ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: SOCCER FIELDS OF CULTURAL [RE]-

PRODUCTION?: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC

EXPLICATION OF THE "SOCCER MOM"

Lisa Swanson, Doctor of Philosophy, 2003

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As noted by Zwick and Andrews, the "suburban soccer field represents a transparent

window into the workings and experiences of power and privilege within contemporary

America" (1999, p. 222). The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural

practices of "soccer moms" as a segment of America's privileged, suburban, upper-

middle class. According to Vavrus (2000), current depictions and understandings of

"soccer moms" simplify maternal experience and homogenize women; therefore, a

more complete picture of this phenomenon needed to be produced. A multifaceted

ethnographic approach was employed in order to generate a substantial body of

empirical data. Data collection procedures included fieldwork, participant observation,

survey, and both structured and unstructured interviews. The results of this research

shed light on the complexities of the "soccer mom" role by problematizing the taken for

granted assumptions about upper-middle class women. In analyzing specific class

practices, the researcher relied on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theories related to the

interplay between "habitus" and several forms of capital (economic, cultural, and

social) within various cultural fields. The researcher provides an analysis of the ways in

which the subjects reproduce their class status in and through the cultural experiences of

their children. Ultimately, the results of this research contribute to an understanding of

"how systems of domination co-construct one another, and how we are 'enlisted',

materially and ideologically in their continued operation" (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 75).

SOCCER FIELDS OF CULTURAL [RE]-PRODUCTION?:

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLICATION OF THE "SOCCER MOM"

by

Lisa Swanson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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DEDICATION

In memory of

Dr. Michael W. Coy

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The "soccer mom" phrase has been tossed around the political arena for the last ten years and even more recently, the term has been worked into print media and televised advertisements. According to Vavrus (2000), the political practice of labeling an "aggregate of women" as "soccer moms" was done to identify the group of voters believed to be "crucial to the success of either presidential candidate: President Clinton or Robert Dole" (p. 193). Today, the following types of headlines are common: "Milbank Woman Wins Van as Nation's Top Soccer Mom" (The Associated Press, 2002); "Soccer's Raging Moms Armed (with SUVs) and Dangerous" (Lacitis, 2002, p. C1); and "A Soccer Mom's Tournament Essentials: A Chair, A Gazebo and a Blender for the Margaritas" (Federico, 2002, p. AL5). The "soccer mom" label is now so widely recognized that the 2002 publication of the World Almanac and Book of Facts included the label's definition. Media portrayals of mothers of children involved in youth soccer only provide a glimpse of upper-middle-class mothering realities. The perpetuation of the label is narrow-minded, for it contributes to a negative simplification of who upper-middle class mothers actually are. Instead, this segment of the population needs to be understood in terms of their suburban context and their social-class-driven attempts at distinction.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the "soccer mom" phenomenon in contemporary, upper-middle class America. The researcher studied the everyday

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experiences of women whose children participate in competitive youth soccer programs. The researcher paid particular attention to how the women's social class location influences, and helps constitute, the formation of the norms, values, and practices commonly associated with the "soccer mom" role. A multifaceted ethnographic approach was employed in order to generate a substantial body of empirical data. The researcher attended soccer practices and games to observe and immerse herself in the culture, carried out unstructured, thematic interviews of "soccer moms" in an attempt to gain an emic perspective, and ultimately compared and contrasted "soccer moms'" private reality with the public's view of their white, middle class, maternal role. An interpretive analysis of the rich, ethnographic data gathered was informed by Pierre Bourdieu's theories on culture and class reproduction, specifically in terms of intersecting experiences of social class and gender.

Research Questions

Overall, the intent of this research was to develop an ethnographic explication of the "soccer mom" phenomenon. In order to critically examine the subculture under analysis, the following questions guided the research process:

- In what ways do mothers of youth soccer players express class distinction and how does their role aid social class reproduction in and through their sons?

More specifically:

- What does being a "soccer mom" entail? How do the subjects rationalize their labor? Can their ideological beliefs and associated everyday practices be understood in terms of class habitus and traditional gender role expectations?

- To what degree, and to what effect, is soccer incorporated into the culture of America's upper-middle class, white suburban populace?
- In what ways does participation in the field of youth soccer contribute toward production of particular behavioral norms and expectations, particularly in relation to the establishment of the class and gender specific subjectivities associated with the bourgeois habitus?

Justification

This research project represents a critical engagement with Bourdieu's theories of social class and class reproduction. While Bourdieu's (1984) seminal analysis provided an understanding of cultural practices, power, and privilege in 1960's France, this study focused instead on current social practices in America. As noted in work by Zwick and Andrews, the "suburban soccer field represents a transparent window into the workings and experiences of power and privilege within contemporary America" (1999, p. 222). This research consists of a full-scale ethnography project informed by Bourdieu's theories. By analyzing the American, middle class "soccer mom" phenomenon through this ethnography, a more comprehensive understanding of within-class cultural practices was gained.

While it may be argued that studying powerful cultural groupings is somehow less important than focusing on underprivileged groups and how they experience domination, it is the researcher's belief that the privileged experiences of middle and upper-middle class women are worthy of academic attention. These groups should be studied for the very reason that they are perceived as the "privileged" class. It is the

attempt by these women to handle and reproduce that privilege that is of particular interest to the researcher. Ultimately, the results of this research contribute to an understanding of "how systems of domination co-construct one another, and how we are 'enlisted', materially and ideologically in their continued operation" (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 75). This contribution will be accomplished by providing an analysis of the ways in which "soccer moms" take part in the process of transforming capital in order to pass on their habitus to their children -- perhaps in an attempt to secure them a position in the next generation of upper-middle class Americans.

While the variables of gender and race often constitute the emphasis in today's sociology of sport research, the significance of social class often goes unrecognized. Gender and race are key factors in determining experience, but it is the researcher's belief that they should be analyzed in association with issues regarding social class in order to attain a fuller understanding of behavior. According to Vavrus (2000), current depictions and understandings of "soccer moms" simplify maternal experience and homogenize women; therefore, a more complete picture of this phenomenon needs to be produced. Zwick (1997) noted that gender, while not a focus in his ethnographic analysis of youth soccer culture, should be a part of future research. The results of this study shed light on the complexities of the "soccer mom" role by complicating the taken for granted assumptions about upper-middle class women.

Assumptions and Limitations

How could I not know? This was the question I asked myself with my jaw dropped open at the site before me. It was nearly eight a.m. on Saturday morning and I had just

driven for close to two hours through a thunderstorm to one of the Atlantic Breakers'

out-of-state soccer tournaments. As I slowly inched along this windy, back-country

road, bumper to bumper with S.U.V.s and minivans, I kept my eye on the traffic

bending to the right up ahead at the end of the tree line. I got a strange chill turning that

anticipated corner -- how could I not know this whole other world existed? And not just

existed but lived and breathed with such intensity. There on the other side of that long

thick wall of trees loomed the soccer field. This was not just any field, it was a

tournament field. There must have been eight to twelve games going on all at once

within the confines of the surrounding stark white fencing, team tents, and hundreds and

hundreds of soccer parents. How could I not know of this other world with its

religious-like fervor?

When developing my research agenda, I knew "soccer moms" existed. I had a

general sense of how they were portrayed in the media and my knee-jerk reaction had

always been to avoid association with this group that I perceived as consisting of

women who were unproductive in the work world and who lacked independence. But I

knew if I was going to take on this ethnography project I was going to have to embrace

what I knew as a former anthropology student to be essential in research -- the cultural

relativist approach.

My plan was to give these women voice through my research. I was going to

discover what went on behind the scenes when playing the role of mothers of soccer-

playing children, and allow my subjects to explain in their own words what their

intentions were in having their sons play soccer. Putting my biases aside turned out to

be relatively easy. My subjects' kind and thoughtful attitudes toward the research, plus

outsiders' negative reactions to my study's "soccer mom" subjects inspired me to do justice to the research project by maintaining an open mind and respect for what I might discover about these women.

There were limitations to what I was able to accomplish in this study. In understanding my subjects' motherhood experiences, I focused mainly on the role they played in relation to their sons' soccer team, as opposed to a number of activities. While the results provide a description of mothers of soccer-playing children, this group of mothers' everyday realities and the meanings they associated with their experiences, and their sons' experiences, could possibly be unique to their team. This study did not include ethnographic data on other teams or other groups of mothers affiliated with youth soccer. So while the results may not be generalizable to all mothers' experiences, they do allow for an understanding of diversity within these experiences and associated meanings. Also while the results of this study allowed for an understanding of mothers' contributions to the reproduction of their class habitus in their sons, it does not address to any great extent the impact fathers play in this reproduction, nor does it assess treatment of daughters in youth soccer.

Early on in my research I had some concerns about my ability to gain a strong rapport with my subjects since I am not a mother myself. I saw this as possibly limiting my chances of getting the subjects to open up about their mothering role. Ultimately though I believe it was a benefit. As I mention below in Chapter II, Tardy (2000) noted that mothers try to maintain a good status among other mothers. So perhaps my subjects would have been concerned about my disapproval and would have glossed over more aspects of their role if they had viewed me as an equal. As noted in Chapter III

below, my subjects treated me as a potential mother; their conversations with me often took on an air of guidance.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter II below, I provide a review of relevant literature. Included are sections on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical understanding of social class and sport and literature on the incorporation of soccer into America's suburban landscape. This information provides a theoretical background from which to work. Bourdieu's descriptions of cultural fields, capital, and habitus not only contributed to the analysis of the data collected, but more importantly were also a driving force behind the production of numerous inquiries during the ethnography. The literature review of material on the suburban envelopment of soccer provided an applicable context for the group under analysis. Also in this chapter, I reviewed relevant work on mothering and middle class women's labor. This material allowed for a greater understanding of women's everyday experiences that I was then able to use to compare and contrast with the subjects of this study.

Chapter III provides a description of my methodology. In this chapter I review ethnographic strategies and methods adopted during fieldwork. Also included is information on the difficulties I encountered while using my chosen method, the importance of reflexivity, and my subjects' reactions to the study.

Chapters IV, V, and VI are my three theme chapters. Each provides detailed analysis while incorporating the subjects' own words. It is in these chapters that the reader gains access to a written representation of the subjects' culture. In Chapter IV, I

provide an analysis of the context (i.e. American, upper-middle class suburb) within which the subjects live. In Chapter V, I focus on the role played, or more significantly "worked," by the mothers. In Chapter VI, I explore what the mothers' labor was intended to produce - "good boys".

I conclude in Chapter VII by summing up my findings and examining the extent to which the experiences of the mothers and their sons is unique. Also, in Chapter VII are suggested research directions I plan to take in the future.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Wacquant (1992), "the wide-ranging work produced by Pierre Bourdieu over the past three decades has emerged as one of the most imaginative and fertile bodies of social theory and research of the postwar era" (p. 2). Bourdieu's extensive volume of work explored a variety of subjects such as education (1988, 1990a); language (1991); ethnography (1958, 1984); lifestyle and social class (1984, 1986, 1993a, 1993b); reflexivity (1990b, 1992); family (1996); art (1993a, 1996); and sport (1978, 1988, 1990, 1993c, 1998). Through his far-reaching and insightful work, Bourdieu has greatly influenced our understanding of the social world and "today, he is considered one of the world's leading social theorists" (Lemert, 1993, p. 479).

Bourdieu pulled from a variety of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, in order to develop his understanding of the social world. Through his work, Bourdieu attempted to "integrate and transcend" … "well-established and mutually exclusive oppositions" (Callewaert, 2000, p. 312). He challenged the numerous dichotomies thriving in sociological descriptions, by questioning oppositions such as theory and method, positivism and naturalism, and qualitative and quantitative methodologies. He perceived of established schemes of thought as too limiting, and therefore, refused to allow objectivism to be his empirical guide (Bourdieu, 1977). Instead, Bourdieu developed his own "theory of practice," noting:

> that we shall escape from the ritual either/or choice between objectivism and subjectivism in which the social sciences have so far allowed themselves to be trapped only if we are prepared to inquire into the mode of production and

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functioning of the practical mastery which makes possible both an objectively

intelligible practice and also an objectively enchanted experience of that practice

(Bourdieu, 1977, p. 4).

This sort of refusal of the traditional by Bourdieu led to his need to develop his own

understanding of social structures and social interaction as described in texts such as

Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (1984), The Field of Cultural

Production (1993), and Language and Symbolic Power (1991).

Bourdieu on Class

In analyzing specific class practices, the researcher relied on Bourdieu's writings

concerning capital, habitus, and cultural fields, as well as recent sociological literature

influenced by Bourdieu's theories. Bourdieu developed social theories initiating with

the identification of the various forms of capital; his

concepts were forged theoretically through a Marxian concern with social

reproduction, a Weberian concern with the particular styles of life and

attributions of honour or dishonour that define status groups, and a Durkheimian

concern with the social origin and function of symbolic forms, classifications

and representations (Shilling, 1992, p. 2).

Capital "refers to the active properties that structure social space" (Laberge, 1995, p.

133). Capital, as described by Bourdieu, is labor in either a "materialized" or

"embodied" form (1986, p. 241). Different types of capital include economic, cultural,

social, and physical forms. It is the analysis of these various forms and their

distribution within a social structure that allows Bourdieu to develop an understanding of social "reality." He explained that:

> the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices (1986, p. 242).

The various forms and distribution of capital were examined in this study to determine the "realities" of the subjects existing within the suburban soccer landscape.

Economic capital consists of income level, or quite simply money. As Bourdieu (1984) described it, an individual's social class ranking is at least partially determined by economic capital. It is the particular social class ranking of an individual that determines lifestyle preferences such as food choices. According to Bourdieu (1984), as one's income level or economic capital increases, his or her preference for fattening foods decreases. An individual with less economic capital would more often opt for a fattening food since it is both filling and economical. Here Bourdieu has made the point that economic capital in the form of "income plays an important part in determining distance from necessity" (1984, p. 177). Bourdieu, therefore, indicated with a rise in economic capital comes a rise in class standing and a rise in freedom. Evidence of being free from necessity occurs when an upper-middle class wife does not work outside the home. This is a clear indication that further economic capital is not needed within the home, therefore, the couple has the freedom to choose a particular lifestyle that a working class couple is unlikely capable of making (1984, p. 178).

Bourdieu (1986) described cultural capital as existing in the following three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. The first form, embodied, consists of "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Cultural capital in this form takes time to produce within the individual. According to Bourdieu, "it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor" (1986, p. 244). Shilling referred to this as "physical capital" and noted that this particular form of cultural capital has been neglected within the literature on Bourdieu's theories (1992, p. 3). He went on to say that physical capital is too important to be considered just a subcategory of cultural capital. In his work "Schooling and the Production of Physical Capital," he emphasized the need to apply Bourdieu's understanding of physical capital to the sociology of education. He explained that students experience the formation of physical capital within school through not only physical education classes, but also an overall attempt by the school to "internalize in pupils socially acceptable ways of managing and maintaining their bodies" (Shilling, 1992, p. 11).

The second form of cultural capital, "objectified," exists as various cultural goods. The role of these material objects as "effective capital" only occurs within fields of cultural production where agents are capable of recognizing the meaning these objects convey (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). For example, the aesthetic value of a painting follows the logic of cultural capital within the artistic field (Bourdieu, 1993).

The third form of cultural capital is the "institutionalized state."   According to Bourdieu, cultural capital in this form is infused with the power "to impose recognition" (1986, p. 248). Educational institutions produce "officially recognized . . . competence"

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Academic capital may be utilized in order to reproduce and legitimate current social structures and order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Holt, 1998).

Social capital is developed as a result of an affiliation with a particular group and is equivalent to a "credential" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). As Bourdieu noted, "social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248). The members of the "network" share in their ownership of this form of capital, and therefore, "social capital is never completely independent" (p. 249). Participation within the group or network is represented through members' similar recognition and practices or exchanges.

Economic capital can be manipulated and transformed into both cultural and social forms of capital. For example, economic capital may be used to purchase various cultural goods (i.e. cultural capital); or economic capital may be used to gain access to elite groupings (i.e. gain social capital). Bourdieu (1986) explained that all types of capital are created from economic capital. Transforming economic capital does require a "specific labor, i.e., an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern" (p. 253). This labor necessary for transformation to take place can only occur if one's economic capital is significant enough to allow for time for the exchange. Bourdieu points out that within a family, the amount of free time a mother possesses is particularly important in enabling that family to experience the transformation of capital and reap the delayed benefits.

By indicating that a member of a particular social class is conditioned by his or her cultural and economic capital, Bourdieu introduced the first step in the process of class

members' production and embodiment of perceptions (i.e. "habitus") and the formation of lifestyle. For example, Chin (2000), in her article on parents' management of the private high school application process, analyzed the transformation of capital. Her analysis was done in order to determine her subjects' intentions. She determined that the parents desired passing on cultural capital to their children. Chin found that a great deal of labor was involved to ensure that the subjects' children were infused with the knowledge necessary to be chosen by desirable private high schools.

