourse that violence is bad (“god forbid he would have to get into a fight”), while at the same time upholding that a certain level of toughness or physicality is a requisite part of life for a male. In doing so, the parents discursively manage competing discourses, that ‘men should be tough’ and that ‘men shouldn’t be violent’. The existence of both societal discourses is acknowledged, and wanting sons to be tough is settled on as a suitable identity for sons – an appropriately neutral position in the discussion. In spite of uncertainty about how tough or aggressive children ought to be, many viewed RL as an appropriate place to display a degree of aggression.

7.2 Rugby league as an outlet for energy or aggression

RL was viewed by some parents as a setting in which their son(s) could release aggression or ‘burn off’ energy. It is noteworthy that this aspect of RL positions the sport itself as neutral, RL merely being the conduit by which energy is expended, in that context, any physical activity could offer similar benefits. While parents did discuss girls in this context, this was only by way of explanation for why players’ siblings did not participate (e.g., “she’s not the rough and tumble girl” (P19)), or to stress the point that boys and girls have different energy levels. Boys were singled out as in particular need of an outlet for energy or aggression, marking this discourse explicitly masculine. In the following extract, the participant talked about their son and his energy levels, which are described as excessive.

> **P5** I solely just put him in it cos he’s got so much energy. Kids get bored, and they need it. I just feel they need to be, run out. Almost like your dog, you know? (laughs) If they get too hypo, they’re going to go mad, so. I feel like you just need to, they need to do it, it’s good for them.

The participant used the word “need” four times in relation to RL providing an outlet for energy, significant for its implication that if not attended to there will be consequences. The predicted outcome of “they’re going to go mad” is indeed raised in this context, further reinforcing the requirement that provision be made for the child to expend energy. These discursive features work in this context to justify the decision of the parent to have their child participate in RL. Additional discursive devices are seen in the account which serve to strengthen the factuality of the account, the first of which is a pronoun shift. The extract begins with discussion of a particular child, the participant’s own, (“he”, “him”) and then is broadened to encompass all children (“they”, “kids”, “them”). This pronoun shift marks the topic as, although relevant to their own son, a topic that is applicable to all children/boys. This has the effect of normalising both the issue (excess energy), and the solution (in this case, RL). There are multiple examples of similarly phrased extracts in the data, with participants frequently invoking the recognisable interpretative repertoire that children need to ‘burn off’ or ‘run off’ energy.

Another participant approached the topic of RL as preferable to rugby union because of contact tackling, which is allowed in RL from the youngest grades, allowing their child to expend energy. The physicality of this component of RL was labelled by the mother as “more boyish”, and was viewed as beneficial.

> **P13** Um, just more boyish I guess. Oh, there was a time- me and my partner broke up for a little bit so I wanted more boy, like more boisterous, instead of just being with me and his sister (laughs). More boisterous, more contact.

The need to expend energy (e.g., be boisterous) is viewed here as pertaining exclusively to males; it is inferred that “just me and his sister” are incapable of catering to this male need. The laughter after this statement points to an element of discomfort with the statement, yet the point is reiterated at the end of the extract. The participant went on to discuss other aspects of rugby union that were not to her (or her son’s) liking, including that it was “soft” for its lack of physicality.

> **P13** …there was, they didn’t seem to play bullrush and do that boys stuff, really. It was more, soft (laughs). Softer, yeah.
> **MA** And do you reckon the boys stuff is good for him?
> **P13** Yeah.
> **MA** What kind of stuff does it give him?
> **P13** He’s, full on. He’s really full on. He, my son isn’t the type of kid that’s gonna sit down and read a book, or, you know. Even doing homework now, I can’t get him to sit long enough? (**MA** Yep.) And I think, yeah, just getting him out, and into physical sports where he does have contact, and they are wrestling each other and that. That’s right up in his element. (**MA** Mmm.) So, in the rugby they didn’t really do stuff like that. It was more….oh, I can’t really explain it really. It was more, like um, it was just softer, they would just throw

> the ball to each other and stuff whereas when he goes to rugby league training, they play big games of bullrush. It's just a different- yeah, it seems a bit more fun for him.

Softness in males is spoken of here as an undesirable trait, indeed, it does not uphold normative masculine ideals (Drummond, 2016). In spite of rugby union clearly having a level of physicality to it, this mother described wanting something more for her son, i.e., something "harder". She attributes her son's need for a hyper-physical environment that matches his "full on" nature. There is a discursive blurring here of 'high energy' with 'hardness', the parent did not clarify how the son's need to expend energy related to his enjoyment of the more physical aspects of RL.

Her account of this is another example of role and trait talk (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The description of her son's nature as 'full on' is presented as impartial. Stating that he is "full on" ascribes a trait to the child, one which is independent of the speaker. As such, the potential for any claims to be made against its truthfulness is reduced. In addition, the impartial reporting of this fact infers a causal link between the nature of the child, and his need for RL. Establishing that her son's energy levels are excessive then affirmed her actions to have him participate in RL as natural (given his need for physical exertion).

In talking about it in this way, the participant has emphasised the value (to her) of RL as a place for her son to be physical, and to act in ways she herself labels masculine ("boyish"). Unlike the parents above who sought for their children a level of toughness but who spoke about it with reticence, this parent embraces the hyper-physicality of RL as a necessary aspect of masculinity for her son. She has unapologetically co-opted a hegemonically masculine societal discourse, with the rationale that this is what her son needs.

Other parents took this concept further, viewing RL as beneficial for providing a space for the outlet of aggression.

> **P8** That's the thing too I think, for boys, it gets out a bit of, I dunno, healthy aggression or whatever you want to call it.

> **P19** I was looking at [son] and he needed that sort of - he wasn't aggressive - it was just an outlet for him and I could see that it would be useful if he wanted to go into rugby league.