The term "habitus," first introduced by Marcel Mauss in 1966 (Laberge & Sankoff, 1988), was expanded upon by Bourdieu to mean "a system of lasting unconscious dispositions and acquired schemes of thought and action, perception, and appreciation, based on individuals' integrated social experiences under specific sets of objective social conditions" (Booth & Loy, 1999, p. 5). Individuals embody their habitus; as Wacquant explained "habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). Habitus, therefore, works "from within agents" (p. 18). Bourdieu explained that while habitus is "durable" it is not "eternal" and that it is only in "relation to certain structures that habitus produces given discourses or practices" (1992, p. 135).

Each class or class fraction has its own distinct habitus "which retranslates the necessities and facilities characteristic of that class of (relatively) homogenous conditions of existence into a particular life-style" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 208). It is a class habitus that determines a class member's practices and patterns of behavior. For example, according to Weber and Veblen, members of a social class share in their manner of conspicuous consumption, this in turn creates a particular status that can be

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visually recognized by others both within and outside their own hierarchical grouping (Booth & Loy, 1999). Bourdieu also indicated that habitus affects the bodily dispositions of a class as well. This "body schema" is described as "the depository of a whole world view and a whole philosophy of the person and the body" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 218). A particular awareness or treatment of one's body, therefore, coincides with an overall lifestyle formed as a result of a distinct habitus.

The impact of capital and the embodiment of habitus take place in what Bourdieu described as the "field of cultural production." "Fields" are sites where struggle exists over "social formation and social relationships. … A field is characterized by a specialized activity area stemming from a sort of division of labor and centered on a specific issue (e.g. literature, art, sport, etc.)" (Defrance, 1995, p. 126). Fields associated specifically with sport have been the subject of research and theoretical work by Light (2001), Andrews (1999), Booth & Loy (1999), Thompson (1999), White & Wilson (1999), Zwick & Andrews (1999), Zwick (1997), Clement (1995), Laberge (1995), Loy, Andrews, & Rinehart (1993), Wacquant (1992), Boulanger (1988), Laberge & Sankoff (1988) -- all largely influenced by Bourdieu's writings. A field consists of the following three necessary and "connected moments": position within the field of power, the objective structure, and the habitus of agents (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 104). Each of these three moments are described by Bourdieu as follows,

> First, one must analyze the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power …
> Second, one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the
> positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate
> form of specific authority of which this field is the site. And, third, one must

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analyze the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have

acquired by internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition,

and which find in a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a

more or less favorable opportunity to become actualized. (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992, p. 104-105)

Concepts and relations internal and external to these three moments only gain meanings

within an overall system of relations. A field is but one of many elements in a social

system and within each field self-regulation develops. Fields contain a dynamic

formation of social relations so that even those individuals with little power can make

an impact on the current hierarchical structure at work. As Bourdieu explained, "the

dominated, in any social universe, can always exert a certain force, in as much as

belonging to a field means by definition that one is capable of producing effects in it (if

only to elicit reactions of exclusion on the part of those who occupy its dominant

positions)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 80). Therefore, a field can only be

understood in terms of power relations, which is why capital is so "tightly

interconnected" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 99) with the concept of field since the

distribution of capital among agents in a field directly relates to the distribution of

power.

Bourdieu (1992) described the field as a "game" and the game's "players" are the

individual agents who hold "interests" within the field. While following the game's

"regularities" which are not "explicit" or "codified" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.

98), these social agents are dedicated to the "preservation of the distribution of capital

or toward the subversion of this distribution" (p. 109). The players are not guided

simply by external factors or internal reasoning instead these "social agents are determined only to the extent that they determine themselves" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 136); but it is their habitus which primarily drives this self-determination and the habitus is greatly impacted by external conditions such as social and economic factors. The social order existent within this game is actually reproduced by the players; the resultant "product" of the social structure is their habitus. "These agents are the product of this structure and continually make and remake this structure" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 140). This is why Bourdieu considers there to be an "ontological correspondence between habitus and field" (1992, p. 127). Both habitus and field ultimately co-create one another.

Bourdieu's work on capital, habitus, and cultural fields greatly influenced the course of this study. As mentioned above, by utilizing Bourdieu's theory, Chin (2000) was able to examine the process parents went through to pass on cultural capital. Bourdieu's description of capital was used in a similar manner in this study. The researcher examined the role and exchange of various forms of capital within "soccer moms'" experiences. As mentioned above, Bourdieu indicated that class habitus guides a class member's practices and patterns of behavior. The identification of the upper-middle class habitus and its impact on activity took place as part of the research in order to gain a fuller understanding of the soccer moms' perspective(s) and experiences. The third item described above, Bourdieu's "fields of cultural production," also affected the direction of the research. The "specialized activity area" where the impact of capital and the embodiment of habitus take place for the soccer moms and their sons in this

study was primarily the suburban youth soccer field and the surrounding community in which they live.

Bourdieu on Sport

According to Bourdieu, members of a specific social class will perceive of and interact within a sport differently from members of another class. This occurs because each social class has its own habitus, and it is this habitus that influences tastes, preferences, and lifestyle choices within sport. In regard to analyzing class distribution of sports, Bourdieu stated, "one would have to take account of the representation which, in terms of their specific schemes of perception and appreciation, the different classes have of the costs … and benefits" (1984, p. 20). As described by Bourdieu, the costs come in economic, cultural, and physical forms. The benefits can vary anywhere from financial or physical to symbolic in nature. For example, while an upper-class individual who experiences changes in his/her body as a result of participating in a particular sport may perceive of improved health as his/her benefit, a lower-class individual may perceive the changes in his/her body as producing aesthetic benefits. An individual can invest particular forms of capital in his/her sport involvement with the intention of gaining new forms of capital as a result. For instance, a middle-class person may invest both economic and cultural capital to learn to golf in attempt to become upwardly mobile. The golfer purchases golf lessons and invests the time and labor needed to improve. He/she then uses this new ability to gain the opportunity to play golf and gain association with upper class individuals (i.e. gain social capital).

The results of the following study add to the understanding of the possible "costs" and "benefits" of participation in soccer, by examining the middle-class perception and treatment of soccer among a specific group of "agents." According to Bourdieu,

> because agents apprehend objects through the schemes of perception and appreciation of their habitus, it would be naïve to suppose that all practitioners of the same sport (or any other practice) confer the same meaning on their practice or even, strictly speaking, that they are practising the same practice" (1984, p. 209-211).

Bourdieu emphasized in the above statement that a class member's habitus is clearly going to affect his/her understanding of a particular sport. The "agents" of interest in this research project were American, middle and upper-middle class "soccer moms." This study provides insight into American middle and upper-middle class habitus by interpreting the agents' understanding of soccer, or more specifically, why they are encouraging their sons' association with the sport.

Bourdieu's work has inspired a number of other researchers to apply his social theories and concepts to the area of sport. For example, Kay and Laberge (2002) examined Adventure Racing (AR) as a "lifestyle sport" and applied Bourdieu's concept of field to the power and identity struggles it now faces. Kay and Laberge's purpose was to:

> position AR in relation to other social fields, to ultimately highlight its specific social dynamic and power structure. Our analysis, which relies on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of field, explains the constitution and direction of AR as the

outcome of struggles, among social agents and institutions, over the definition of

the sport practice's 'legitimate' form. (2002, p. 26)

In order to accomplish this analysis, Kay and Laberge (2002) relied on a variety of

means to collect qualitative data encouraged by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) and

utilized by Bourdieu. Their methodology incorporated interviews (some covert and

informal), email correspondence, the Adventure Racing Association's listserve,

participant observation, and quantitative data from one of the competitions. While

collecting their qualitative data they remained cognizant of their role in the field under

study and emphasized reflexivity. Kay and Laberge identified the external fields linked

with AR as entertainment/media, corporate management, adventure tourism, risk

recreation, traditional/mainstream sport, and extreme/fringe sport. The researchers

positioned AR as overlapping with all of these fields while existing within the overall

field of sport practices. They discussed agents' debate over the legitimate form of AR,

providing quotes from participants and mapping the field of AR based on levels of

"spectacularization" and "authenticity." The researchers' analysis of the struggle over

AR's legitimate form reflected their use of Bourdieu's concepts of field and symbolic

capital as they noted that "the 'players' are the driving force of the field's development,

forming the corps of specialists who try to develop, transmit and control their own

particular status culture, forming organizational and professional interests that

constantly restructure and redefine the field" (Kay & Laberge, 2002, p. 44). Kay and

Laberge conclude by indicating that possible future research could entail an analysis of

an AR habitus.

My study followed similar theoretical and methodological lines to Kay and Laberge's (2002) research. My analysis included an interpretation of the subjects' experiences and positions within a number of overlapping fields based on class, residential location, and affiliation with youth soccer. My methodology was varied as it was for Kay and Laberge; qualitative data was collected through structured and unstructured interviews, observation, participant observation and survey.

Light and Kirk (2001), like Kay and Laberge, applied Bourdieu's theoretical work to a sport related power struggle. Light and Kirk examined how Australian schools used rugby as a means of gaining class distinction. The researchers noted that previous studies successfully revealed that upper class families used educational institutions to reproduce their class standing in their children, but that the studies did not take into account the role children's physical experiences in school play in this reproduction. Light and Kirk's examination of the social meaning of rugby in an elite independent school helped to fill this void. The researchers used a combination of methodological tools, including observation, interviews, and video analysis. They studied the school's rugby team and also gathered additional data from former players now in adulthood. Light and Kirk noted the important role habitus plays in the development of physical and social capital; "through the capital passed onto them by their families most of the boys in the firsts brought with them a habitus that was in tune with that of the school and the GPS rugby community" (2001, p. 96). This in turn helped these boys gain social capital and perform well in school. The researchers learned from the former players that "sharing of a similar habitus and the intense personal bonds forged through playing GPS rugby provide for 'comfortable' relationships with men in positions of

power and influence" (2001, p. 95). My research revolved around the examination of a similar phenomenon.

Like Light and Kirk (2001), I analyzed the social meaning or value that can be gained due to a particular relationship with sport. While Light and Kirk's sport team under study was rugby affiliated with an elite school, my sport team under study was soccer affiliated with an upper-middle class residential area. My work utilized Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital in a similar manner as Light and Kirk's research.

White and Wilson (1999) applied Bourdieu's theoretical work on class distinction and his quantitative approach to their study on the effect of income and education on sport spectatorship in Canada. White and Wilson noted that previous research indicated a positive relationship between socioeconomic status and participation in sport; their intention was to add to this research by testing if the same relationship exists with sport spectatorship. The source for their data was the previously performed General Social Survey of 1992. This national survey entailed questioning 9815 Canadian respondents by telephone. The particular responses White and Wilson utilized for their study were in regard to participants' attendance at professional and amateur sport events, their income, educational attainment, gender, region, age, and language. The researchers did find, as hypothesized, a positive relationship between respondents' socioeconomic status and sport spectatorship. The researchers noted that their analysis made them aware of the "complexities of the relationship between different dimensions of class experiences and sport experiences" (White & Wilson, 1999, p. 259). I believe my study

highlighted some of these complexities by incorporating issue of gender, social class, and residential location.

White and Wilson asserted that there is a "relative lack of knowledge within the sociology of sport about the subtle dynamics through which cultural aspects of socioeconomic status enable and constrain primary and secondary sport experiences" (1999, p. 259). My study, with its focus on class habitus and social capital's impact on the youth sport experience, effectively begins to fill this void in the discipline. The researchers questioned in their discussion "what are the social conditions, beyond financial considerations, that lead to a 'taste' for attending sport events as spectators?" I believe the answer to their question could be found in a study incorporating an analysis of spectators' habitus, or more specifically, their preferences in regard to physical capital. The researchers noted that qualitative methodology would assist in addressing their questions. It seems ethnography would be particularly useful to them since it would allow for more control over the questions asked of respondents and it would allow them to access the lifestyle choices and details in which they are interested.

Wacquant (1992) in his study of boxers in Chicago, emphasized the central role body habitus plays in understanding social behavior. Wacquant performed a three-year ethnography in a boxing gym located in a poverty stricken, segregated, Chicago neighborhood. At the start of the research, he was a complete novice to the world of boxing. In order to gain an understanding of the social logic behind participation in this brutal sport and the patterns within, Wacquant trained at the gym, kept an ethnographic diary, and tape-recorded informal conversations with members of the all-black boxing gym. The researcher argued, "the boxing gym defines itself in a relation of symbiotic

opposition to the ghetto in which it is situated, and from which it both draws its sustenance and protects its members" (1992, p. 225). Ironically the gym, where Wacquant's subjects learned a sport thought of as violent and dangerous, was a safe haven from the streets. Participation in the pugilists' lifestyle kept these men, as one respondent described it, "out of trouble" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 230). Wacquant described the boxers' incorporation of the necessary bodily habitus within the context of their ghetto locale. According to Wacquant,

> "the culture of the boxer … is formed of a diffuse complex of postures and (physical and mental) moves that, being continually re-produced in and through the functioning of the gym, exist only *in action*, as well as in the traces that this action leaves within and upon the body" (1992, p. 237).

Wacquant found that only the men entering the boxing gym with an already established habitus conducive to the lifestyle were successful. The men from the poorest and most unstable backgrounds could not survive in this environment which demanded commitment to an intense training schedule.

My ethnography, like Wacquant's, incorporated Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Similar to Wacquant's experience, I was a complete novice to the culture under study in my ethnography. I followed similar fieldwork techniques in order to gain an understanding of the inner workings of the social behavior surrounding the sport. I was especially concerned with behavior developed as a result of the subjects' upper-middle class habitus and body schema.

Bourdieu (1984) has discussed the possible movement a sport can make down a social class hierarchy. For example, rugby, traditionally experienced by members of the

elite, English, public school system, later went on to be played by the French working and middle classes. Bourdieu (1984) also indicated that tennis has made a similar descent. It has gone from being played solely in private clubs entrenched in standards of etiquette, to being played on municipal courts by participants with an "anything goes" attitude. Soccer has experienced movement along the social class hierarchy as well, but in the opposite direction of rugby and tennis. This would help to explain soccer's new location -- the American suburb.

The Suburban, Middle Class and Its Incorporation of Soccer

The majority of the U.S. population lives in suburban areas (Thomas, 1998; Andrews, 1999). Andrews (1999) describes this American suburban landscape as a "site of class-based power, prestige, and privilege" (p. 43). Kenny (2000) further describes the suburban landscape as a site of misrecognition by those experiencing this class-based privilege. Kenny, in writing about teenage daughters of suburbia, explains that her subjects "are in the process of learning to silence, defer, and misrecognize. Such is the landscape and culture of privilege" (2000, p. 47). According to Kenny (2000),

> from the perspective of those born into privilege, middle-class whiteness is invisible, and its access to power unremarkable. In functioning as a privileged norm, white middle-classness does not appear to be raced or classed in the way that other races and classes are. By this same logic, everyone else has a race except whites and class is reserved for those with and without money, either the very rich or the very poor (p. 25).

Soccer was initially viewed in the United States as part of the ethnic "other" (Andrews, 1999). It was not viewed as part of this raceless, classless privileged suburban lifestyle described by Kenny (2000); instead soccer carried a non-American (i.e. in some cases non-white) and working class attachment. These perceptions of soccer and its affiliations within the U.S. later changed as will be discussed below.

According to Coakley (1998), "participation in organized youth sports is now an accepted part of growing up in most high-tech, rich societies, especially among the middle and upper classes, where resources enable adults to sponsor, organize, and administer many programs for their children" (p. 118). Coakley indicated that the increase in the number of organized youth sport programs partially resulted from our changing view of children, the world, and what it means to be a "good parent" (p. 118). Parents' new fear laden perception of the world as a dangerous place for children and that children are of a danger to themselves, leads them to produce adult-controlled activities as safe alternatives to unsupervised play. Without this supervision, parents believe children may threaten the current social order (Coakley, 1998).

Also noted by Coakley are the "significant changes in what it means to be a "good parent" (1998, p. 118). Coakley explains that since the early 1980s, being a "good parent" means being constantly aware of what your child is doing during every part of the day. Being a "good parent" now entails providing constant supervision of your children. Today's organized sport programs help fill that manifested requirement (Coakley, 1998). But why have "good" upper-middle class suburban parents chosen *soccer* as the sport for their children?

Early perceptions of soccer as something different and external to the American suburban experience changed when a number of attempts to produce professional leagues were made post World War II. According to Andrews (1999), "each targeted at taking advantage of the increased discretionary income being earned by the American populace" (p. 36). From the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, one of these professional leagues, the North American Soccer League (NASL), attempted to infuse youth soccer programs in the suburbs. Also during this time period, the suburbs began to experience the ramifications of Title IX on sport. Title IX, an educational amendment passed in 1972, stated that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Coakley, 1998, p. 212). This governmental legislation indirectly led to the production of more youth sport programs for girls in particular. The NASL's production of youth soccer programs, along with the mandatory increase in opportunities for girls in sport, began soccer's massive growth during the 1980s and '90s (Andrews, 1999; Andrews, Pitter, Zwick, & Ambrose, 1997).

Another reason soccer has found a home in the American suburb is because upper-middle class parents find soccer to be quite appropriate (especially when compared to the perceived values and behavior in other sports) for their suburban boys and girls. Their claim is that it is "good for the kids." Organized youth soccer has the "right type of corporeal aesthetic" for the upper-middle class, and it emphasizes competition, teamwork, and achievement - all while providing a "safe" after-school activity (Andrews 1999, p. 48). Sports cannot be distributed among the social classes based on

the activities' "nature," instead any sport can be practiced within any social class as long as it fits within that class' "body schema" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 218). Bourdieu noted that as part of the working class habitus, it is expected that sports require high energy, physical contact, and even pain. While soccer is energy demanding, and therefore, suits working-class expectations of the body in sport, it is not a dangerous sport mainly due to its lack of harsh physical contact between opponents. As a result, soccer is able to fit into upper-middle class expectations of appropriate bodily practices.

Soccer's appropriate fit has led to its role in the already existing, massive consumption practices in suburban areas. The creation of the American suburbs and the mass of homeownership in these areas led to increased consumption by "suburbanites" during the second half of the twentieth century (Andrews, 1999). According to Andrews (1999) consumption was:

> stimulated by the purchase of consumer durables to furnish and upkeep one's pristine *dream home*. This post-war repositioning of the suburban home as a "temple to consumer society" escalated the demand for consumer goods, which assured relatively high levels of mass employment, and subsequently created a stable and affluent workforce ready and able to partake of the new consumerist ethos. (p. 41)

Because the American suburb maintains an almost monotonous form of consumerism, it has been labeled as "bland." Suburbanites simply look to one another for insight into consumption practices; this results in distinct lifestyle patterns (Andrews, 1999). As noted by Booth and Loy, sport "has historically provided a medium for displaying status, learning new tastes, and acquiring social distinctiveness" (1999, p. 3). Soccer, in

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the case of this research, will be examined as the means by which upper-middle class suburban distinction is produced.

The sport of soccer has been successfully interwoven into the privileged lives of the upper-middle class. Ultimately "[y]outh soccer represents an effective sublimation of the very real social class relations, … through which a suburban landscape of the powerful (white middle class) is both structured and experienced" (Andrews, 1999, p. 50). The site for the research was one such suburban landscape in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Analysis of the practices of white, middle class "soccer moms" contributes to the understanding of how the structure of the suburban landscape is experienced. Any indication of the "soccer moms'" perception of their community as "bland" and lacking diversity was examined. The researcher explored these women's perceptions and treatment of soccer as an appropriate sport for their middle class children, taking into account any apparent "body schema" and "physical" capital.

Mothering

The idea that a woman's place is in the home remains prevalent in patriarchal society, despite the fact that the majority of women are employed and spend less time than mothers of previous generations raising their children (Jackson, 1993). Feminists have written extensively on the notion of mothering (Collins, 1994; Glenn, Chang, & Forcey, 1994; Jackson, 1993; Nicolson, 1993; Richardson & Robinson, 1993; Roberts, 1993; Ferguson, 1983; Gimenez, 1983; Trebilcot, 1983; Rich, 1976). A universal theory on mothering has not been realized (nor should it be) as a result of the various feminisms at work within the current literature. According to Glenn et al., "feminist

thinking about mothering is not all of a piece: there remain fundamental divides" (1994, p. 22). For example, liberal, socialist, Marxist, and radical feminists theorize women's experiences and mothering in a variety of ways. Liberal feminists "focus on individual rights and choices which are denied women, and ways in which the law and education could rectify these injustices" (Stacey, 1993, p. 51). The liberal feminist theorizes that equality may be produced as a result of reform; women's experiences need to be more evenly matched with those of men (Glenn et al., 1994).

Marxist feminists focus on women's labor within the larger picture of society's capitalist economy. According to Chodorow (1999) in her psychoanalysis of the social reproduction of mothering, capitalism has set the tone for a division of labor between the sexes. This division is continually legitimated by various social institutions normalizing and naturalizing patriarchal ideology. Chodorow noted that:

> in the case of mothering, the economic system has depended for its reproduction on women's reproduction of particular forms of labor power in the family. At the same time, income inequality between men and women makes it more rational, and even necessary, in any individual conjugal family for fathers, rather than mothers, to be primary wage-earners. Therefore, mothers, rather than fathers, are the primary caretakers of children and the home" (p. 35).

Here motherhood experiences appear to be the result of a dominant force – the division of labor to the exclusion of other factors as well as personal choices. According to Stacey (1993) "in some accounts, social feminism and Marxist feminism are distinct from one another, socialist feminism being less economically deterministic, and allowing some kind of autonomy to women's oppression, yet retaining a belief that

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women's liberation and socialism are joint goals" (p. 51-52). Marxists' focus on class

struggle in order to explain social behavior in economic terms has had an impact on the

formation and reformation of feminisms. A segment of feminists in the 1970s who

were dissatisfied with feminism in its liberal, radical, and Marxist forms, developed

socialist feminism. As social feminists, these women wanted to avoid the Marxist

tendency to ignore race and gender at the expense of a class-focus. According to

Holmstrom, a socialist feminist is:

> anyone trying to understand women's subordination in a coherent and
>
> systematic way that integrates class and sex, as well as other aspects of identity
>
> such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation, with the aim of using this analysis to
>
> help liberate women (p. 38).

While this is a fairly broad definition, Holmstrom further grounds her description by

noting that according to social feminism "class is always gendered and always raced"

(p. 39). According to Holmstrom, social feminists are "justified in wanting to pay

attention to the emotional dimensions of our lives, both to understand how oppression

manifests itself in the most intimate aspects of our lives and also, most importantly, to

give a more complete vision of human emancipation" (p. 46). Social feminists wanted

to address mothering as labor; this perspective had been ignored by Marxists. For

example, socialist feminists do not ignore issues of mothering, instead theories and

analysis of motherhood experiences are understood as diverse among the various social

classes. As a socialist feminist, Ferguson (1983) theorizes about motherhood and

sexuality, questioning "the relative power that the relations of parenting and sexuality

give to men vs. women" (p. 154). As a socialist, Ferguson refused universal

categorizing and instead recognizes differences among classes, races, and ethnicities. As noted by Collins (1994), the significance of class is often lost or minimized in feminist theories of mothering. The research on mothers of young soccer players described below is an attempt to contribute to this socialist feminist view by recognizing the significance class plays in women's experiences. Over the last twenty years socialist feminism has lost much of its former strength. Ferguson (1999) argues that socialist feminists "need to more clearly establish the specific impact capital accumulation and class exploitation have on the overall process of social reproduction (p. 3). According to Ferguson (1999), if socialist feminists focus on social reproduction, then they will be able to regain some of their former strength and influence. The following research should contribute to this new, important direction for socialist feminists.

According to Stacey (1993), radical feminists focus on "men's control of women's sexuality and reproduction, seeing men as a group as responsible for women's oppression" (p. 51). Radical feminists consider the current state of motherhood to be oppressive; thissocially constructed role is narrowly defined and constrains a woman's ability to continue her own personal development (Nicolson, 1993). According to Woollett, "to become a mother is to do what women and those around them expect and want them to do. It is to be the same as other women and not stand out as different" (Woollett as cited in Nicolson, 1993, p. 208). This continued mass acceptance of the socially constructed role resonates with Andrews' (1999) point regarding the suburban landscape. He noted that suburbanites look to each other for direction in lifestyle choices.

Nicolson (1993) explained that many women feel taking on the role of mother is the natural order of things and the skills required to care for a child are innate. As a result of believing in this myth, women often experience much guilt and stress when they don't instinctively know how to "mother." Apparently many women's ideals of motherhood are shattered when the role becomes a reality; and according to an older study by Gavron (1966) this experience of a shattered ideal "cuts across social class groups" (Nicolson, 1993, p. 212). Nicolson described motherhood as challenging and having a far-reaching effect. Motherhood makes an impact on women's choices, economic dependence, relationships, identity, and health. Yet "despite the prominence of motherhood as a social institution, and the almost universal expectation that women will become mothers, the everyday reality of mothering is frequently invisible" (Nicolson, 1993, p. 202). The current research on the soccer mom phenomenon contributes to an understanding of the everyday reality of mothering.

Tardy (2000), in her article "But I am a Good Mom," discusses the ideal image of motherhood. In her review of literature she emphasized that a mother is considered to successfully fulfill her role if she puts her child's needs above her own. Also she indicated that the "idealized notion of motherhood has tended to pit women against each other rather than join them against the structures that have created the idealization" (2000, p. 440). Tardy analyzed health-oriented conversations among a group of mothers in order to determine if maintaining the idealized motherhood image played a role during these interactions. She found that part of a woman's effort to maintain the "good mom" status among other mothers meant maintaining the health and well-being of her child. Tardy mentioned that "a mother must be savvy to ways of maneuvering"

through health and medical related issues (2000, p. 445). This is an interesting

statement since it seems to allude to the notion of habitus. It appears as though Tardy is

saying that mothers are expected to utilize a particular habitus in order to successfully

produce a healthy child. Reay (1997) makes a similar point in her article on a mother

who lacks the proper habitus to maneuver her child through the school system.

Reay (1997) pointed out that feminism, while in the 1970s and 1980s followed a

universal viewpoint, is complicated by reflexivity and recognition of various

perspectives. This former universal view of women united under their shared

oppression has been problematized. According to Reay (1997), feminists, now focusing

on difference and diversity, are critical of traditional social class constructs and

understandings. Reay claimed that this criticism of class categories, along with what

she recognized as Britain's generally recognized movement toward classlessness or

grand labeling of middle class, could arguably cause feminists to become "elitist" in

their studies; for we can not simply see middle class as normative and miss the

complexities that class brings to our understanding of gender. While Reay's study

focused on everyday life in Britain, her research was an indication that this focus on

class could potentially apply to studies in the U.S. and elsewhere. As Reay put it

"without class or something to go in its place feminist theory will fail to engage

adequately with the intricate web of inequalities that constitutes society in the 1990s

and into the millennium" (1997, p. 226). Reay emphasized, as do socialist/Marxist

feminists, the need to incorporate, just like race, the concept of social class into our

understandings of gender and the social world.

Reay used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field to examine mothers' involvement in their children's schooling. She approached habitus and field as dynamic concepts; she stated, "there is a flow of influence from field to habitus that produces a relationship of conditioning in which the field structures the habitus. In the other direction the habitus can influence perceptions of the field in which it finds itself and generate a relationship of cognitive construction" (Reay, 1997, p. 227).

Out of the thirty-three mothers Reay interviewed, fourteen described themselves as middle class, eleven described themselves as working class, and eight could not identify themselves as strictly within either position. Christine was one of those eight; the article elaborates on her struggle with the middle class label. She has working class roots, but also the educational attainment to indicate emergence from that background. She believes in possibility (part of the middle class habitus) for her son, but she lacks the ease she sees middle-class women have in dealing with their children's schooling. According to Reay, Bourdieu indicated that habitus "continues to operate long after the objective conditions of its emergence have been dislodged" (p. 229). Christine's responses to Reay indicate great uncertainty on how to best prepare her son. She continually refers to her lack of knowledge on the schooling process, but she continues to do as much as possible despite feeling inadequate and unsure. Ultimately, Reay reiterated her belief in the relevance of class to feminist theory. She stated, "feminist theory needs to reclaim social class, not in the male, marxist mode, but as intricate daily practices which, intertwined with race and gender, are inscribed on women's bodies and played out in their social interactions" (p. 231). The emphasis on social class in Reay's study will be reiterated in the research described below as mothers are described as

relying on their middle / upper-middle class habitus to navigate their soccer playing sons within the suburban landscape.

Jarvinen, in her article "Immovable Magic: Pierre Bourdieu on Gender and Power," reviews Bourdieu's understanding of gender inequality as it is represented in several of his works. According to Jarvinen, Bourdieu's "message is that gender inequality is partly invisible and that it is maintained by a subtle power game in which the participants are both the dominant and the dominated" (1999, p. 6). The participants, without realizing it, are therefore contributing to their lack of equality. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power is informed by Durkheim's view "that the system of classification is not universal and transcendental, but arbitrary and group-specific" (1999, p. 9), as well as, by the Marxist view of ideology as serving dominant groups. According to Jarvinen, Bourdieu viewed symbolic power as the ability of the dominant groups to make their defining of reality (which gives them power) essentially invisible. In fact, as Bourdieu contended, it is the subordinate groups who contribute to their own domination. Bourdieu was inspired here by Weber's view that "all human hierarchies are ultimately anchored in a belief in the legitimacy of the social order" (1999, p. 10). Bourdieu described the dominated groups as accepting the legitimacy of their relation / position to the dominant group. For example, the existing gender order is viewed as natural. This is what Bourdieu (1977) called "social alchemy." Gendered bodies have "body hexis" which refers to the accepted functions or beliefs which surround gendered bodies as schemes. These schemes do not include knowledge about their own social creation. In this case, the "façade of naturalness" is relied on to keep the social

hierarchy in static and stable condition (Jarvinen, 1999, p. 11). Ultimately, Jarvinen indicated her belief that Bourdieu was a radical feminist thinker.

Not surprisingly, Nicolson (1993), working within a heterosexist assumption, indicated a marked difference in the experience and treatment of fatherhood as compared to motherhood. Fathers "are represented as adding positive ingredients to the beleagured and insufficient mother-child relationship" and enhancing intellectual and social skills; while the mother's role is "seen primarily as supplying the basic conditions for survival and maintenance" (1993, p. 206). Included below in the results of the current research is an examination of the differences between the mothers' and fathers' roles in relation to their children's soccer experience.

Andrews, Pitter, Zwick, and Ambrose (1997) reported on upper-class mothers who think that their suburban community's commitment to youth soccer results in their children's well-being. Bourdieu noted that "it is understandable that middle-class women are disposed to sacrifice much time and effort to achieve the sense of meeting the social norms of self-presentation which is the pre-condition of forgetting oneself and one's body-for-others" (1984, pp. 213-214). While Bourdieu referred here to women as the participants, this insight could also be applied to the experiences of women as "soccer moms"; for it coincides with what Thompson (1999) found among Australian mothers whose children played tennis.

Thompson, in her book Mother's Taxi, analyzed the maintenance of "gendered divisions of labor and how they are reproduced within and by sport" (1999, p. 7). She explained that the connection between sport and women is one of labor. The women contribute labor so that others may play. Thompson found them to be "unrecognized,

undervalued, and mostly invisible" (1999, p. 2). In the research results below, the labor that "soccer moms" put forth to enable their children to play was described, as well as the "soccer moms'" reasons for contributing the labor.

Chafetz and Kotarba (1995) examined the role mothers play during a Little League season. They found that "mothers socialize their sons into, and reinforce their own commitment to, gender values particular to their upwardly mobile community through activities that stress female management of family-oriented conspicuous consumption, the cult of the male child, and gender segregation" (p. 217). Much of the data they collected reinforces Thompson's results. Chafetz and Kotarba found that it was simply expected that the mothers of the boys participating in Little League would provide the labor necessary to complete tasks and activities traditionally done for the players. The basic reasons for providing this labor were noted by Chafetz and Kotarba as "displaying one's competence as a mother" (1995, p. 224) and for the community. "They upheld prevailing values concerning how to act as competent mothers in their particular community" (Chafetz & Kotarba, 1995, p. 239). In the research described below, the "soccer mom" was examined in a similar way. The researcher explored "soccer moms'" identity and concerns over the presentation of that identity. Overall, the soccer moms' experiences were analyzed in an attempt to compare and contrast their private reality with their publicly recognized status within the community.

In order to best develop an understanding of "soccer moms'" lifestyle, mothering experiences, and class habitus, I conducted ethnographic research on a group of mothers with soccer-playing children. I believe choosing ethnography as my methodology was the most effective means of accomplishing an understanding of the social world related

to the "soccer mom" phenomenon. By performing an ethnography I was able to tap into

the complexities of studying a field of agents struggling within a much larger social

context as Wacquant (1992) and Kay and Laberge (2002) did with their research.