The first parent used the term "healthy aggression". Although this is a developmental psychology term applicable to infants, this participant has presumably used it in reference to the concept known as catharsis theory (Young, 2013). Catharsis theory is controversial within academia yet encapsulates the widely held belief that if aggression is released in small doses, large outbursts or total repression can be avoided (Bushman, 2002). The second account (above) alludes to the same concept. This participant's son used RL as an outlet, for what is not stated except with the use of a word that is specified as not applicable- aggression. The outlet is described as "needed", again framing RL as a fulfilling a masculine need.

Reference to catharsis theory is significant because, in spite of scientific evidence to suggest it is incorrect, parents persisted in drawing on it as one of the benefits of RL for their child(ren). In doing so, parents are drawing on a "culturally available repertoire" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 10). In addition to RL providing space for the enactment of masculine traits, parents spoke about RL as a space for their son(s) to foster positive relationships with males.

7.3 Masculine role-models

Parents spoke of their sons benefitting from contact with males at RL. These men (and older boys who assist at RL) were framed as role models and were in most cases acting in the capacity of team coach, trainer, or helper, or were fathers of team-members. For some parents, males at RL were esteemed simply for being male, e.g., where there were no or few men in the family home; for others, they acted as examples of 'good males' whose qualities were perceived to have a positive influence on children at RL. In the first extract, the parent repeats the phrase "male role model" three times after having stated earlier in the interview that her son "hasn't got much men in his life, I think it just gives him that contact with other males- positive role model males, you know?" (P8).

> **P8** Cos he doesn't have a, he's a only child and he doesn't have that male role model, and I think he gets that from being with other kids, and having those male role models. I think that's quite important to me too. Yeah. Same with St Thomas [school], having those male role models at that school as well, that's a big thing for me.

The participant uses the phrase "male role model" repeatedly. She drew on this concept of males as role models to make three points. First to describe the absence of men in the child's home. Second, that RL gives her son contact with 'good' men, and third, that she intends to send her son to a school that can provide this. Note that it is implicit with use of the term role model that the parent viewed these men as 'good', for her son at least. With the use of this term the participant emphasised that boys need men in their lives, and did so in a rhetorically limited way. The existence of this need is taken for granted, and as such is assumed to need no detailed explanation. The lack of evidence to support her claim leaves her argument reliant on the phrase "male role model" itself as proof that this is somehow necessary for boys. The "male role model" is constructed as a necessary component of her son's childhood, something which he will have access to through participation in RL.

The importance of role models for children, in particular for boys, is a well-discussed topic in academia. The concept of children modelling other's behaviour is also a prevailing interpretative repertoire, as such, is in the realm of common knowledge. It is a widely held belief that boys need regular contact with (good) men, and that this belief goes relatively unquestioned in society (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2005). This notion is reflected in the following participant's words, where they had just talked about the "bonus" of RL as a place their son could tackle and be rough around boys.

> **MA** So you're quite happy, he needs a bit of rough and tumble…
> **P6** Yep. Definitely for boys. And cos he's in a house full of girls, and just dad. Yeah.

The explanation given for why the son needs a place to be able to act "rough" is that he lives in a "house full of girls", with "just dad" as an addendum (the participant has two daughters in addition to her son who plays RL). This adheres to gendered stereotypes of what boys and girls need. The implications are many: that girls are not or do not need to be able to be rough, that boys do, and that the lack of males in the house limits the boy's access to developmentally crucial physicality. An observable discursive device underpins these implications, again "description as attribution" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 104). In this case the need for the son to participate in RL is attributed to the house being "full of girls"- a *description* of that family's living arrangements. In this case the description clearly implied the need for the son to have a place to "be rough", which this parent has facilitated for their son through participation in RL. The action performed here is justification of the parent's decision to have their child playing RL.

Other parents provided more descriptive accounts of the benefits of male contact for their sons, discursively significant for the wealth of detail provided.

> **P17**…just seeing those men being there and ah, help out, its great role models for [son]. He can take all different things from that, he's like 'oh my dad does this this way', and '[Coach] does it this way, and [teammate's father] does it this way', and 'I like that and I don't like that'. You know, it'll all be going on in his wee head and he'll see that. And he may not remember when he's a adult, but he'll see, and I'm hoping that it will encourage him to be a well-rounded, good man, really, when he's older. (**MA** Mmm.)
> **P17** And that will help him. A man that takes his son to practice, and then helps out, is a good man. He's a good father, and so he will see that. And hopefully he will see that and know that when he has children, that is what he does.

The narrative is constructed using, amongst other discursive devices, reported speech (Wiggins, 2017). In this extract the device serves to strengthen the authenticity of the account in which the participant's son learns from the men at RL how to become a 'good man'. Interestingly, the participant reported not on the actual speech of their son, but on how they perceived his thought processes occur. Nevertheless, the account's factuality is strengthened by quoting someone else.

This is achieved by removing the personal stake of the speaker from the account, for, in reporting someone else's views, personal accountability is reduced. This is just one of many ways in which an account can be made to appear "disinterested" (Kalaja, 2003, p. 91), an act which imbues the account with factual significance. The participant went on to make explicit links between their son bearing witness to (good) male behaviours, and him eventually becoming a good father himself.

7.4 Conclusion

Discussion alluding to discourses of masculinity were prevalent in the interview data. Parents considered RL a masculine sport, one that on balance confers beneficial masculine traits upon their child(ren). Notwithstanding the aspects of masculinity which tend towards violence, the majority of parents valued the physicality of RL to support their child(ren) to develop skills and traits viewed as beneficial for future outcomes.

This, and the previous two chapters presented analysis of the interview data under three broad societal discourses, each of which is divided into relevant themes and topics. The strength of societal discourses around physical activity, the benefits of sport, parental responsibilities and masculinity are evident from both the high proportion of participants who discussed these topics, and from the ways in which parent's talk revealed their varying degrees of acceptance of the discourses.