Simply surveying subjects or following quantitative methodology would have left too

many unanswered questions. By engaging in an ethnography I was able to avoid

becoming solely reliant on data supplied by the subjects, but instead I able to rely on my

own lived experience. The details of my chosen methodology are described below in

Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

As described by Bryman (1988), there has been much debate over the pros and cons of utilizing qualitative versus quantitative methodology. While the literature on this debate may over-emphasize the differences between these two forms of research, the distinctions do exist, especially in regard to the role of the researcher and epistemological issues (i.e. what counts as acceptable knowledge). Within quantitative research, the researcher maintains a distant relationship with his or her subjects while producing structured investigation in order to produce "hard" data. Quantitative researchers attempt to confirm predetermined theories through their work with subjects. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, take on an insider's perspective as they begin the process of understanding their subjects' behaviors. This interpretive process incorporates an exploration and understanding of the meanings the subjects associate with their social behavior, as well as, the meanings they affiliate with the roles and identities they hold. According to Tedlock (2000), "in the past, the human sciences modeled themselves on the physical sciences, which emphasize the structures of reality outside the area of meaning" (p. 470). Now qualitative researchers take the approach that "human beings exist within the realm of meaning as well as in the material and organic realms" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 470). Qualitative researchers' understanding of theories and findings, in contrast to quantitative research, emerges and unfolds through a less structured process (Bryman, 1988). As a result of these different approaches, research results differ as well. The social reality described by quantitative researchers tends to be understood as external to the subjects, while qualitative researchers describe

their knowledge of social reality as that which is developed or produced by their subjects' understanding of social constructs (Bryman, 1988). The social construct of "soccer mom" was explored in the following qualitative research.

One form of qualitative research that effectively captures an understanding of the complexities of human behavior is ethnography. According to Tedlock (2000), "ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context" (p. 455). Ethnography allows the researcher to gain insight into human behavior that not only varies by culture, but expresses the multiple perspectives and meanings associated with social life within a culture as well (Hammersley, 1989). By performing ethnographies within marginalized areas, the knowledge base on social behavior not only expands but shifts its center. Ethnography provides an effective means by which previously ignored voices can now be heard and understood within a context (e.g. women and particular racial or class groupings) (Tedlock, 2000; Silk, in press).

Ethnographic researchers uniquely combine "research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455). Ethnographic methodology enables the researcher to become exceptionally close to the natural environment under study, and in the case of participant observation, become part of that environment. As sport sociologists (e.g. Silk, in press; Wacquant, 1992) further incorporate ethnographic methodology into their research, the discipline will benefit from the rich data on behavior affiliated with sport and activity. Sociology of sport will expand its understanding of the varied meanings

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associated with activity and gain an insider's view of the sport-related environments. Silk noted that "there have been pleas for the sport studies community to widen its research boundaries" (in press, p. 2). Ethnographic methodology is an effective response since it will allow sport sociologists to gain knowledge beyond their current understanding of social behavior in sport. According to Maguire "general taken-for-granted assumptions and the outdated philosophy of science guiding sport science thinking … is seen as problematic" (1991, p. 191). He suggested that "a bolder and more imaginative view of sport sciences would center on its potential to tell us something about human beings generally, not solely relating to their performing in elite sport events" (Maquire, 1991, p. 191). Ethnography can provide that "bolder and more imaginative view" as sport sociologists recognize the need for further studies focusing on the complexities of sport-related behavior(s) in context.

It is not unreasonable to assume that sport science research can move into, or at least pull from, a new methodological approach. Qualitative researchers have a long history of experimenting with various approaches. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) there have been seven historical time periods of qualitative research during the last century.

> These seven moments overlap and simultaneously operate in the present. We define them as the traditional (1900-1950); the modernist or golden age (1950-1970); blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis of representation (1986-1990); the postmodern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990-1995); postexperimental inquiry (1995-2000); and the future, which is now (2000-) (p. 3).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), these moments are capable of operating simultaneously. So whereas, qualitative research is forever evolving in a way, it also can be strengthened by researchers who look back upon approaches, that dominated in previous decades, as aspects that my be applied to present and future studies. The intention in doing so would be to strengthen the overall quality of the research and its results. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), ethnography is flexible; the design of the ethnographic study can be molded by a number of approaches. My current study on mothers of young soccer players effectively overlaps with these moments. I produced a social-class-based study on women that ultimately produced an understanding of class privilege, suburban community and lifestyle, expectations surrounding mothering, and the inculcation of future upper-middle class males.

The ethnographic research entailed an eight-month study of fourteen women. The women were all mothers of boys participating on a youth soccer team in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. I learned the importance of ethnography's emergent design process early on in my study. The women I had selected to study were open and giving of their time, therefore, I was under the impression from the start that this would be a good group of "soccer moms" with which to work. What emerged a few weeks into the project was that most of these mothers rejected the label of "soccer mom." My first concern was that I had the "wrong" group and should move on to new subjects. I then realized as more and more mothers informed me of their concerns with the label, that this unexpected twist in the data was what made this group not only interesting but important to study. My subjects' views were representing the very complexities of human behavior that ethnographers attempt to describe as they analyze

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social life. Therefore, it may seem strange to even use the term "soccer mom" in this research; however, a central purpose of the dissertation became an exploration of this mythological trope. The term "soccer mom" has been used in public rhetoric as a label for mothers whose children play youth soccer, along with some underlying assumptions about their norms and values. The results of this research should shed light on the complexities of what should be understood as a "soccer mom." I have chosen to always utilize this phrase with quotation marks as an indication that the definition of this phrase is under scrutiny and recognize that the label may have derogatory connotations, and that my subjects are, for the most part, not accepting of the label. I continued on with this particular group of mothers and maintained flexibility with my research design throughout the study. Methodological tools incorporated to gain an understanding of these women's lives were observations, participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and a demographic survey. The importance of the researcher's ontological and epistemological approach to this study is described below.

Ontological and Epistemological Perspectives on Ethnography

In order to accomplish the study, the researcher incorporated ethnographic methodology. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) noted that this is a popular approach to qualitative research; perhaps it is due to this vast interest, that there is diversity among researchers' methodological prescriptions. Variation also exists when simply accounting for what *is* an ethnography.   While central to ethnography is a focus by the researcher on culture, or a total way of life, definitions of this form of research vary. Van Maanen (1988) simply defined ethnography as "written representation of a culture

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(or selected aspects of a culture)" (p. 1). This definition overlooks the philosophical underpinnings to ethnography and discounts the data collection process as part of ethnography (Silk, in press). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994; 2000), views on what an ethnography should and could be are developed as a result of the time period or "moment" in our academic understanding of the researcher's role. Therefore both the approach to ethnography and the cultural information that results vary depending on whether the researcher followed a traditional, positivist model; a postmodern, even subjective model; or something in between. Overall, the ontological stance of ethnographers and their epistemological approach have altered over time. How to "write culture" has also taken on new meaning as a result of these changes.

"Writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 2). In the past, anthropologists claimed to be able to report on culture, somehow maintaining objectivity and simply writing the "truth." "The fact that it [writing] has not until recently been portrayed or seriously discussed reflects the persistence of an ideology claiming transparency of representation and immediacy of experience. Writing reduced to method: keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, 'writing up' results" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 2). What is now increasingly evident in the discipline is a convergence of objectivity and subjectivity. Or as Pratt (1986) explained, the attempt is made to put subjective experience into scientific discourse.

According to Silk (in press), the "critical ethnographic approach then is thus based on an ontological perspective that recognizes the complexity of the social world, the role of the researcher within that world and the meanings that people attribute to

everyday life" (p. 11). In doing the following study, it was my intention to provide an account of the everyday lives of my "soccer mom" subjects and place it "into a fuller, more meaningful context" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455). According to Tedlock (2000), "women can, and often do, enter into women's worlds during their field research" (p. 470). I did just this as I entered the "soccer moms'" world; I intended to give these women voice. I had to balance this support and valuing of their words with a critical perspective of the broader picture. In addition to determining the roles these women played as mothers of soccer-playing sons, I examined how their behavior could be understood in terms of their social class and suburban location. Ultimately, I hope it is clear in my research descriptions below that I support Silk's following view of ethnography:

> Ethnographic research holds much promise for the sociology of sport. Through a focus on the qualitative values and meanings in the context of a 'whole way of life,' that is a concern on questions about cultures, life-worlds and identities; ethnography provides an opportunity for the expression of 'other' cultures and indeed those from the margins of our own cultures. As Barker (2000) suggests, ethnography can be the route by which our own culture can be made strange to us, allowing new descriptions of the world to be generated. In this way the continued redescription of our world can offer the possibility of improvement of the human condition (in press, p. 5).

As noted by Wacquant (1992), sociology is a "total science." Sociologists should not limit themselves by aligning with merely one mode of practice, method, and understanding of the social world. Wacquant encouraged the recognition of "the

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underlying unity of social strategies" and to "apprehend them as a dynamic totality" (p. 27). The strategies employed by a sociologist of course still must suit the particular research objective at hand, so it is not a matter of just incorporating a wealth of practices but selecting what is applicable while still avoiding the dichotomous pitfall (e.g. choosing between qualitative and quantitative methods). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), in writing about reflexivity in ethnography, came to a conclusion similar to Wacquant's; "recognition of reflexivity implies that there are elements of positivism and naturalism which must be abandoned; but it does not require rejection of all of the ideas associated with those two lines of thinking" (p. 17).

Bourdieu (1993a) was critical of methodology not fueled by a theoretical vision. He believed that "data production" ought to be "intimately bound up with the theoretical construction of the object" (1993, p. 29). Bourdieu emphasized the need to recognize that both methodological and theoretical choices impact upon each other. As a researcher makes choices during the course of a study, reflection must take place on the impact of these choices on the overall study; but reflexivity goes much further than just between method and theory. The act of "turning back upon" must occur in regard to the researcher's discipline(s), thereby unearthing the "epistemological unconscious" of the discipline (p. 41).

Wynne (1998) in his text, Leisure, Lifestyle, and The New Middle Class, emphasized the importance of accepting the ethnographic methodology as a "process". He stated that in doing community studies,

> the researcher(s) will inevitably be faced with decisions regarding the path to be
> followed next, the relative importance of one set of observations over another

and the theoretical weight of the events that are recorded. Rather than seeing

this as a problematic feature of the community study as method, it should be

understood as a strength -- in that it allows for, and encourages, a continual

reflection on the research activity itself (1998, pp. 1-2).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) also emphasized the same by noting that research

requires "the exercise of judgement in context" (p. 23). So whereas, the research for the

following ethnography involved participant observation and extensive interviewing, I

did accept this research project as a reflexive process.

Fieldwork and Data Collection Procedures

The role of the fieldworker is to immerse him or herself into the subjects' culture.

The fieldworker must enter what Van Maanen (1988) called the subjects' "home

ground." Upon entering the field, the ethnographer must gain rapport and key

informants. From this point the ethnographer can move through a variety of data

collection methods, including interviews and participant observation.

Cultural data can be collected through both structured and unstructured interviews

(Peoples & Bailey, 1994). Wynne found that while he initially intended to gather data

from a group of middle-class citizens through structured interviews, ultimately

unstructured interviews lead him to pertinent information for his case study. Wynne

noted, "as the ethnography proceeded it became obvious that such interviews could be

undertaken more successfully as a part of the ethnography itself. As such, unstructured,

in-depth interviews were undertaken, more as conversations in a series of natural

settings" (1998, p. 3). Wynne also indicated that these conversations occurred even

without him initiating them. This emphasis on allowing an ethnography to develop and evolve without significant constraints by the research design has been supported by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) as well as by Silk (in press) who stated "knowledge of the social world is gained through a more fluid and flexible design that often emerges as the project unfolds" (p. 11).

The fieldworker may, in addition to interviewing and simply observing, move into participant observation (i.e. taking part in the subjects' activities). Participant observation allows for "detailed data" collection. These "firsthand observations . . . allow the researcher to see how people diverge from the culturally defined, idealized model of behavior" (Peoples & Bailey, 1994, p. 89). Participant observation is performed by the ethnographer in an attempt to take on verstehen. According to Tedlock (2000), ethnographers need to be cognizant as they gain an emic perspective; they may end up crossing the line between outsider and insider, i.e., "go native." According to Tedlock (2000), "it has become commonplace to suggest that a field-worker adopt the stance of a 'marginal native' (Frelich, 1970)" (p. 457). This means the ethnographer, while developing a good rapport with his or her subjects, should attempt to avoid full immersion and becoming a complete member (Tedlock, 2000). According to Fontana & Frey (2000), "going native" means leaving behind the academic role. Claims of being able to gain cultural subjectivity while still maintaining scientific objectivity have been made by cultural anthropologists in the past in an attempt to maintain credibility (Angosino & Mays de Perez, 2000). The notion that a researcher can gain such empathy that he/she may be able to write from an insider's point of view has been questioned. According to Angosino & Mays de Perez (2000), the idea that

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"the ethnographer, as a distinct person, disappears" may not even be relevant (p. 674).

Instead, the emphasis is placed on gaining understanding of the "Other" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 1057). The term native is disappearing from anthropological and sociological writing; researchers no longer perceive of their subjects as uncivilized individuals. Today, ethnographers "try to come to terms with our own 'critical subjectivities' (p. 1057).

An awareness of one's outsider status and academic role can be maintained through reflexivity. By not completely immersing him or herself, the researcher will benefit when disengaging from the field. When to depart is determined either by data saturation or the end of the group's time together (Silk, in press). In my case, it was the latter that determined the end of my fieldwork. The members of the team I studied would alter in the following season; therefore, I completed my data collection with the end of the season. Below is a further personal account of my perspective, methods, and data collection procedures while studying mothers of young soccer players.

Putting Ethnographic Methodology Into Practice

Silk (in press), in his work on sport ethnography, emphasized how far ethnographic methodology has come in its movement away from older positivist models, but at the same time he questioned whether the broader academic view of ethnography has changed. He asked, "do those who practice ethnography maintain a legitimate place within the scientific community? … Equally appropriate, how are research methods such as ethnography perceived within the department in which you are based, your Faculty, your institution and within the realm of sport studies as a whole?" (Silk, in

press, p. 2). I did find using ethnographic methodology (the notion of participant observation and unstructured interviews) to be problematic at times for the very reasons Silk described. Encountering situations where my methodology was questioned or misunderstood were hurdles I had to overcome. The first conflict I encountered due to the use of my ethnographic approach came early on in my research. In order to move forward with my proposed study I had to receive approval from my university's Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC). I had to respond in writing to numerous questions that just did not apply to my specified qualitative methodology. For example, questions included the following: what precisely will be done to the subjects? and what is their risk/benefit ratio? As I saw it, I would not be doing anything to my subjects. I was merely entering their world -- I was really the one at risk. I was also expected to provide exact procedures, the questions I would be asking my subjects, and how long I would collect data. This was problematic. Because I was performing ethnographic research, I really did not know the answers to their questions. My exact procedures and interview questions could only be formed to a certain extent at that point since my interaction and findings would greatly impact upon how I proceeded through the study. It was understandable that the HSRC representative in my kinesiology department wanted to know where my control group was and what instrument I would be using, since his research pertains to the physiological science side of kinesiology; his perspective on methodology was therefore different than my own. I came to realize ethnographic, qualitative methodology was going to have to come with an explanation, and I was going to have to bend to the positivist model in order to gain acceptance. I

answered the committee's questions as best I could and I was kindly given approval to move ahead with the research.

The HSRC also required that I include examples of interview questions on the informed consent form that my subjects would be signing prior to my data collection. I had reservations about doing this because I did not want to give too much away to the subjects before I even had a chance to begin. My concern was that I did not want to influence them in any way; subjects might be thinking after reading those questions -- I know what the researcher wants to hear. I ultimately added to the form some of the initial questions I planned to ask my subjects (See Appendix A). These questions I believe came across as fairly innocuous. Despite any conflict that arose during my research due to my chosen methodology, the benefits of producing an ethnography far outweighed the problems.

The technique I used to gain contact with each of my subjects was referral sampling. Referral sampling is described as a sampling technique "developed for sampling target populations that comprise small subgroups of the larger population" (Singleton, Straits, & Straits, 1993, p. 164). One form of referral sampling is "snowball sampling". This technique is used when a researcher develops a chain of referrals. According to Singleton et al., "when members of the target population are located, they are asked to provide names and addresses of other members of the target population, who are then contacted and asked to name others, and so on" (1993, p. 164). The "basic assumption of snowball sampling is that members of the target population often know each other" (Singleton et al., 1993, p. 164). This was the case in the following research project. Since the target population was a particular group of "soccer moms," they were all

sharing in the same sub-culture. Therefore, snowball sampling appeared to be the appropriate sampling technique.

In order to locate and meet a group of "soccer moms," I utilized a contact I had with an area high school teacher. The public school where she taught had a strong academic reputation and was located in an affluent mid-Atlantic suburb. The teacher informed me of one of the mothers of a former student of hers. She identified the mother, Jenny, as a "soccer mom," she explained that Jenny had four sons who all played soccer and was someone who would most likely be willing to take part in a research study. Jenny turned out to be an ideal initial contact; she ultimately became one of my strongest informants. She was well established within the group of team mothers, had been the "soccer mom" four times over since all four of her sons had participated in youth sport, and she played a significant role among the team mothers as the one in charge of the team's official league cards which identified each of the boys on the team.