The next, and final, chapter examines the significance of these results, shifting the focus from talk at the micro level to broader notions of discourse and societal discourses.

Chapter Eight

8. Discussion

Consistent with discursive psychology methodology, analysis of interview extracts in the previous chapters focused on what words achieved in context, rather than perceived meaning or truths on the part of the speaker. In the discussion of results, emphasis shifts the focus to broader interpretations of the concept of discourse. Following Moberg (2013) who stresses that (societal) discourses must be defined according to the context in which they are discussed, I reiterate that this project views discourses as constructing “the world in different ways; each presenting a different account of a given phenomena [sic] or states of affairs, each highlighting certain aspects or elements at the expense of others” (p. 10).

In this section I make links with how personal accounts intersect with Foucauldian notions of discourses, and what this reveals about operative social norms and the ways in which children’s sport and parenting practices are viewed generally by society. Foucault’s work emphasises the power of discourses to define the parameters of what is permissible or acceptable in a given society (Foucault, 1971). The ways in which certain topics were navigated by parents indicates both their awareness of dominant societal discourses and, crucially, that there are potential implications of challenging these discourses. This chapter pays particular attention to societal discourses which, by the ways in which parents negotiated them, are considered significant.

I begin with parents’ accounts and how they are both situated within, and constructive of, parenting and sporting discourses. I go on to describe how use of and reference to these discourses is revealing of normative practices, and the need for parents to justify decisions about their children and participation in rugby league (RL). Finally, I raise questions about the significance and implications of those conclusions.

8.1 Navigating societal discourses

It is accepted that language is used to navigate immediate social situations, but, of significance to this chapter is what features of language reveal about the social norms that societal discourses both produce and uphold. Findings from this research are consistent with others' findings that talk is discursive representation of "social practices, social organisations and social institutions" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 7). Discourses can be analysed as being both a product of all that makes up the social world, and as constructive of those aspects. Furthermore, the very talk that places parents' accounts within discourses demonstrates how the discourses themselves limit discussion that is occurring or can occur. This cyclic process forms the basis of how societal discourses are produced and reproduced through talk.

The ways in which discourses are navigated is of interest for what this represents about the acceptance (or not) of social norms. Given that the dominant societal discourses of any social group are evidence of prevailing opinion within that group, societal discourses which were either adopted with reticence or navigated tentatively immediately mark themselves as significant. It is important to reiterate that different discourses can dominate within certain groups and do so at many levels (such as amongst the middle class, Tasmanians, grandparents, or crochet enthusiasts, for example). The careful management of words when parents were discussing some topics (as explicated by the various discursive devices outlined in the previous chapters) represents talk that is being moderated. This 'self-censorship' suggests parents view some topics as controversial and that they may transgress applicable social norms if the topics were approached directly.

The hesitant ways in which parents described wanting toughness for their children is a good example of self-censorship, and can be understood with reference to the "crisis of masculinity" (Carrigan et al., 1985, p. 556). In the case of the extracts, participants drew on traditional hegemonic masculine discourses rather apologetically. In doing so, they revealed that the 'crisis' for parents, in this instance, is wanting their sons, in particular, to possess or develop certain traits associated with traditional masculinity (e.g., to be able to physically stand up for themselves/friends), while at the same time acknowledging that these are considered undesirable forms of masculinity in today's society, particularly given the association toughness has with violence. This type of dilemma is also seen in the research of Richard Pringle (2001), whose work describes how hyper-masculine discourses within school-aged rugby union made the journey of his own identity formation difficult. The author found that discourses operating in a rugby union setting competed with those outside of that setting, creating a conflict in his self-presentation and identity formation. The parents in this study were similarly conflicted, they supported hegemonically masculine traits in their children whilst also indicating awareness that this goes against the social norm.

Parents in the present study also spoke quite openly at times of RL as the setting in which masculine traits could develop or be reinforced. They ways in which they spoke of RL as a space for their child(ren) to learn resilience, be “boyish”, and associate with (male) role models (e.g., with the idea that this would somehow support their becoming a man) indicated these masculine traits are viewed as beneficial, and consequently are considered less controversial than was talk of toughness and chivalry. This finding is supported in the research of Claringbould and Adriaanse (2015), who showed that the dominant masculine values seen in sport are, in part, a result of the ways in which parents’ talk is gendered.

Similar to how the tentative navigation of a discourse signals significance, accounts containing either no explanation at all, or heavy explanation, are also telling. Edwards and Potter (2005) state that descriptions of “non-normative actions, are treated as requiring accounts” (p. 255). This can be understood by examining the opposite situation within a narrative, one in which no careful navigation or explanation is offered. This was the case with how participants spoke about both the benefits of sport for physical activity and the benefits of team sport for children. Parents in many cases referred to these discourses with no justification whatsoever, revealing that the benefits are assumed self-evident. Little or no accounting signifies discourses that, for this group of people at least, are so entrenched they are assumed common knowledge, thus indicating a social norm.

Despite normative ideas about the inherent goodness of sport, research suggests that there are some for whom sport is unpleasant, unenjoyable, and/or socially or physically detrimental (Pringle & Markula, 2005; Walters et al., 2015). Parents whose child(ren) did not particularly enjoy RL are placed in the sensitive situation of having their choices questioned, for, if children’s love of the sport can be cited as one reason for their participation, cannot their dislike of RL be used as evidence that they should not participate? The parents in this study whose child(ren) did not particularly enjoy RL typically emphasised the benefits of the sport in general.

We can assume that parents perceive some benefit from their child participating in RL, otherwise, what would be the reason for their participation? In the absence of a child’s enjoyment of RL, they are compelled to ‘find’ reasons. If not simply to satisfy the social needs of the interview/conversation, then to explore for themselves why they facilitate the activity for that child. In reaching for responses to questions about the benefits of RL, parents frequently replied not with aspects specific to RL, but instead with discussion of the physical activity needs of children generally. Conflating physical activity with RL in this way (via the avenue that sport facilitates physical activity and so therefore is beneficial to children, i.e., co-opting the great sport myth) provides the asked for response, it also circumvents issues of RL’s marginalised position in Aotearoa New Zealand and its more controversial aspects, which could count against parents who expose their young children to this sport. Parents’ emphasis on physical activity as a primary benefit from RL has the outcome of precluding focus on other, potentially more controversial, aspects of the sport. By focussing discussion around the physical activity requirements of children they achieve two things: first they conform to normative expectations of good parenting, consequently, they cannot be open to criticisms of neglect in that regard, and, second, they avoid addressing the issue of their child participating in an activity they dislike and any consequent criticism for placing their child in an unpleasant (for them) situation.

8.2 Parents signal responsibility

Parents, as do others, draw on culturally specific language resources in speech, consequently, discussion on topics is limited to a certain degree by what is discursively available and acceptable. Interview extracts showed that parents' accounts contained repetitive use of words or phrases. An example is the 'cotton wool' trope that several parents used to distance themselves from styles of parenting in which children are coddled ("you can't wrap your child up in cotton wool" (P21), "I'm not a cotton wool mother" (P15) etc.). This is significant for its prevalence in the interview data and because it directly constructs parents as a *certain type* of parent.

In all cases the cotton wool trope was deployed as the definitive statement in support of children's need to take physical risks. Although there is evidence to suggest developmental benefits from children taking physical risks, good parenting ideals popular in Western industrialised nations endorse the careful protection of children and, in general, a risk averse attitude when it comes to young children (Niehues et al., 2013). The repercussions of not fulfilling normative expectations of that aspect of parenting is to risk accusations of neglect and invite blame; indeed, cultural anthropologist Mary Douglas (1992) states that risk averse cultures tend to characterise risk-taking behaviour as "pathological or abnormal" (p.41). In such a climate, one must justify children's participation in a full-contact sport known for its associations with head injuries and violence. Parent's use of the cotton wool trope served just such a function in conversation.

Foucault (1970) asks in his exploration of the power of discourses to regulate speech, "how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?" (p. 177). Participants in their immediate discursive work projected responsibility in their parental role by demonstrating knowledge of the discourse that children benefit from exposure to risk; the trope itself provided a readily available solution to a dilemma for parents about perceived levels of exposure to risks of injury from RL. This easy-to-reach-for trope is an effective and reliable conclusive statement on the issue. Put simply, it 'works', even in the face of the perhaps stronger competing discourses about care and protection of children. The use of the cotton wool trope to signify a certain type of parenting supports the work of social psychologist Nigel Edley (2001), and others, who suggest that identities are “not so much a matter of ‘doing what comes naturally’ as doing what works best” (p. 194).

Some parents recruited both the ‘risk is good’ discourse, *alongside* care and protection discourses in their accounts. Contradictions of this type within narratives are consistent with DP which conceptualises talk as the place where psychology plays out. In this study such contradictions indicate the difficulty for parents in finding a balance between children’s risk-taking and their safety. Parents who successfully co-opted competing discourses minimised or normalised risk (e.g., with the cotton wool trope), and acknowledged that care and protection are important (e.g., by discussing protective headwear).

As I have just described, the discourse that children must be able to take risks dominated amongst interview participants. A key point here is that parents co-opted *a* societal discourse to justify their choice, and did so in the face of competing societal discourses that could equally justifiably have been co-opted. There are any number of societal discourses available to draw from, and participants showed their behaviour (or attitudes, or choices) can be defended with the recruitment of any popular (enough) societal discourse.

A lot of discursive psychology (DP) research is concerned with identity. Although each instance of identity work is not explicitly highlighted here, much of parent’s discursive work positioned them as responsible and competent parents. This is consistent with broad principles of impression management stating that people will, in general, make efforts to present themselves favourably (Van Dijk, 2005), relevant here because of the central place that discourse holds in the presentation of self. Accounts which indicated selfless parenting, a trait strongly associated with good parenting ideals, not only positioned parents as responsible, but afforded them the ability to engage in a form of societally sanctioned self-praise within a cultural environment which does not condone boastful behaviour (Matley, 2018). Signalling competent parenting is a subtle form of self-praise, and must be handled delicately if social norms about humility are not to be transgressed. Participant’s descriptions of busy training schedules, standing on the sidelines in cold weather, taking children to and from games and washing mud-covered playing uniforms all make inferences about levels of parental dedication to children. This is not overt bragging, however, parents’ words are consistent with Matley’s (2018) use of the term ‘humblebragging’, defined in one regard as “implicit self-praise… formulated as an ostensible complaint” (p.35). Parents’ descriptions of the inconveniences to them of RL verge on complaint, their acts of commitment to their children are undertaken despite the difficulties to themselves, ostensibly so that children can gain the benefits that parents had in many cases outlined so extensively. This is a clear example of Edwards and Potter’s (1992) ‘dilemma of fact and interest'. In this instance, parents have an interest in being seen as a 'good' parent but are able to account for their actions in ways which simply list the 'facts' of the matter, such as the requirement that child(ren) attend training.