Jenny introduced me to several of the other mothers of the team. I would ask most to suggest another mother or two. I would have that mom contact the next potential subject for me so everyone was meeting me through someone she knew. I was trying to produce an environment where each subject would be as comfortable with me as possible. I would begin each initial interview by finding out what the contacting mother had said about my research. I did this partially to establish what they knew so far, but also to reinforce my connection with someone the subject was friends with or at least familiar.

In order to accomplish my research I had to enter what Van Maanen (1988) called the subjects' "home ground." I realized in the proposal stage of my study that my

subjects' "home ground" would likely extend beyond just one soccer field. And it did --

I found myself not only on their home practice field but in several different counties,

across state lines and even in their homes. Meeting the subjects one-on-one in their

homes was extremely valuable. I did the majority of these initial interviews, which

usually lasted around two hours each, before any of the season's games and

tournaments began. It was extremely beneficial to do this early on in the study since it

enhanced my ability to collect data later on when working in groups at the soccer fields.

When I would arrive at games or tournaments there might be hundreds of parents

swarming the sidelines, but because I had gotten to know each individual subject quite

well, I could easily find my group of mothers. They were very accepting of me,

allowing me to work myself into their conversations, and seeming quite comfortable

with my interaction and with my being around their children.

At most games and tournaments I would take part in as many conversations with

mothers as I could. Fitting in with them was important in order to immerse myself in

the culture; therefore, I did as they did. I observed their appearance and behavior and

listened to the kinds of comments they made from the sidelines and the discussions that

took place among the parents. I tried to absorb as much information as possible during

these first few events. I then mimicked their typical dress and actions during the rest of

the season. For example, showing up with a folding chair in tow seemed to help

establish me as one of the group. Of course, I did stand out as different since I was also

armed with a notebook and tape-recorder.

There was some diversity among the subjects' activities during games. There were

the moms, who at one point referred to themselves as "the rebels," that usually sat off to

one side, distancing themselves a bit from the field. Then there were the moms right

there on the sidelines following a ritual of sitting, then standing, then walking. Most of

the fathers who attended the game would stand grouped together close to one end of the

field or the other. Despite the occasional varied groupings, I still managed to spend

time with all the subjects. On a whole, the team parents were loosely formed on the

sidelines compared to other team parents; but they all interacted with each other during

games. They all seemed quite comfortable with one another, getting along very well.

They would discuss a variety of things with one another such as the game, their kids,

schools, food, what they did over the weekend, and vacations. But what amazed me

was their ability to keep an eye on the game while seemingly not watching at all. They

could carry on in-depth conversations with me and other team parents, but all the while

still know exactly what the score was, when to clap, and why the referee was signaling.

When to use or even appear with items (e.g. notebook and tape-recorder) that made

me stand out as more of a researcher and less one of them was quite often a struggle.

With every practice and game and with each home visit I had to make the decision of

whether or not it was appropriate to bring these items along. Occasionally I would

leave the notebook and tape-recorder in my car and just run over to the parking lot once

or twice to jot down notes or record observations or informative quotes. There were

certainly times when it seemed inappropriate to take any notes; for example, one mom

after dropping off her son to practice, invited me back to her home to just hang out until

pick-up time two hours later. I talked with her while she made dinner for her family.

This type of unstructured data collection time often gave me insight into their personal

lives and a further look at their values, but also often what could be considered "inside

scoop" on the team. After every interaction, whether it was a home visit, practice or game, I would immediately record my impressions on tape (while traveling what were often considerable distances) in order to produce thick description despite lack of time.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), "research is a practical activity requiring the exercise of judgement in context" (p. 23). The ethnographer must be open to varying his/her research design once in the context of the cultural setting under study. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) explained, "ethnography cannot be predetermined"; instead, the "research design should be a reflexive process" (p. 24). About mid-way through data collection I realized I was assuming too much regarding certain social factors such as the age, religion, and income level of my subjects. I thought asking them questions about such matters might produce an uncomfortable environment for these mothers, who so far had been quite open and responsive. So I decided to incorporate as part of my data collection a one page demographic survey in order to produce a profile of these mothers (see Appendix B). This information will also be useful when comparing and contrasting analysis of this group with data from future research on parents of other youth sports teams.

I found the subjects' reactions to me quite interesting. I told them to treat me as a complete novice and to think of me as an anthropologist attempting to understand their subculture. They appeared comfortable with my constant inquiries and lack of understanding of what I am sure seemed second nature to them. Once I became somewhat knowledgeable and appeared at numerous games and practices, they then adopted me as a "soccer mom in training." I think this occurred because they saw me as a younger version of themselves and in need of guidance. For example, I was told to

get my dissertation done now, because later I would not have time for that kind of thing when running kids back and forth to practices and games. I was really struck by the fact that they would assume I would automatically take on the same role they had in life. At one point during a game they were seeking a marker to write "future soccer mom" across the back of my fold up chair.

Another interesting reaction from my subjects was constant comments of disbelief. When parents would first see me at a practice or event, I often heard things like "you're such a trooper" or comments about my "commitment." Sometimes I felt like my subjects were fighting over me. If I sat with some of the mothers on the bleachers, I might get a call over from the moms in chairs to come sit with them. If I did not have a place to sit, one of them would grab an extra chair from her car. Often parents would strike up conversations with me, indicating there was something I might be interested in for my study or just inquiring how it was going. They would often want to know if their answers were fitting in with what others had said. They definitely supported me in my research efforts. At one point during my ethnography when the parents were all huddled around talking about an upcoming tournament that support became very clear. The location of the tournament was a great distance away and would require a two to three night stay; and they asked if I was going. I told them I could not financially handle the cost of the trip. They suddenly started talking about working something out so I could go. I of course did not take their money, but was impressed by the offer and their support of my research. I was extremely thankful for their constant kindness and openness. My subjects' positive and supportive attitude ultimately became one of my strongest motivations to produce a quality research project.

One of my concerns over producing quality work was to maintain credibility. The term *credibility* is used by ethnographers in an attempt to note the distinction from positivists' work. The positivist model of research is an attempt at establishing "truth" or validity. Ethnographers take on a different ontological stance or purpose in producing research, therefore the terminology should reflect the differences between types of methods. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), "terms such as *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* replace the usual positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity" (p. 21). Janesick (2000), who noted that quantitative methodological terms need to be replaced with qualitative referents, emphasized the important point that "qualitative researchers do not claim that there is only one way of interpreting an event. There is no one 'correct' interpretation" (p. 393). If qualitative methodology entails action research then credibility, validity, and reliability are logically assessed by "local stakeholders" abilities "to act on the results of the action research" (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, p. 96). But if qualitative research, such as ethnography, does not include this step, then there are other means by which to produce credibility. For example, a number of different forms of triangulation could be utilized to enhance validity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). One form is data-source triangulation; according to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) this entails:

> the comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the fieldwork, different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting, or, as in respondent validation, the accounts of different participants (including the ethnographer) differentially located in the setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000, p. 230).

The ethnographers could also opt for performing triangulation among a team of researchers or data collection triangulation. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), ethnographers often use a combination of techniques to increase credibility.

Silk (in press), in his work on sporting ethnographies, mentioned strategies that an ethnographer can take to increase credibility. One such strategy is to return to the field to share research notes and interpretations with the subjects. "However, it is important here that the researcher maintains some critical distance and enters into a dialogue with the participant if differences emerge. In this way, the process becomes less a 'check' of interpretations and more a site through which new dialogue and data can be elicited" (Silk, in press, p. 20). Toward the end of my data collection I organized a few focus groups. I would gather either two or three mothers at a time and review with them some of the themes that had developed in my fieldnotes. This gave the subjects an opportunity to hear about my findings thus far and provide their reactions. Also, it was interesting to see them interact with each other over these topics. They quite often reacted unanimously after talking things through, but were not hesitant to speak up if they did not agree with me or some of the other mothers.

When I started this ethnography project I knew I was working within somewhat of a limited time frame. My goal was to familiarize myself with the "soccer mom" sub-culture, but I knew that the group of subjects I was studying would only remain a group until the end of the soccer season. The team was likely going to take on a new form once they transitioned into the indoor soccer season, and would definitely change next season as they lose a couple of the boys to high school soccer and possibly to other sports. During the earlier stages of my research I did not know if I would be able to

gain a full understanding of the "soccer mom" phenomenon prior to the end of the season. This is why establishing a strong rapport with my subjects and gaining access to their homes was essential. I knew I could easily go back and reconvene with them one-on-one for follow up questions if I needed to before I finally ended the data collection process.

Understanding the Process and the Interpretation Within

Ethnographic research is an "active process" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 18). The ethnographer goes through a process of first decoding the culture studied and then recoding that data into a written representation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986 & Van Maanen, 1988). Previously, anthropologists believed that ethnographies could be duplicated since they were simply reports on culture or "truth." It is now accepted that through the decoding and recoding process, variations will occur among ethnographies on the same culture. Sparkes (1992) suggested, "there can be no such thing as a neutral report since the conventions of text and the language forms used by researchers of all paradigmatic stances are actively involved in the construction of realities" (p. 7). The variations of ethnographic accounts result from the different theories and ontological stances driving the decoding of culture and the ethnographers' discipline(s) affecting recoding (e.g. perspective and language).

In the current study Bourdieu's theories on social class drove my decoding of the "soccer moms'" culture. Recoding the data into written form was influenced greatly by the intended resultant product, that is, a dissertation within the discipline of kinesiology; therefore, the results of the research should in addition to providing a sense of the

suburban middle class body culture, add overall to the discipline's body of knowledge.
I was also heavily influenced by an academic background in the fields of anthropology and sociology.

In many ways this study crosses numerous genres (Van Maanen, 1988), moments (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), and voices (Sparkes, 1992). One intention I had was to represent my subjects' personal views while at the same time acknowledging that this was my interpretation of their views. I attempted to incorporate any diversity of responses, thereby avoiding the artificial development of one theoretical view by the subjects. Another significant intention in producing this research was to develop a critical analysis of my subjects' behavior. While not completely losing myself to their way of life, I did find myself fully engaged in my subjects' lives. Because I had developed what I perceived as close ties with these women and a "thick" understanding for their behavior and beliefs, themes in the data hardly had to be *recognized* by me; instead, I would *know* and understand these themes as they unfolded within the time I spent with my subjects. Elwin (1964) wrote the following about his ethnography experience, "I did not depend merely on asking questions, but knowledge of the people gradually sank in until it was part of me" (as quoted in Tedlock, 2000, p. 458). I realized I was having a similar experience during my data collection process when I began to accurately anticipate my subjects' responses and behavior.

According to Denscombe (1999), "data do not exist 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are *produced* by the way they are interpreted and used by researchers" (p. 208). I not only had an effect on the production of the data, but on the on-going interpretation and analysis that takes place in an ethnography. During this process,

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advantages of qualitative research became evident. According to Denscombe (1999), qualitative researchers' strength revolves around their ability to generate descriptions and theories "grounded in reality," their ability to produce rich, detailed data, their ability to take note of and incorporate into an account any ambiguity or contradictions in the data, and finally, strength in the research develops from "the prospect of alternative explanations" (i.e. a number of interpretations or explanations may be considered valid) (p. 221).

In order to accomplish my interpretations, I followed a five-stage framework for analyzing unstructured, qualitative data; I did this while continuously reflecting back upon theoretical work by Bourdieu. The five interconnected stages comprising the framework were familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and finally mapping and interpretation. These stages were developed by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) with the understanding that the researcher has the ability to conceptualize his or her own data and how best to relate the interpretive process. During the first stage, the researcher should familiarize him/herself with the data by reviewing tapes, transcripts, and notes. During this time the researcher should begin to formulate an understanding of possible themes. I developed a strong understanding of the meanings my subjects held for their role as "soccer moms" very quickly, but still continued experiencing the familiarization stage throughout the data collection process. It was also during the early part of my research that I was able to determine how best to gain information from my subjects. Once I ascertained this information, I was able to move into the second stage - identifying a thematic framework.

Themes for my work developed over several months' time within a context of the mothers' voices, Bourdieu's theories, my doctoral dissertation advisor's reactions, and my own reflection. I mainly formulated an understanding for themes in my data though a theoretical guide. Bourdieu's work on capital, class habitus, and cultural reproduction acted as a lens to help me see my data in a particular way, as it had earlier when I formulated questions and collected the data. This was an ethnography; I lived the research experience, and therefore, did not find it difficult to identify the emergent themes. Themes such as the "soccer mom" label, investment, commitment, mothering versus fathering, soccer versus football, "good boys," and the good coach were the result and are described in detail in the following chapters.

The next stage of my interpretive process was indexing, meaning that all data are analyzed and coded in the sense that markings should be used along the margins of recorded data as indications of themes and patterns. As I determined possible themes I would then "test" them against transcriptions of interview responses, thereby assessing whether I had data from the field that would allow me to more fully develop my understanding of their culture. I used one or two letters to represent each theme and then marked passages of the data with the corresponding letters. For example, each time I read a line or passage pertaining to my "good boys" theme, I would mark "GB" to the right of those lines in the margin. Each time I read information pertaining to the "soccer mom label" theme, I indicated it in the margin with the letters "SM."

The next stage of the analytic framework was charting. This is done by charting data according to themes. I went back to my voluminous file of data and proceeded to highlight, copy, and paste the lines that were marked in the previous stage. The data

was then organized by theme. At that point I was able to map and interpret the data

more effectively. I included the majority of marked or coded comments in my written

analysis even when there was a contradiction made to the theme. The only comments

left out would be from a subject or two who had already been well represented or if the

comment was so strangely worded that I felt its meaning would be lost to the reader.

Overall, following this five-stage framework enabled me to develop a written analysis

rich in the words of my subjects.

CHAPTER IV

THE AMERICAN SUBURB:
HOME OF THE UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS "SOCCER MOM"

Attempts at Distinction Amidst the Growth of the Suburban Landscape

Jackson (1985), Ehrenreich (1989), Andrews (1999), Schor (1998), and Langdon

(1995) contribute to our understanding of the twentieth century development of

American suburbs and the fabricated lifestyles of those residing in these areas. After

World War I, Americans experienced a rise in home ownership. Better roads and

automobile purchases enabled Americans to access new homes built outside major

cities. Americans were able to afford these suburban homes as a result of rising

incomes, lower housing prices, and real-estate tax exemptions (Jackson, 1985).

According to Jackson (1985), "new suburbs sprouted on the edges of every major city"

during the 1920s (p. 174). While the depression of the 1930s slowed down the housing

boom, the advertisements of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) kept the pursuit

of home ownership in the minds of Americans (Jackson, 1985). By the end of the

second World War, buying suburban homes was again on the rise.

Jackson (1985) described five key characteristics of the American suburbs during

the three decades following WWII. The first shared characteristic was the location of

the suburbs. The common site of their development was just outside the boundaries of

major metropolitan areas. The second shared characteristic was a pattern of low

density. Most suburbanites opted for detached, single-family houses instead of row

homes. These new developments provided larger areas than in the past for streets and

open spaces. A third characteristic experienced by suburbanites was a lack of diversity

in home designs. In the past, home styles had varied greatly form region to region. The redundant architecture of suburban homes produced post WWII was a result of developers attempting to save on costs and production (Jackson, 1985). The fourth common characteristic of the American suburb during the three decades following WWII was availability. People were able to afford new homes in the suburbs with financial ease not experienced in previous decades, nor experienced later toward the end of the century. Mass-production of homes kept costs down and interest rates were low, ultimately contributing to people's choice of suburban home ownership over city apartment rentals. The fifth post WWII characteristic of the suburbs was homogeneity. Those living in suburban areas segregated themselves by race and income level. Wealthy areas just outside of major cities became mainly white communities. Zoning in the suburbs, while designed to prevent congestion, contributed to weeding out the lower classes. This was accomplished by restricting the development of more affordable housing i.e. apartments and smaller homes (Jackson, 1985).

It is important to note that despite these common post WWII characteristics of American suburbs, the term *suburb* is difficult to define. According to Jackson, "a moment of concentrated reflection will show how stubbornly the concept defies definition … Suburbia is both a planning type and a state of mind based on imagery and symbolism" (1985, p. 4-5). It appears that an area may receive the "suburban" label for a number of reasons, such as residential density, architectural distinction, or patterns of behavior. Jackson's 1985 work provided the broad definition of suburbia as "residential areas where the residents, who are more affluent than their counterparts in cities, live in single-family homes they own and commute to work" (Gardner, 2003, para. 1).

The general understanding of what constitutes a suburban area is further complicated by the fact that the outward movement from cities has occurred over a five-decade time period. This long-term process of altering the residential landscape has produced somewhat of a patchwork of areas within suburban space. Specific socio-economic, and in some cases racial and ethnic, groupings are marked by residential location within suburban areas. In more recent decades an understanding of new and better living environments has developed to the extent that there exists a hierarchical understanding of suburban space. Ever-growing consumer aspirations lead suburbanites to pursue the most recently built homes; thereby, leaving neighborhoods that are merely a few decades old, because they are considered out-of-date in comparison. Despite the reality of the variation among residential areas, the imagery of suburban space and lifestyle still exists (Andrews, 1999).