Other parents described their children's participation in RL in ways which strongly emphasised the benefits to children generally. In doing so they demonstrated awareness that certain practices are known as 'good' for children (and consequently, that there exists a category of practices that are 'bad'). Within the current neoliberal climate in which individual responsibility is expected, following social norms about what is considered 'good' for children also reflects well on parents, effectively marking their own behaviour as 'good' (or, conversely, 'bad') (Coakley, 2011; Green, 2015; Stirrup, Duncombe, & Sandford, 2015). So, participant's discussion of RL's beneficial aspects for children is also relevant to parenting. A large proportion of the discursive work carried out by participants was comprised of justifications for their actions as parents. Accountability is a core component of the discursive action model (DAM) which, when used in analysis, showed how this is achieved in the intricacies of talk. Parents' subtle and overt positioning of themselves as responsible highlights that, to parents, there is some worth in signalling competence in that role. This worth is partly that such talk deflects perceived or actual accusations of irresponsibility and blame, which are inherent in modern day parenting.

8.3 Risk and blame

Attention to justifying actions with regards to ones' child(ren) can be considered in terms of intensive parenting and the broader societal context within which good parenting ideals operate. One aspect of this is the well-known concept of the risk society (Beck, 1992). This concept refers to the ways in which societies organise in response to risk. Within this context risk, including risk to children, is viewed as measurable, manageable, and able to be mitigated, with the obligation firmly on individuals (usually parents) to do this (Gillingham & Bromfield, 2008; O'Malley, 1996). This approach conceptualises harm to children as a lack of protection, correspondingly, in the event of negative outcomes, there is a tendency to apportion blame. Events resulting in the harm of children that in the past might have been described as isolated accidents now frequently attract public attention and comments laden with moral judgements about the role of parents (Wardle, 2006). A local example, reported by Fairfax Media in 2015, includes a statement from the police urging the public to cease commenting on the parents' inability to prevent the accidental death of a young girl.

> [Police Superintendent] Todd warned people to be careful about speculating on social media and abide by the Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015. 'The speculation, gossip and

> conjecture on social media is causing considerable, unnecessary distress to her family and friends,' he said. (Ensor & Campbell, 2015)

In the article a family friend states how attentive and loving the parents in this case were, "you can't get a more loving family. They [the parents] would do anything for those kids, anything at all." (Ensor & Campbell, 2015). This type of talk is designed to prevent further accusations of poor parenting by members of the public; a point which in its very inclusion in the article serves to further emphasise the accountability of parents where their children are concerned.

Fulfilling, and being seen to fulfil, parental obligations is important for families in a culture that holds parents responsible for all aspects of their children's lives. In light of this, risk aversion can be explained by fear of negative outcomes but also fear of blame and the corresponding social judgement (Jenkins, 2006). Parents in this study spoke of risks and, although they rarely approached the topic of social judgement explicitly, they demonstrated awareness that their actions as parents are to a certain degree noted by others. For example, comments such as "we're not one of those sideline parents who get all angry cos they drop the ball" (P5), "God, I'm sounding horrible!" (P11) (when talking about limiting time spent devoted to children's sport), and, "what sort of parent thinks that?" (P17) all evaluate parents' actions negatively. Even in the instance that the actions being evaluated are their own, the extracts are examples of parents making judgements of the actions of parents. Such findings corroborate the work of Jenkins (2006), who extended this idea to suggest that such judgements and the resulting anxieties parents face on account of them, are the result of an "increasingly privatized approach to parenting" (p. 390) which has resulted in parents limiting their children's exposure to risk.

The acceptability of risk has been described by Quarrie et al. (2017) as value dependent, and so can be considered in terms of class. As touched on earlier, the recruitment of one discourse over another depends heavily on aspects such as class, and accounts about how children spend their time aligned with what other authors have identified as class-based discourses. Talk of setting fitness goals for or with children, for example, align with middle class notions of "child as project" (Halldén, 1991, p. 334), while parents whose accounts conveyed relative indifference to their own role in their child's developmental outcomes co-opt discourses of "child as being" (Halldén, 1991, p. 334), which are strongly associated with lower socioeconomic groups. Given the associations RL has with working classes, it is interesting to see in the data evidence of middle class discourses; it could be the case that middle class ideals and values are spreading to the working class, such as was recently argued by Patrick Ishizuka, whose 2018 survey polled 3,600 U.S. parents of different socioeconomic backgrounds on their attitudes to various parenting practices. Additionally it could be that those who agreed to be interviewed were more likely to have middle class values, or simply that increasing numbers of middle class families are becoming involved in RL. Further study could clarify these suppositions. The ways in which participants discussed the place of fun in childhood revealed other interesting associations with class-based parenting styles.

Participants in this study frequently raised the concept of fun alongside that of childhood, indeed, many parents stressed this aspect as an integral part of childhood. However, fun is not strongly associated with the intensive parenting styles so prevalent amongst the middle classes, which, as research has found, values activities with outcomes of a quantifiable nature, and on measurable progress (Romagnoli & Wall, 2012; Sayer & Gornick, 2011; Wall, 2010). The contexts within which fun was raised by parents in this study, however, reveals that it was frequently discussed as a factor contributing to children’s desire to remain with the sport. Parents emphasised that without enjoyment of the sport children’s continued participation was at risk, and as such, so was their ability to access other benefits from RL. Parents’ views on children’s enjoyment of sport being a factor in their continued participation align with Walters et al.’s (2015) study on young people which showed that children primarily value fun and fair play from team sport. Children considered these aspects crucial to their enjoyment of the sport, which thus contributed to their willingness to participate. Given that several children in the present study were spoken of as having to be ‘encouraged’ by parents to participate in RL (which suggests a level of unwillingness) the question of children’s enjoyment of the sport is important.

It appears that children’s enjoyment of RL was legitimised by parents in the present study so that access to benefits of seemingly greater developmental value could be gained. In this context, ‘mere’ fun – although cited in developmental psychology literature as a crucial aspect of child development for its creative and agentic properties (Gray, 2013) – does not meet intensive parenting objectives. When instrumentalised by parents, however, fun’s association with outcomes that *are* quantifiable and measureable made it more acceptable.

The cultural importance of using time productively (Bellezza et al., 2016) may be a factor in participants’ reluctance to solely and fully embrace the ‘children should have fun’ societal discourse. Quantifiable outcomes, such as a child’s fitness level increase over successive games, or sporting successes, are tangible evidence of good parenting, more so than the less quantifiable, although arguably as important, state of happiness (via fun). Parents in this study were more comfortable prioritising fun for their child(ren) when fun was discussed as the means by which other, more culturally valued, outcomes were transmitted. This shows the dominance of developmental discourses, but that the fun discourses are also present. This is consistent with the work of Walters et al. (2015) who stressed that discourses, as amorphous entities, cannot be clearly delineated. The reluctance of many parents to state that they prioritise children's fun simply for fun's sake raises the issue of what goes unsaid.

8.4 What goes unsaid

As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, societal discourses operate in such a way that what remains unsaid is also of significance (Billig, 2002). Foucault notes that there are "many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (1999, p. 518). With these words he emphasises the importance of what is not said alongside that which is, in the context of the discourses which have the power to shape peoples' attitudes and actions.

What goes unsaid is significant in two respects. First, where the speaker lacks the discursive resources to articulate a topic (i.e. because, for lack of vocabulary or the "requisite concepts" (Billig, 2002, p. 136), they are literally unable to formulate meaningful discourse); and second, where the ability for discussion to take place, publicly at least, is restricted or repressed on account of that to do so would breach a social norm. Because the former respect refers to discourse within historical periods in which appropriate conceptual frameworks to discuss certain topics have yet to be developed, there is no possibility of detecting such examples in the interview data. (If I were to attempt, resultant extracts if they existed would likely be those which I could only label inane or insane, such would their unconventionality have to be.) Nevertheless, interpreting Foucault's concept a little less literally, I identified in the interviews instances where participants either lacked the will or the ability to articulate ideas in such a way as to convey meaningful accounts. Reponses from participant P12, for example, were routinely short and contained undeveloped and unlinked ideas that gave little clue as to any reasoning about their actions as a parent in relation to their son's participation in RL.

Examples of the latter respect, the avoidance of transgressing social norms, were abundant in the interview data. One participant spoke of assembling snack packs for the children in her team, she went on to say that she stopped because it "was getting a bit...[rubs fingers together] costly [in a quiet voice]" (P3). Whispering the final word "costly" equates to reluctance to say it out loud which suggests that to do so would be somehow inappropriate. Given that the parents' friends (also present at the interview) had just been talking about how much they had spent on chocolates for the children's RL prizes ("all for the love of the kids" (P2)), the participant's whispered word may indicate acknowledgment that it is considered socially unacceptable to direct finances toward something other than the much-loved children. Another interpretation is that to admit that the cost of snacks is unaffordable transgresses a social norm about the importance of being self-supporting and financially secure. The point of interest here, is that the way in which the parent talks tells a much deeper story than simple analysis of the words. Some societal discourses were conspicuously absent from the interview data, and as such also indicate social norms. Two such discourses are described next.

Although spectator behaviour at children's sporting fixtures has been noted in the literature as increasingly of concern (Knight et al., 2009), and RL spectators have drawn criticism for unruly and alcohol-fuelled behaviour (Law, 2018), this issue was by and large not raised as a concern by participants of this study. Only a few parents noted they had witnessed concerning behaviours from parents who question referees' decisions, or who yell encouragement or criticisms at their children from the sideline. One parent reported witnessing abusive behaviour from parents, who she reported picked up children "by the scruff of their neck, they'll shake them, I've seen them [children] get smacked around the face" (P20). I can report from my own observations on the sidelines of young children's games several instances where patched gang members have been present, arriving and leaving conspicuously by motorcycle. In one instance a club official warned parents to escort young spectators away from the sideline of a game as some form of altercation was expected between gang members (no such event occurred, nor have I observed violence or abuse directed towards children on the sidelines from parents or spectators). In spite of this, the majority of participants emphasised the family-friendly nature of RL and reported no concerns about sideline behaviours.

That RL is largely by and for lower socioeconomic groups means the sport has a distinct culture, one that, because of class differences, is more accepted by some social groups than others. That interview participants perceived little risk to children from associating with supporters of the game suggests a level of comfort with the RL culture and, as a result, little need for parents to display that they had attended to this concern.

Another discourse was also conspicuous in its absence. The current study showed no evidence of parents drawing on a dominant North American discourse, namely, that it is beneficial for children to specialise early in a sport for the greater chance of future sporting success that this is said to result in. This discourse persists in the United States (US) despite several published works showing there is little evidence to support its premise (Gould, 2009; Malina, 2010; Read et al., 2016).

Although some parents expressed an interest in their child playing for Aotearoa New Zealand's national rugby union or RL team, or at an NRL level (provided the child expressed continued interest in RL) the majority of parents prioritised immediate benefits over specific long term goals. There are several possible explanations for this. The lack of pressure for early specialisation in RL may be symptomatic of sociocultural differences between the United States (US) and Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, the highly competitive and commercialised nature of tertiary education in the US has led to increased demand for access to education via sports scholarships (Malina, 2010). Other possible explanations include comparatively holistic attitudes to child development on the part of parents in Aotearoa New Zealand, or the possibility of a culture within the province in which the study took place (Canterbury), RL generally, or Aotearoa New Zealand which precludes the type of concerted cultivation required to foster such specialised development.

There operates in Aotearoa New Zealand a strong discourse *against* parents who actively and conspicuously micro-manage their children's sport (Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999). Further studies could clarify whether there is variation between localities in this regard. This 'pushy parent' discourse was maligned by the majority of participants in the present study, one of who expressed strong disapproval of parents who loudly encourage children on sports fields, and another who bemoaned the mere existence of clinics available to children whose sporting performance shows promise.