Overall, the twentieth century saw ever increasing numbers of Americans moving form cities to the suburbs. According to Jackson (1985), the term *suburb* changed in meaning during this residential shift; "whereas it once implied a relationship with the city, the term today is more likely to represent a distinction from the city" (p. 272). According to Andrews (1999), the twentieth century saw a large percentage of the American population move from ethnically segmented urban areas into the suburban landscape where distinction was less likely a matter of ethnicity, but resulted instead from consumption patterns. Urban areas had provided identity and distinction through groupings based on ethnicity. Urban cultural patterns developed as a result of living in neighborhoods specifically recognized as Italian-American, Polish-American, or any other European American; but as families from various ethnic neighborhoods moved to

the suburbs, each grouping became filtered in with other Euro-Americans. Ironically the diversity of ethnic backgrounds represented in new suburban areas resulted in an eventual homogeneity of consumption. Schor (1998) has outlined in her text, The Overspent American, the suburban movement toward homogeneity of consumption throughout the 1900s.

According to Schor (1998), middle class individuals are caught up in the constant need to gain and flaunt status. Her ideas on individuals' desires to spend in order to gain recognition reflect Veblen's (1899) earlier view that in order to gain prestige, individuals practice conspicuous consumption. As noted by Andrews (1999), the suburban middle class uses economic and cultural capital in combination in order to produce social capital through a particular lifestyle of consumption. This practice has had a long history both in America and abroad; but it was during the 1920s when the middle classes began to grow as a result of new development and productivity, that the pattern of consumption began to take on a new purpose (Schor, 1998). The middle classes had more money to spend at this time; this comfort and prosperity felt by Americans during the 1920s lead to "a mass keeping-up process" (Schor, 1998, p. 8). Mass production and lower prices provided greater opportunities for Americans to buy products. By the 1950s suburban neighbors were looking to one another for indications of what to own. According to Schor (1998), the Harvard economist, James Duesenberry, described this phenomenon as "keeping up with the Joneses." Schor noted that "Duesenberry's 1950s Joneses were middle-class and they lived next door, in suburban U.S.A. Rather than seeking to best their neighbors, Duesenberry's Smiths mainly wanted to be like them" (1998, p. 8-9). Suburbanites were not looking to out do

one another, instead it was a matter of each neighbor attempting simply to follow the same consumption pattern as the family next door. Fear was a clear motivator; middle-class individuals were afraid of falling behind. What was "necessary" to spend money on became socially determined (Ehrenreich, 1989; Schor, 1998; Andrews, 1999).

Two decades later, middle-class comparisons went well beyond those in their own neighborhood. Exposure to the consumption habits of a much larger group came as more women entered the workforce. By the 1970s, people were using the workplace to flaunt status symbols of consumption and gain knowledge of what needed to be purchased in order to keep up. Social contact at work was different than contact at home with neighbors. Interactions at work took place with individuals of various class backgrounds. A lower-middle class employee for instance had exposure to his/her boss's upper-middle-class consumption patterns. According to Schor (1998), the "high earners" in the workplace produced a need among less affluent individuals to spend at a level inappropriate for their class. This also occurred among women who stayed home and compared themselves to mothers who did earn a living outside the home. These dual income families had more disposable income, leading families with only one income to overspend in order to keep up. According to Schor (1998), advertising did not help the unrealistic expectations middle class individuals were developing in regard to their ability to consume. While advertisements were targeted to particular high-income-level viewers of television, lower-middle-class individuals were watching as well. According to Schor (1998), exposure to products will not only make viewers want those products, but will contribute to the viewers feeling as though they deserve them.

Consumerism continued throughout the 1970s, but took a slightly different form as Americans chose products in order to gain individuality. Desire for individual distinction through conspicuous consumption developed into particular lifestyles. According to Schor (1998), "what emerged as the new standards of comparison, however, were groups that had no direct counterparts in previous times. Marketers call them clusters -- groups of people who share values, orientations, and most import, *lifestyles*" (p. 10-11). Consumerism did not slow down as a result of this new interest in individuality, instead particular groupings formed around certain individual images gained from products. As noted by Andrews (1999), "suburban lifestyle projects are less a search for true individualism, and more a stylized expression of class-based cultural associations (p. 45).

Consumerism continued to intensify into the 1980s and 90s. "Reference groups" for how to live expanded beyond previous boundaries; Schor (1998) refers to this as the "new consumerism" (p. 4). Recent years have brought about suburbanites' need to look beyond just neighbors for comparisons; they now additionally look to co workers and the media. Lifestyles portrayed on television shows (typically upper-middle class) set up unrealistic goals for most Americans; but this has not stopped them from wanting those lifestyles and attempting to achieve them even at the expense of their children.

As middle-class Americans have intensified their consumption in an attempt to carry on the suburban lifestyle, their children have been successfully folded into the process. While worried about being "good parents," suburban-middle-class mothers and fathers work hard at making sure their children have the products and clothes their peers have (Andrews, 1999; Schor, 1998). Children become aware of status-fueled

products, especially children in higher social classes, and their ability to use these products to fit in with their peers. Parents use this as an excuse, according to Schor (1998), to defend spending so much money on their children. Schor (1998) noted that "what stands out about much of the recent spate of spending is its *defensive* character. Parents worry that their children need computers and degrees from good colleges to avoid being left behind in the global economy" (p. 19). Middle and upper-middle-class parents claiming concerns about their children's education and safety, respond by placing them in costly private schools. As a result, a public education has become equated with the lower classes and minority students (Schor, 1998). Schor (1998) went on to explain, "education is only the most expensive of the 'goods' that make American parents feel a need to keep up. There are also costly extracurricular activities, such as lessons and sports teams" (p. 86). The investment made by middle class parents to do the right thing by their children is described by Rosenfeld and Wise (2000) in their book The Over-Scheduled Child. Rosenfeld and Wise refer to this extra-ordinary investment as hyper-parenting. According to their account, today's suburban lifestyle is leaving parents overextended, overworked, and overwhelmed. The authors of this popular book attempt to get readers to question why having an average child is not good enough, why winning matters so much, why children's schedules are so packed, and ultimately, with good intentions, attempt to get parents to reign in their zeal for hyper-parenting. While the authors encourage their readers to tackle this problem by focusing instead on values and ethics, they leave out a very necessary discussion of the suburban, middle-class-based issues driving such a lifestyle. It is the middle class habitus that has caused suburban parents to understand their field and behave in that field in a particular way.

Class habitus, according to Bourdieu (1984), is "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails" (p. 101). Habitus represents a particular disposition, and therefore, accounts for the similar way in which class members perceive and appreciate the world. Laberge and Sankoff (1988) described the habitus, lifestyle, and activity of women in a variety of class fractions including the middle class, working classes, the intellectual bourgeoisie, and the upper class. Pulling from Bourdieu's (1978, 1984) work, Laberge and Sankoff emphasized that class members are conditioned by economic, cultural, and social capital; this contributes to the formation of their habitus, which in turn produces a particular class (or class segment) lifestyle. Descriptions of both middle class and upper class habitus are pertinent to this study.

The middle class habitus, has generated a particular approach to physical activity and overall utilization of the body. Middle-class concern for good health leads to the incorporation of regular exercise. Women in this class spend a great deal of time on appearance; their regular participation in exercise therefore also contributes to a particular aesthetic form believed to be beneficial in trying to get ahead (Laberge and Sankoff, 1988). Spending time and effort on appearance as a middle class individual is expected to produce benefits in the long run, essentially turning one's time into physical capital and conforming to expected norms of appearance for women in the workplace, thereby attempting to gain economic capital as a result. Booth and Loy (1999) echo Laberge and Sankoff's description of the middle class and emphasize that this class attempts to control the body through diet, health practices, and dress. According to Booth and Loy (1999) "self-restraint, discipline, sobriety, frugality, and piety -- the handmaidens of hard work -- combined with individual competitiveness frame the

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ethical imperatives and aesthetic preferences of the middle classes" (p. 13). These concerns along with a tendency toward eagerness and concern over the usage of time separate the middle class habitus from the distinct lifestyle preferences of the upper class.

According to Laberge and Sankoff (1988), members of the upper class make lifestyle choices which result in gaining social capital. Participation in particular physical activities (e.g. tennis) is wrapped up in the opportunity to produce and enhance social networks. These chosen activities are less common than those of the middle class and often take more time or are played more leisurely (Booth and Loy, 1999). According to Booth and Loy (1999), the "dominant classes engage in leisure pursuits that stress manners, deportment, disinterestedness, refinement, self-control, and social distance" (p. 10). While middle-class members may be more anxiety prone emphasizing their need or desire to advance economically and socially, the upper class engage in activity without the angst. Instead the upper class is concerned with making lifestyle choices that reflect upper-class traditions of the past and therefore status (Booth and Loy, 1999). In analyzing my subjects' habitus, lifestyle practices, and specifically their choice of soccer for their sons, I found them to fit squarely in the middle between these two class groupings.

The Upper-Middle Class, Suburban, Soccer "Field"

Gilbert (2003), relying on descriptions from Weber and Marx, defined social class as "a group of people who share the same economically shaped life chances" (p. 8). The Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure takes into account class members' typical

occupations and income level as an attempt is made to place social classes into a hierarchical ordering. Developing an understanding of class structure is far from a perfect science. As Gilbert (2003) noted "broader statements about the class system run up against the inherent inconsistencies of social reality" (p. 16). Despite possible inconsistencies, Gilbert provided an understanding of each class; three of which are particularly pertinent to this study. The capitalist class, or upper class, at the top of the hierarchy is quite small. This group consists of only one percent of the population. Class members' average income is reported at two million and "is largely derived from return on assets" (p. 282). Their typical occupations are reported as investors, heirs, and executives. The group second from the top is the upper-middle class consisting of upper managers, professionals, and medium-sized business owners. Individuals in this group are university trained and earn on average $120,000 a year. Fourteen percent of the American population falls in this category. Just below the upper-middle class is the middle class consisting of thirty percent of the overall population. This group of lower managers, semi-professionals, craftsmen, and foremen typically earn $55,000.

   The subjects for this study seem to best fit the category of upper-middle class. The family income range of this group of subjects was $75,000 to over $200,000. The mean income was $130,000 per year. The vast majority of spouses had earned advanced degrees beyond high school and were in what Gilbert (2000) has described as upper-middle class occupations. The mothers reported that their husbands held positions such as the following: engineer, lawyer, and salesman.

    The subjects for this study shared some traits with middle class descriptions of habitus and some with the upper class habitus. Constant participation in activities by

the subjects' families was a sign of middle class habitus. All of the mothers had their sons, as well as the rest of their children, in a variety of activities. Running around to and from soccer, basketball, band, and recitals was common practice for these families. The mothers were particularly fond of soccer in regard to its time constraints. Soccer games unlike some other activities, such as baseball, had predetermined starting and ending times that the mothers could plan around. They also enjoyed the fact that actual playing time only lasted an hour. This satisfaction reflected middle class concerns over time and one's ability to utilize it effectively. I believe the subjects' insistence on commitment to soccer, not only from themselves but from their sons as well, was also an attempt to effectively utilize time. By establishing commitment to soccer as the primary goal (as opposed to winning in soccer), the subjects and their sons had greater control over their ability to be successful; as long as effort was made, they were not wasting their time on the soccer field.

The subjects' efforts to produce social capital as well as social distance through their sons' soccer experience were in line with the upper-class habitus. The subjects spoke a great deal about what it meant to be a part of the Atlantic Breakers. The mothers perceived their sons' team and especially the coach as unique within the world of youth soccer. A few of the mothers new to the team discussed the great efforts they took to gain access to this team by coming back year after year for tryouts. The established mothers of the team sought out suitable families to tryout. Overall, the team took a great deal of care to maintain its set values and norms. The mothers felt as though they were a part of something really special and unique. They were incredibly pleased with being part of this particular social network.

The group members saw themselves as different from other youth soccer teams. The mothers effectively created social distance between themselves and parents from other teams by disapproving of the values and actions of others. As noted by Booth and Loy (1999), social distance and self-control are attributes of the upper-class habitus. The mothers of the Atlantic Breakers developed their social distance precisely by maintaining self-control. They were disgusted by parents of other teams who would run down from the bleachers and yell at the coaches and children. The subjects maintained decorum on their sideline. Even when yelling out in support of their sons, they noted that they clap for everyone and yell supportive words to all the boys not just their own. I was told by one subject that the mothers had been recognized by other teams for this behavior. Most of these mothers refused to be labeled as "soccer moms," as they noted, "soccer moms" were the ill-behaved parents on the other side of the field. All of the subjects disagreed with the over-the-top behavior of these other parents (obviously displaying middle class values in their actions). The mothers also expected their sons to exhibit self-control. The boys were to show restraint on the soccer field even when the opposing team played a rough or physical game. Coaches also emulated these expectations. Overall the team (all associated with the Atlantic Breakers were part of the team) was expected to exude sportsman-like qualities and not take the competition too seriously.

Sharing qualities of both the middle-class habitus and the upper-class habitus, this group of subjects could be fairly labeled as upper-middle class. The upper-middle class habitus has been summed up in the following way: "They stress planning for the future and not too much regard for the past; they stress activity, accomplishment,

practical results; they stress individualistic achievement within the framework of group cooperation and collective responsibility" (Booth & Loy, 1999, p. 13; Kahl, 1957, p. 201). This description of upper-middle class habitus effectively captures my subjects' values and lifestyle practices associated with suburban youth soccer.

As noted by Bourdieu (1990) and Andrews et al. (1997), sport does not exist in a vacuum unaffected by surrounding social structures, instead the activities associated with sport are a part of the larger social system at work. The experience my subjects had in relation to their suburban youth soccer program was determined not only by the broader class habitus, but also by their location in the American suburban landscape and their notions of gender and mothering. The subjects' understanding of the right way to raise their children existed within a larger scheme of thought on child-rearing. As indicated by Andrews (1999), suburban youth soccer programs represent sub-fields within the larger field of upper-middle class, suburban areas. Bourdieu's concept of field "consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" and "is simultaneously a *space of conflict and competition*" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 16-17). The mothers in this study were attempting to effectively use their capital to produce upper-middle class habitus and the suburban lifestyle for themselves and their soccer-playing sons. Their self-presentation, consumption patterns, and child-rearing practices located them as part of this larger, upper-middle-class, suburban field, but at the same time produced conflict for these women as they attempted to establish distinction through their own sub-field -- the Atlantic Breakers soccer team.

The Mothers

> I arrive and see parents watching the game - their feet leave the ground,
> arms fly up and they yell (Fieldnotes 11/3/02).

These are *not* Atlantic Breaker parents. I was still over a hundred yards away walking

over to the soccer field when I made this observation, but I could tell by what I saw that

this was not my team. Instead the team mothers I was studying were the ones loosely

gathered at the sideline and their agenda went well beyond simply being entertained by

the game. While following upper-middle class habitus, this seemingly typical, suburban

group of "soccer moms" was producing a unique experience for themselves and for

their children -- the future upper-middle class.

The American suburban landscape is understood as a "site of class-based power,

prestige and privilege" (Andrews, 1999, p. 43). The "soccerisation of suburbia" is just

one of many manifestations of this power, prestige and privilege (Zwick & Andrews,

1999, p. 212). My subjects for this study all lived in this suburban world and most

followed the expected consumer practices associated with their social class and

residential location. While there was some individual diversity among their lifestyle

practices, the majority of them were living in relatively large, single family, detached

homes, sent their children to either private schools or only the most well-regarded

public schools, and believed in keeping their sons busy with after-school and summer

activities. While some subjects lived in newly built homes with gourmet kitchens,

others lived more modestly and drew my attention to the differences among the

mothers. I was told that not everyone from the team discussed the same kinds of things

on the sidelines, sent their children to private schools, or vacationed in the Caribbean.

However, while there was some diversity in the amount of economic capital each family

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held and in their conspicuous consumption patterns, they were all remarkably similar in their reasons for involvement with the Atlantic Breakers.

My subjects lived in an area approximately ten miles north of the city. The area had several newly developed neighborhoods, many of which my subjects lived in. Their area was about five miles north from a more densely populated suburban location in which many of them did their shopping and sent their children to school. The area in which they lived and in which their boys held practices had a "getting away from it all" feel to it. While they were located in easy access to malls, museums, and restaurants, the area still maintained a quiet atmosphere. The location was bordered by a more rural area to its north. In fact, the boys' practice field was on the local, public elementary school's property adjacent to a cornfield. The soccer games the boys played were held in a variety of locations throughout the season. Occasionally the boys would play on their home field, but most of the time games were held in other areas of the same county, other counties in the state, or in other states entirely. The typical distance that my subjects would travel for games would be about thirty minutes, but a two to three hour drive was not unheard of. Game sites were either on public school grounds or at county parks. Some locations were large enough for several games to occur at once and for several hundreds of parents, including my subjects, to take it all in.