> **P17** [Kids have] either got to be going for the colts, or going through a talent centre, sort of situation twice a week, and parents are paying extra money for these paid coaches to teach them extra skills, I mean, really, what's it all for?

Specialisation and pressure on young children to train intensively or upskill dramatically were of little importance to parents compared to their children's ability to simply try a sport or activity for the sake of 'giving it a go'. Even the parent who supported their 8 year-old son's goal to be in the NRL by facilitating morning runs was not advocating for RL-specific training. That father stressed that they would support whatever their child's goal was (presumably within reason).

In fact, many parents in this study adopted the position that children should try a variety of activities (not limited to sport) and see which they were drawn to. This area represents opportunity for further study, particularly given that specialisation and sampling are represented in the literature as "competing realms" (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017, p. 108). Locally, although the crown entity responsible for sport and recreation in Aotearoa New Zealand promotes sampling over specialisation for young athletes, schools with sport programmes as well as sports clubs continue to attract paying customers by co-opting the discourse that early specialisation and talent development is beneficial to young people. For example, the following is from a football academy website which claims to offer a "unique set of advantages" (Mainland Football, 2018) for children from the age of

11 with “focused training hours with specialist coaching for the most talented players” (Mainland Football, 2018).

The above is an example of institutional recruitment of a discourse that, although not entirely endorsed by scientific research, makes inferences about what is best for children (who could argue with children being better off for the chance of gaining a ‘unique set of advantages’?). The idea that discourses represent social practices, organisations, and institutions was raised earlier. The previous example, however, shows the power of institutions to instigate (and/or perpetuate) discourses. In this instance an appealing, but not (yet) established, discourse that early specialisation is beneficial to children, is recruited to support the financial capabilities of a business. Consequently we can reasonably expect that the motives are financial rather than for any duty of care to the young footballers.

8.5 Institutional dissemination of discourses

Foucault’s (1970) conceptualisation of discourses emphasises their appropriation and dissemination by institutions. The example above, and many other types of institutional messaging, are part of a complex set of mechanisms by which discourses become and remain dominant. Institutional influence comes from an array of sources, such as: the media, the education and health systems, and corporations (i.e., via advertisements, sports news, school curriculums, the advice of general practitioners and team sponsorship). All have a role in the establishment and maintenance of discourses and contribute to cultural understandings of how things are or ought to be. Strongly held ideas about sport as beneficial, even necessary, for children are upheld by institutions whose messages are imbued with legitimacy because of their positions of authority in society. Some participants cited institutional messaging when justifying their decision-making around children’s activities, which could be taken as evidence of direct influence, or could simply have been a discursive strategy deployed to bolster credibility in accounts. It is clear though that participants’ talk which displayed unreserved faith in the benefits of (team) sport is underscored by the multitude of institutional messages which champion sport.

Foucault’s conceptualisation of this process is referred to in the literature with the phrase ‘regimes of truth’ (Olssen, 2016; Pringle, 2004). This describes the ways in which particular social attitudes and practices are legitimised by "sets of understandings" (Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, & Richardson, 1999, p. 142), which, in many cases, are promulgated by institutions. Academia has been identified by those working within critical strands of the social sciences as just such an institution, one which has influence on the regimes of truth being promulgated. Hence, this thesis is itself part of the broader discourse on parenting and sport. Furthermore, my use of the terms 'good parenting', 'good parenting ideals' etc. further reinforce the existence of such categories as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ parents. This may contribute in its own small way to parental self-monitoring and self-regulation, the effects of which are not necessarily beneficial to parents or their child(ren).

8.6 Conclusion

Parents constructed accounts to show that they were attending to children’s needs through the recruitment of popular, though not necessarily dominant, societal discourses; they co-opted relevant societal discourses and used a variety of discursive devices which worked together to construct themselves as responsible and competent parents. The degree to which parent’s accounts were oriented towards displaying competence is significant. Because of the emphasis on individual responsibility in Western industrialised nations, responsibility for children, and blame when adverse outcomes ensue, falls squarely on parents. The display of competence in a parenting role is valuable currency against accusations of incompetence. Parents were aware of the scrutiny they are under regarding their child(ren) and recruited operative societal discourses to simultaneously bolster the credibility of their account, and to undermine alternative versions. In doing so they satisfied societal expectations of good parenting but these acts also serve to reinforce existing pressures on parents to be solely responsible for children’s outcomes, and thus the issue is compounded.

Institutional (re)production of popular discourses combined with the importance to parents of being seen to ‘do the right thing’, constitute a powerful influential force on parents. The discussion of results has shown the power that societal discourses have to shape social practices and that the ways in which people talk reflect this.

Chapter Nine

9. Conclusion

An important feature of this study is its dual emphasis on macro and micro discourses. Attention to both micro and macro level discourse(s), and their interconnections provides original insight into the ways in which parents make and justify decisions concerning their children's activities. Another original feature of the study is its focus on rugby league (RL), an activity which, in the New Zealand context, raises interesting questions around class, ethnicity, and the sport's relationship to the dominant code of rugby union.

Analysing discourses at both the macro and micro level has shown how societal discourses are both produced and reproduced in talk; the regularities in speech working to strengthen the system of discourses that in turn define what constitutes propriety. This confirms what Wetherell and Edley (2014), and others, have found in this regard, yet the process by which this occurs remains complex.

The overwhelming majority of participants in this study spoke about their children's participation in RL in ways which showed they had knowledge of what children need, and what is considered 'good' for children. Their actions in regards to their children and RL were explained as designed to benefit children in some way(s). Parents' accounts also displayed awareness that the needs and expectations surrounding children are varied and can be contradictory. It was evident that parents were aware of these contradictions, and, appropriate courses of action for this group of parents appear based on their ability to justify that the needs of the child are considered and/or prioritised.