Below is a brief description of each of the fourteen mothers in this study. These descriptions are intended to provide an understanding of their suburban lifestyle, upper-middle-class habitus, and relationship with me.

Karen:

Karen always made time for me and she was incredibly eager to help out. She tried to

get everything right and was worried about sounding "stupid." She indicated that she

thought about my study outside of our interviews and talked with her husband and the

other mothers about my research. She attended games, but rarely needed to be at the

soccer field for practice since her husband was the assistant coach. She lived with her

three children and husband in a large colonial home. The interior design of her home

had a slightly country style with more of a middle than upper class feel to it. Family

took precedence - as I noticed "pictures everywhere, family pictures everywhere the

bookshelves were full of them" (Fieldnotes, 6/14/02). Her oldest son had gone to

private school and now attended a small college up north known for its strong soccer

team.

Jenny:

Jenny lived in a very large, new home with a three-door garage, pool out back, and

plenty of SUVs in the driveway. She had four sons, the youngest in middle school and

the oldest in college. All four boys received a public education in the best schools in

the county. Her kitchen looked like it was out of a home decorating show -- granite

countertops and fine cabinetry. Jenny came across as extremely personable and

outgoing. She worked hard at making sure I met the other team mothers, had a

schedule, and got the information I needed for my research. During my study she

played tennis regularly, tried taking up golf, and organized team cards for the Atlantic

Breakers. I found her extremely knowledgeable about the "soccer mom" role; she had

dedicated herself to this role four times over since each of her sons had participated in youth soccer. I considered her the queen of my "soccer moms," and I got the impression other team mothers felt the same way. Jenny wondered a great deal about what she would do after her youngest son went off to college.

Susan:

Susan and her family lived in a very large, red brick, colonial style house. "House has a two door garage and is on a fairly large lot with a lacrosse goalie netting in back. Basketball hoop on the side. Gold Town and Country mini van" (Fieldnotes, 7/2/02). The bumper sticker on the back of the van was for the republican candidate running for governor. On my first visit to her house, she and her large, yellow Labrador greeted me outside and she welcomed me into her home. Susan didn't seem to censor her comments and revealed what I believed to be her true feelings. I greatly appreciated her openness; my interaction with her always gave me the impression I was seeing exactly what would be happening even without my presence. She had two daughters and one son attending public schools. While I interviewed Susan, one of her high school age daughters sat on a stool at the kitchen island and poured through her just developed pictures from Paris.

K.T.:

K.T. lived in a modern, seventies style home with somewhat of an artsy feel inside. The house was large, but the décor was casual; it had a middle to upper-middle class appearance. She wanted a daughter, but had three boys. Religion played a strong role

in her family's life; her oldest son attended a religious affiliated college, she attended a religious retreat during my study, and talked a bit about Christianity in our conversations. She had an upbeat personality and came across as quite intelligent. She drove around a huge, old Chevy van. She did not work outside the home. Since her husband was the coach of the Atlantic Breakers, I assumed she would be a good person to rely on for scheduling information, but she explained that she was always the last to know when it came to the team's practice times and events.

Barb:

Barb's small bungalow style home was in a somewhat more rural area a few miles from several of the other mothers' homes. Her house was surrounded by quite a bit of property and she mentioned how the land is a hundred thousand dollars an acre. Her house did not have air conditioning so we talked outside when I visited her. She is the oldest of the group and sees a difference between herself and most of the other moms. She said that in talking with her I would get "a lower level" perspective. While she gave some indication of class differences between herself and several other mothers, she did emphasize that her husband was a lawyer, she had a degree in higher education, and that her oldest child, Jessica, was on a scholarship at a private college. She appeared to have the same, if not more, cultural capital than the rest of the subjects but perhaps not quite as much economic capital. She worked part-time at a local high school and garden nursery. She showed definite interest in the project and gave suggestions on what to look for while studying the group.

Anne:

Anne lived in a suburban area separate from the other mothers, but equally if not more highly valued as a prestigious residential location. Her neighborhood consisted of homes just as large as the other mothers' homes, but with much more of a suburban feel than suburban-rural. There was less variation among the style of houses and they were situated on smaller lots. They looked to be about ten to fifteen years old. Anne drove a gold color minivan with a STX (lacrosse brand) sticker on the back. She was one of the few mothers to work full-time outside the home. Her husband was an optometrist and she had a ten-year-old daughter in private school and a twelve-year-old son in public school. Her home had an upper-middle class appearance. "She explained that they were in the middle of remodeling. Really couldn't tell looking around, rooms seemed put together. The only thing that seemed out of place was a framed picture that was on the floor leaned up against a wall in the living room" (Fieldnotes, 7/19/02). Her husband and daughter watched television in the family room on the other side of glass French doors while I visited with her. That night, she was dressed in professional attire, obviously just post-work. I rarely saw Anne at games or practices, normally her husband was there. Apparently she would take their daughter to her games during the time her son would be playing.

Melissa:

Melissa and her family made a move during my study. When I first visited her, they were living in a red brick home with a two-door garage, somewhat modest in size compared to some of the other mothers' homes. By the end of the study, she was living

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in a very large brick modern style house that easily rivaled the size of Jenny's home.

Melissa drove an older red Chevy Tahoe and kept her appearance fairly simple. She

almost always wore khaki shorts with a white or black top, and a small amount of

jewelry and make-up. Melissa was the mother of three. Her oldest son was on the team

and she often brought her two younger children to the games and when I would meet

with her. She showed initial excitement about the study and indicated she had a degree

in psychology and that this background enhanced her interest in analyzing "soccer

moms." She worked part-time as an accountant and seemed extremely busy and

dedicated to her children.

Carrie:

Carrie drove a new Audi A4 -- she was not interested in having the stereotypical

minivan. Her older brick home had a two-door garage and a trampoline, jungle gym,

and goalie nets in the back. She had three children and explained that she was no longer

working outside the home. She usually dressed very casually and often had her

youngest child with her at games. After visiting her home, which was not new,

remodeled or updated as many of the other homes were, I came away with the

impression that Carrie's family was middle class; but both she and her husband drove

upscale, new cars.

Terry:

I got the impression Terry was upper class. She had three children, one boy and two girls. Her son attended a well-regarded private school. She coached a girls' soccer team for which one of her daughters played.

> Dark green Honda Odyssey mini-van looks quite new - can't be more than a year or two old. There's a soccer ball sticker on the back of it. Also an Atlantic Breakers soccer sticker is on the bumper. Beautiful home surrounded by trees. Off white with Williamsburg blue shutters. Two door garage. Large colonial style home with siding. Home looks like it could be ten years old. Many of the homes on the street look fairly new (Fieldnotes, 8/7/02).

She dressed casually. Things were messy in her house and she explained she wasn't much of a housekeeper or cook. Her family vacations in Cape May during the summer, but she drove back home once a week to take her son to soccer practice and to coach her daughter's team. She took time in answering interview questions, but I don't think she was worried about getting things "right." Instead, she seemed at times to want more of a philosophical discussion, hear what I thought, and perhaps look for meaning behind my questions. I do not think she fully trusted me and gave me the impression she may have had her own agenda in speaking with me. Terry changed her "upper-middle class" response on the survey to "middle class" and refused to report her household income.

Sally:

Sally came across as very open and casual. She often wore jeans and t-shirts with a flat pearl necklace and a baseball cap. The cap had Professional Golf Association

lettering across the front. She and her husband have four children. The oldest three were from her husband's former marriage. Her fourth child was her son on the Atlantic Breakers team. She lived in a modern, seventies style ranch home that the housekeeper was cleaning when I arrived for my first visit. While I was there, Sally showed me the landscaping being done out back. She drove a black Ford Explorer - there were several SUVs parked in the driveway. Sally worked part-time as a reading teacher. I found her extremely easy to talk to and almost always sat with her for at least part of the time at games. She was in a graduate program in a local private college and often brought a textbook to games.

Debbie:

Debbie was rarely at games. Apparently she attended her daughter's sporting events instead. I occasionally saw her at games and practices. Debbie and her husband appeared very well off; she played tennis, spoke of a family vacation outside the U.S., and I often saw them in their new black Mercedes. They and their two children lived in a large modern home with a pool out back. She was very nice to me, but I believe most of her responses were attempts at fitting in with what the other moms may have said or coming up with answers sort of to please me. After forgetting about our first planned meeting, she explained she felt embarrassed and spent the next few weeks avoiding me.

Chrissy:

Chrissy had just recently moved to the area and was new to the team. She and her family lived in a light, red brick, colonial style home at the end of a quiet street; there

was a jungle gym, trampoline, and volleyball net out back. Part of the house was being remodeled; it appeared they were putting in a sun room off the kitchen. Chrissy had a very clean, simple style. She usually wore khaki shorts and a colored T-shirt, her hair long and straight, and a bit of make-up. During interviews she wanted to know if her answers were similar to what the other mothers had said. She had three children in private school. She and her husband appeared very well off, but she drove a somewhat modest Toyota Camry. She came across as well educated and a very hard working, dedicated mother who was concerned about the health and safety of her children, as well as instilling in them what she believed to be appropriate Christian values.

Jill:

Jill seemed a bit different from the other mothers, but was just as dedicated, if not more so, to her son's well-being. She wasn't married but did have a boyfriend that I occasionally saw. She was car shopping at the time of my study and was interested in something more practical to save on gas since she had a long commute into work every day. During the course of my study, her boyfriend bought her a new gold colored Ford Explorer-Trac. Jill was thirty-seven and the youngest of the mothers. She had long bleach blond hair and dressed casually. The first time I met her she had on a red sleeveless shirt with "Harley Davidson" written across the front. She was one of my most open subjects during interviews. She did not appear to censor her responses. She went into great detail about how she felt about things, but seemed to attempt to think along the lines of the other mothers. I believed she really envied the other mothers, especially Jenny. She indicated that she worried that the other boys on the team were

receiving better parenting than her son (e.g. eating healthier meals) and seemed to be very hard on herself. Other parents often emphasized to me what a great child her son was.

Sarah:

Sarah had five very well mannered children, who were all heavily involved in activities. Her fourth child played for the Atlantic Breakers and attended a private Catholic school. Her husband was running in a political campaign during this study. She and her family lived in a:

> gigantic yellow Victorian style house. Had a bit of a farm feel to it. Two little American flags sticking out of the ground at the start of the walkway. She drives a black Suburban - looks several years old. He [the husband] drives what looks like a new blue/gray Acura MDX. A boy of about fifteen or sixteen years of age opened the door [to their home] and let me in. He held back three large dogs. I sat in a room right off the foyer. A room that looked like it was set up for meeting with guests - sort of like a small southern parlor / den. Numerous books - Kennedy, Tom Clancy, and political looking texts" (Fieldnotes, 8/29/02).

Sarah came across clear and poised in the interviews and was always quick with her responses. Her manner made me think she would be socially accepted as a perfect First Lady. She had a real classic New England appearance.

Despite individual differences, all of the mothers shared a similar habitus and struggled with notions of effective, suburban, upper-middle class mothering. All

believed having their sons in youth soccer, and on this team in particular, was the right thing to do. These women were utilizing their economic capital, upper-middle class habitus, and labor to produce in their words "nice" or "good boys." Wrapped up in their attempt to do this was the reproduction of their lifestyle patterns and habitus in these boys. These women all had vision for what their sons should be, their shared middle-class habitus had determined for them what constitutes a good or nice boy, and their shared suburban lifestyle set the tone for the challenge of producing this quality in the boys.

A good upper-middle class son in their minds is a boy who "stays out of trouble," shows commitment, works hard individually and with a team, exudes sportsmanship qualities, and is not overly aggressive physically. These attributes are described in detail in Chapter VI: The Production of Good Boys. The qualities the subjects expected from their young soccer-playing sons fit right in line with the upper-middle class habitus. These mothers, if successful in their mission to produce good boys, were basically reproducing themselves in this next generation. The appropriate manner in which to reproduce this habitus in the boys was determined by their suburban surroundings. The mothers in this study were living in a culture of privilege. Most of them either did not work outside the home or worked only part-time, this allowed them the time to take control over the formation of their sons into good boys. They generally appeared to recognize that not every mother is experiencing the same distance from necessity as they are and able to play this role for their children. I do think their impression was that these other mothers were outside of their cultural field and

experience. What was clear was that these subjects believed that this way of being in their field was right.

Their belief in the participation in youth soccer programs as the right thing to do was reinforced by being surrounded by others believing and doing the same. According to Andrews (1999), the suburban identity is formed in relation to the urban identity. While cities represent ethnicity and diversity, the suburban landscape gains distinction in opposition to difference. The suburbs contain individuals who look to one another for appropriate consumption patterns and values (Andrews, 1999; Schor, 1998; Slater, 1997). The last five decades of continuous conforming have left suburban neighbors with what has been described as an "unimaginative, bland and monotone culture" (Andrews, 1999, p. 43). My subjects' view was "everybody's kids play soccer." By "everyone" they meant those sharing the same cultural field and class habitus. Their suburban location and upper-middle class habitus normalized the soccer experience for them and they in turn normalized it for their children. According to Andrews, Pitter, Zwick, & Ambrose (1997), " youth soccer participation has become an integral part of a normalized culture that marks suburban status and sameness, as the antithesis of urban depravity and difference" (p. 272). The subjects did of course recognize that not everyone is actually playing soccer. They mentioned that boys in other counties and other parts of their own county played football instead. As detailed in Chapter VI below, the mothers' upper-middle class suburban habitus allowed them to successfully incorporate soccer while rejecting football. Soccer provided a legitimate use of their sons' bodies and they believed contributed to their overall development of good boy

qualities. The amount of labor and commitment it took on the mothers' part to produce

these qualities is described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

SUBURBAN, UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS MOTHERING:
AN ATTEMPT AT DISTINCTION AND NECESSITY

According to Nicolson (1993), "the everyday reality of mothering is frequently invisible" (p. 202). It is my intention to utilize my ethnographic data on mothers of soccer-playing children to begin to fill this void. In order to comprehend the complexities of my subjects' mothering experiences, their behaviors and expressed intentions must be understood within the suburban, upper-middle class context in which they developed and occurred. The American suburban landscape has been recognized for its "bland and monotone culture" (Andrews, 1999, p. 43). The suburban lifestyle experienced by my subjects was one of *sameness*. This relatively privileged group was surrounded by others sharing the same cultural field and following similar consumption patterns. As their everyday life choices were normalized as a result of their location, so too was their role as mothers. The suburban mother is enveloped into a narrowly defined child raising world where she contributes to producing an environment of sameness for her son or daughter. According to Schor (1998):

> For parents, the pressure to emulate is often experienced through their children. … The one place where keeping-up behavior is paramount and conscious is where the kids are concerned. Whatever doubt the average American parents may have about the importance of the Joneses' new kitchen, there's little doubt that they are worried about whether their children are maintaining the pace with the Joneses' offspring (pp. 84-85).

How to play the role of mother is nearly naturalized by these surroundings. How other mothers or "players" in their cultural field utilize and transform various forms of capital

for their children (e.g. education in an elite school or youth sport involvement) becomes the standard or *right* thing to do (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98).

The subjects for this study included fourteen mothers. Each of these fourteen women had a son on the Atlantic Breakers soccer team. The Atlantic Breakers was an "under 13" soccer team consisting of fifteen boys. The fifteenth boy was under the guardianship of his grandfather, and therefore, I did not include his mother in the research. The grandfather, however, allowed me to interview him for the study. The team was located in an affluent suburb in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The women's ages ranged from thirty-seven to fifty-one with a mean age of forty-four. Seventy-one percent of the women had earned a bachelors degree or higher, but during the time of this study only three of them worked full-time outside the home. Their mean annual household income was $130,000 and fifty percent of them identified themselves as upper-middle class. The other fifty percent identified themselves as either middle class or middle / upper-middle class. All the subjects identified themselves as either white or Caucasian. (See Appendix D for further survey results profiling the subjects.)

These mothers were acutely aware of their roles as parents of young soccer players. The subjects believed there to be a particular way of performing their role that would ensure they were "good" mothers. The interplay between this suburban field and the mothers' class habitus established for them what they constituted as a good mother. According to Bourdieu, players in a cultural field act as agents by contributing to the creation of that field, but at the same time these players are influenced by the field as external factors contribute to the formation of their habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant,

1992). Their definition of a good mother as self-sacrificing and committed to her child

was fueled by their upper-middle class habitus. Through my ethnographic research I

was able to establish how this group of subjects identified themselves and, just as

importantly, how they refused to identify themselves. While they identified themselves

as nurturers and supporters, most of them refused to identify themselves as "soccer

moms." This was a further indication of their upper-middle class habitus at work, as

they tried to gain distinction from other mothers within the broader suburban field.