The societal discourses recruited in defense of decisions around children and RL were effective in the production of a factual account, but they also functioned at times to contradict discursive efforts to display competent parenting. Resultant dilemma(s) were then resolved with the co-option of other operative discourses. The interplay of discourse at the micro level and the recruitment of discourses at the macro level showed that the co-option of any popular enough societal discourse was adequate to display both discursive and parenting competence. (Questions remain about what the effects are on parents who recruit subordinate, or highly controversial discourses.) The sometimes messy interplay reaffirms discursive psychology's conceptualisation of cognition and speech as fluid and unfixed, and is indicative of the social and discursive complexities operating in the social world. It is perhaps the case that some solace can be found in the recruitment of popular discourses, where familiarity and conformity are comfortable, even in the event that the speaker is not a proponent of corresponding practices.

In addition to the dilemmas of parenting that this study has highlighted, RL as a social practice was brought to the fore. Given that the question of young children's participation in the sport is contingent on parents working through complex issues involving responsibility and care (along with many other aspects, such as scheduling), and that parents frequently seek resolution to issues through discourse, increased knowledge about how RL is considered by parents has implications for the sport. As a sport embedded with historical notions of struggle for recognition and validity against the more popular code of rugby union, and one which competes with many physical and other activities for children's membership, continued existence of the sport relies on parents seeing some benefits from their child(ren)'s participation.

Parents in this study by and large esteemed RL for its higher levels of physicality compared to rugby union, and its reputation as 'rough' was of little concern. The rough reputation of RL and how parents assess this in terms of the risks it poses to children has practical implications for RL as a sport for young people. This connects to broader notions of identity, ethnicity, and masculinity, further study of which would make valuable contributions to academic literature on RL, which has tended to focus on class.

The discourses parents drew on in justifying their decisions about children's activities displayed to me, the interviewer, that they were aware that certain practices are considered 'good' for children. Their accounts, although acknowledging conflicting notions about what is *best* for children, exuded confidence in the decisions that had already been made about their children's participation in RL. These assertions perhaps also work to reassure the parents themselves that, in this uncertain world, they have some control over their children's outcomes.

10. References

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11. Appendices

Appendix A- Research information sheet (2 pages)

Lincoln University
Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki
CHRISTCHURCH•NEW ZEALAND
New Zealand's specialist land-based university

Faculty of Environment, Society and Design | Department of Tourism, Sport and Society.

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled: Parents' discursive accounts of their young child(ren)s' participation in rugby league.

The research project has three aims:

(1) To identify how parents make decisions about enrolling their children in rugby league.
(2) To examine how parents view the benefits (if any) their children derive from participating in rugby league.
(3) To explore the ways in which parents talk about children's rugby league, and how this might be influenced by general advice in society about parenting, child development, health and wellbeing, and organised sport.

Your participation in this project will involve: your agreement to be interviewed about your child's involvement in rugby league. I want to talk to parents/caregivers of rugby league players (current or recent) aged between 5-10 years old.
The interview will be much like a conversation and will likely take between 40 minutes to one hour. I would like to record the interview to refer to at a later date, and will not do so without your consent.

What will happen with the information you give me: The results of the project may be published or presented (e.g., at a conference), but you may be assured of your anonymity. Your identity (e.g., your name, and your child's name) will not be made public, or made known to any person other than myself, my supervisors, and the Human Ethics Committee (in the event of an audit), without your consent.

To ensure anonymity, consent forms and individual interview data (our transcribed conversation) will be stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only by me. Any published work will use a pseudonym, and no other identifying information will be published.

What to do if you change your mind: You are free to cancel the interview, to decline to answer questions, and to stop the interview at any time. If, after the interview, you want to withdraw any information you have provided, please contact me or my supervisors (listed below) by 1 October 2017.

If you have any questions, or would like to withdraw your consent to participate in the research (by 1 October 2017), please contact me, or my supervisors (listed below).

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The project has been reviewed and approved by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix B- Consent form

Lincoln
University
Te Whare Wānaka o Aoraki
CHRISTCHURCH•NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's specialist land-based university

Faculty of Environment, Society and Design | Department of Tourism, Sport and Society

Consent Form

Research title: Parents' discursive accounts of their young child(ren)s' participation in rugby league.

I have read and understood the research information sheet provided of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided, up to 1 October 2017.

- ☐ I consent to having an audio recording made of my interview.
- ☐ I do not consent to having an audio recording made of my interview.

Name: ____

Signed: ____

Date: ____

Appendix C- Interview guide

Faculty of Environment, Society and Design | Department of Tourism, Sport and Society

Interview Guide

Research title: Parents' discursive accounts of their young child(ren)s' participation in rugby league.

Participant:

Date/place of interview:

Contact:

Child's age/grade/club:

Open-ended question prompts:

- Tell me about when (child's name) started playing rugby league?
- Tell me about why (child's name) started playing rugby league?
- How did (child's name) settle in to the game when they first started playing?
- Do you think (child's name) has learned any new skills from playing rugby league? (If so, what skills?)
- Does (child's name) play any other sports? (If so, which sports?)
- Do/did you have any future or long-term goals with regards to (child's name)'s rugby league?
- What things do/did you like about (child's name) playing rugby league?
- Is there anything that you don't/didn't like about (child's name) playing rugby league?
- What kind of experience were you hoping (child's name) would have when you enrolled them in rugby league?
- How does this match with the experience(s) they have had so far?
- [If child is no longer enrolled in rugby league] Can you tell me about why (child's name) is no longer playing rugby league?
- How do/did you feel about the coaching and the general organisation of the club?
- Can you tell me about your own personal history/experience/thoughts about rugby league?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?