Overall, my subjects navigated themselves and their sons through the suburban upper-

middle class lifestyle by effectively utilizing economic, cultural, and social capital.

This chapter provides data on the subjects' identity, nurturing role, and use of capital

through an analysis of the following sub-themes: the "soccer mom" label, investment

and commitment, flexibility, and mothering versus fathering.

The "Soccer Mom" Label

> *Soccer mom: a typically suburban mother who accompanies her children to*
> *their soccer games and is considered as part of a significant voting bloc or*
> *demographic group (World Almanac & Book of Facts, 2002, p. 442).*

According to Vavrus (2000), the "soccer mom" label represents "a demographic

category characterized by women's relationships to their children" (p. 194). Therefore,

use of this term to generally refer to white, suburban women simplifies who they are

and homogenizes their experience. "Soccer moms" are portrayed as living a hectic and

demanding lifestyle and have been described as "harried-but-concerned suburban

homemakers" (Argetsinger, 1996, p. B1) and "masters of multi-tasking, nurses by

nature, taxi-drivers in training and can coordinate a family schedule without a Palm

Pilot" (Newswire, 2002). While today's "soccer moms" may have been the "supermoms of the 1980s," they nonetheless have lost major power as women and individuals and are now simply recognized for their power as a consumer group (MacFarquhar, 1996, p. 1). According to Vavrus (2000), women during the early 1990s (pre-soccer mom labeling) were gaining power in the political arena and were well represented and supported in the media. Unfortunately, women's portrayal and representation in the media and politics turned completely upside down a few years later as the "soccer mom" phrase was thrown around by politicians in an attempt to gain support from voters. According to MacFarquhar (1996) "Susan B. Christopher may well have coined the first political usage during Denver's 1995 municipal elections with her slogan 'A Soccer Mom for City Council.' It was, she thought, a way of denoting herself as everyneighbor" (p. 1). Women were suddenly no longer characterized as strong individuals on the verge of making significant inroads as political figures, instead they were undermined by this labeling which relegated them to merely a domestic role. According to Vavrus (2000):

> rather than engaging a substantive critique of the domestic and professional expectations of soccer moms, the label and the ensuing media discussions tend to diminish them in importance, make them seem trivial or cute, and/or link them with consumer products -- as if a minivan or organic rice cakes could address the cultural and structural inequities that conspire to make even middle-class women's lives difficult (p. 209).

My study was an examination of how the "soccer mom" label erroneously simplifies the lives of mothers with soccer-playing children and how my subjects came to terms with

the "soccer mom trope" which "contributes to and reinforces beliefs about the appropriateness of women as apolitical and as well suited to the individual fortresses of their suburban homes" (p. 210).

The majority of the subjects in the study differentiated themselves from other mothers of young soccer players. The mothers expressed a definite view on what comprises a "soccer mom," but most did not identify with the descriptions they provided. Subjects agreed that the true "soccer mom" has only a singular focus - intense dedication to her soccer-playing child. The mothers insisted that their "whole life" was not "just based on going to the soccer games" (Jenny). The following statements are a few quotes representing their descriptions and their rejection of the "soccer mom" label:

> The "soccer mom" label is a "way to describe these crazy people who spend all their time and energy running around with their kids, with no life" (K.T.).

> It's interesting because the soccer mom label I've never liked. … I always saw it as a mom that was pushing their kid. … Maybe to associate with a certain group of kids. … It [the label] has a negative connotation to it (Barb).

> [The] world thinks "soccer moms" are like this group of social moms that don't work and just all they do is soccer (Sally).

> My interpretation [of the soccer mom label is] I live for my child's soccer program (Chrissy).

> It is somebody who's that's all their world is … that's their whole life (Jill).

> I think it's somebody who's very intense about their child playing soccer (Sarah).

> It definitely had taken on a kind of derogatory um you know like the pushy … very over-bearing you know kind of like what the um what actresses, like [the mothers of] child actors (Melissa).

A couple of the mothers included in their descriptions a reference to the political

nature of the label, specifically the Clinton era. This of course coincides with the above

noted definition of "soccer mom":

> My perception was that it was a mom that was pushing their kid to do and I
> know that's not the way Clinton referred to it basically (Barb).

> I think the "soccer mom" wasn't that a Bill Clinton uh political thing to
> enfranchise the suburban housewife? Isn't that what he was trying to say
> (Terry)?

Some of the subjects viewed themselves as just somewhat different from a

stereotypical "soccer mom" and desired to be seen as more of a "sports mom" and in a

far more nurturing role. It became evident through talking with these mothers that they

had established their own personal definition for "soccer mom" in order to better

capture the meaning of the role they actually played.

> But I mean I take it more of a you know like from a business sense almost. Like
> the soccer mom's the one who does the you know makes sure the schedule's
> done, make sure the clothes are clean, make sure the you know the equipment is
> in good condition you know. … I think more of the the person who handles
> everything (Melissa).

> I think of it that I'm not just a "soccer mom" I'll call myself a "sports mom".
> Because you know what I mean. Soccer's just one of those things. I know what
> soccer mom means; it means moms driving their kids to all their sporting events.
> Didn't ever really click with me (Jenny).

> I think of it more as a generic term as a parent who [is] pretty much … around
> sports all the time, whether it be soccer lacrosse, or basketball or football
> (Carrie).

> I think the soccer mom is the field hockey mom, the the uh basketball mom, or
> the ice hockey mom or you know all these moms that are just hanging around
> supporting their children trying to you know have them be successful in what
> they want to do. I think that's what it is. So the fact that it's a soccer mom is you
> know it could be any mom. It's really just mom (Terry).

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While many of the moms tried to convince me they were not a stereotypical "soccer mom" they often pointed to other women who were. According to Bourdieu, "[p]articipants in a field" ... "constantly work to differentiate themselves from their closest rivals in order to reduce competition and to establish a monopoly over a particular subsector of the field" (1992, p. 100). The "participants," or in this case the mothers, continuously gave indications that they were different from other mothers of soccer-playing children. At times the subjects even referred to other mothers on the team (ones who themselves did not accept the label either) as "soccer moms." For example, after Karen turned to her oldest son and asked "you don't think I'm a 'soccer mom' do you?" she then said "I know that there are the ones who bring the oranges and bring all that stuff. You know I just kind of show up I think that will have a lot to do with well Jenny will be a different perspective. ... I bet you anything that Jenny probably takes Ethan to every practice you know she'll just stay." When I spoke with Jenny, she indicated that K.T., another team mother, should be included in the research. "She's a real 'soccer mom'" and she went on to identify another. "Who's a real 'soccer mom.' Another friend of mine Susan." Susan then encouraged me to talk with one of the other mothers that she identified as different from herself. "I'll tell you somebody you might want ... she definitely is your true 'soccer mom' ... is Barb" (Susan). Jill joined in on this identification of other mothers as "soccer moms" when she said "Jenny to me is like a prime example of a 'soccer mom.'"

Even though some of these women identified soccer moms on their own team, the strongest reactions came when they compared themselves to mothers from other teams. Early on in the research K.T. said to me, "I do think there are probably groups of

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parents who take it way beyond that. But see we're not one of those of groups." Here

again, this group can be viewed as attempting to "differentiate themselves" from other

teams' parents (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 100). Class and status distinction was at stake; my

upper-middle-class subjects desired recognition for the differences between their own

mothering practices and those of other "soccer moms." These mothers clearly did not

agree with a lot of the parental behavior they were exposed to at games and especially at

tournaments. The subjects saw themselves as mothering in a different and more

positive way than parents from opposing teams. The subjects had a negative view of

parents who had their children in soccer programs that were at an even more elite level

than the Atlantic Breakers. They did not agree with such an intense focus on

competition and such extensive travel. The subjects' behavior on the sidelines during

games was markedly different from parents across the field. The group was usually

loosely formed -- not a big tight cheering mass of parents appearing to live vicariously

through their kids. I was not aware of the class status of the mothers on the other side

of the field, but I understood my subjects' negative reaction as an attempt to

differentiate themselves from what appeared to be a reflection of middle-class habitus;

instead of being overly concerned about competition, this upper-middle-class group

portrayed themselves as more relaxed and interested only in competitive activity as it

could be used to develop cooperation and leadership skills among their boys. What

these women may have been experiencing is the formation of their own "idioculture" as

described by Fine (1987) in his research on Little League. Idioculture refers to the

"collection of orientations, norms, behaviors, and shared meanings created by the

members of a group who share experiences over an extended period" (Coakley, 1994, p.

125). The mothers in this study had a shared understanding of acceptable behavior for their own long-standing group. Unfortunately this need for distinction caused divisiveness among the suburban mothers. According to Tardy (2000), the "idealized notion of motherhood has tended to pit women against each other rather than join them against the structures that have created the idealization" (p. 440). In this case, the "idealization" is a negative stereotype about suburban mothers. By individually pointing fingers at other mothers who are "soccer moms," the subjects ended up contributing to the problem as opposed to moving toward resolving the negative labeling that homogenizes their mothering experiences.

The mothers of the Atlantic Breakers team, through their affiliation with one another, had developed social capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital is basically a "credential" gained as a result of affiliation with a particular "durable network" (1986, pp. 248-249). As part of this network, members (i.e., the team mothers) share in their recognition and behavior. As noted above in Chapter II, capital is only "effective" within a field where agents are capable of recognizing its meaning and therefore value (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247). This group of mothers recognized their shared values in one another and their distinctions from opposing team mothers.

A couple of the subjects said that they accepted the "soccer mom" label and that their behavior fit the stereotype most of the mothers had described and rejected at least to some degree. When Anne was asked if she thought advertisements portraying "soccer moms" with mini-vans and kids was realistic, she responded, "absolutely, no question." She was then asked how she responded to that type of advertisement. "That's me," she said. She explained that she has been called a "soccer mom." "Yeah

people have said that … Yeah I laugh and say yeah you're right I've got the van and the flavor, the sport of the day. Yeah that's what we're doing" (Anne). Debbie also accepted the "soccer mom" label. She explained, "I think that we all are soccer moms I think we are all. When I went looking for a van this weekend they were talking about 'soccer moms' … I mean you have to, everybody's busy, everybody's looking, nobody's gonna miss a game, but if you have to, you're constantly searching for the carpool. And a four seated car is not gonna cut it anymore, cause you can't bring anybody" (Debbie). Interestingly, both of these mothers mentioned the stereotypical "soccer mom" minivan. They perceived this form of cultural capital as establishing them as mothers of soccer playing children and perhaps what they perceived to be the appropriate behavior for an Atlantic Breakers' mother. Other team mothers did not do this; in fact, the other subjects often emphasized that they drove a car and not an S.U.V. or van.

These two mothers, Debbie and Anne, both work full-time outside the home. Anne was even described by another mother as having a "high power job." They were also the two subjects least frequently sighted during the season. To see either of them at a practice or an entire game was quite rare. When they did attend practices or games they behaved in a similar manner as the other mothers of the Atlantic Breakers. So while they accepted the label of "soccer mom" they still did not take on what was considered "over the top" behavior; and therefore, they fit well with this team overall. For example, after a particularly physical game when parents from the opposing team came down off the bleachers yelling at the referees and making remarks about the boys from

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the Atlantic Breakers, these two mothers remained calm and stood with the rest of the subjects who were disgusted by such behavior.

When John, the grandparent and guardian of the fifteenth boy on the Atlantic Breakers team, was asked about his thoughts on the team's mothers and the "soccer mom" phrase, he simply and convincingly responded "They're not it." In the majority of the subjects' minds, they are not "soccer moms." Instead they are moms; and to be a mom *is* to be a good mom; it does not seem as if it is a choice for them. They believe the role of mother is what they are effectively playing out by valuing their son's participation in soccer and sharing that value with this group of subjects (i.e. Atlantic Breakers team). In order to ensure their sons' continued inclusion with the team and their own continued acceptance within this overall social network, the mothers were committed to investing a great deal of labor.

Investment and Commitment

Bourdieu, as mentioned above, often describes agents as "players" and a field as a "game." The players:

> have an investment in the game, ilusio (from luidus, the game): players are taken
> in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the
> extent that they concur in their belief (doxa) in the game and its stakes; they
> grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere
> fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract," that the game is worth playing
> (1992, p. 98).

The subjects in this study *invest* themselves and their capital in the *game* of

manufacturing "good boys" (this concept is presented in detail in Chapter VI). These

mothers invest an extensive amount of their time and energy. As noted above, the

socially constructed role of motherhood is narrowly defined and results in constraining

the continuation of a women's own development (Nicolson, 1993). Many of the

mothers in this study either quit their jobs or cut back on hours to dedicate themselves

to caring for their children. Even mothers who were not working full-time explained to

me that they did not have time for themselves. Dropping their children off at school

and activities, organizing family schedules, and preparing meals left most of them with

little, if any, down time. They did not have weekends off since they attended games

and tournaments at that time, they rarely ever watched television, and opportunities for

exercise were at a bare minimum. I listened to one mother as she desperately tried to

re-organize her normal hectic schedule to find an hour to walk around a nearby track.

About mid-way through the season she did manage to find a day to walk, but it meant

showing up late for a game and leaving the responsibility of getting her son to the

soccer field to someone else in her family. I believe she found this unacceptable since

after that one day, she never chose exercise over attending a game. When asked about

their own activity levels, several of the mothers explained that their husbands were

active (apparently husbands were free to go running after work or golfing on

weekends), but that they usually only exercised if it was a family activity. For example,

if Chrissy's children went biking she would walk along the bike trail as they rode. I

was surprised that so many of them cut back on the hours they worked or left work all

together. I expected that as their children got older they would have devoted

themselves to their careers; instead the mothers explained that as their children aged and

entered high school (most of the Atlantic Breaker boys were twelve), they felt like it

was more important they were there for them and keeping an eye on them.

The mothers' focus was on the commitment it took to play the role of a mother of a

youth soccer player. This dedication became evident while I observed their behavior

throughout the season.

> But most of these parents and this is really true about this group of parents and I'd say most parents, they are very committed to what their kids are doing and they expect their kids to be committed. I mean if they make a decision to be part of this team and want to be part of this team, they're where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there. … The parents [of the Atlantic Breakers] are the kind of people who I mean they're all kind of we're all kind of at the same mind set to begin with that you know when you make a commitment you stick with it. If you're going to do something you're gonna do it well and do the best you can (K.T.).

These mothers, as Bourdieu (1992) would put it, were "playing the game" (p. 98). The

game in this case is survival (i.e. keeping up) in their upper-middle class suburban field.

Position within this field comes with certain expectations assigned to the mothering

role. Dedication and activity were part of these subjects' upper-middle class habitus

which made these women feel commitment to this team was the right thing to do.

Commitment to this team was going to contribute to the production of an upper-middle

class son and ultimately affirm their role as mothers. Their constant dedication was a

clear indication that this mattered. In fact it mattered more than other things such as

friends, family dinners, and vacations.

> But if you have friends who are not who have no clue if their children don't play soccer or don't play sports they're the ones who are like - what do you mean you have to check your soccer, what your soccer schedule is - but you just do. It comes down to whether you make a choice of whether you want to go to dinner on Saturday afternoon with friends or go to your child's soccer game I mean it's just a no brainer (Karen).

That's right there is no dinner … when there is something going on every night. I mean tonight we have two games and it's not even soccer season (Jenny).

I can't tell you how many times these kids change and eat in the car for the next sport (Susan).

Dinner gets sandwiched in there somewhere. Sometimes Greg comes you know we'll grab McDonalds on the way by (Terry).

But you never take vacations especially, we know vacation pretty much … should be over with end of July, first week of August. You work your vacations around (Susan).

Her parents have a beach place in New Jersey. They go for the whole month, but she brings them up, she comes and brings him for the Monday evening practice with us and then goes back. So they literally drive up Monday morning, Monday afternoon or they drive up Sunday night and leave Monday night from practice (Susan).

Our life revolves around him frankly (Debbie).

Because their lives revolved around their children, individual success was only achieved through the success of a child. Their goal was to produce "good boys" (i.e. upper-middle class sons); doing this gave them purpose.

The mothers expect a great deal from themselves. They put in a tremendous number of hours. This information coincides with Thompson's (1999) findings from her research on Australian mothers of tennis-playing children. Thompson indicated that her subjects took on a labor-intensive role maintaining their children's status as a youth tennis player. I found among my subjects that there is a constant need to organize, get the "grunt work" done as Sarah put it, and quickly move from one event to the next in order to have their children remain committed to the team:

Well if we figure for the most part Tom has practice three days a week, that's two hours that's six hours of practice time. And then once school starts it'll break down to two. But then they're playing on the weekends. So it would be a Saturday and a Sunday game and we add on another forty-five minutes prior to

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that they have to be there. Because they spend you know it's not just the hour that they're playing they spend time preparing before they get on the field and all that other kind of stuff. So that's six, seven, eight, nine and a half hours right there. That's just, that's not even travel time when you get to and from (K.T.).

So that's where it gets tricky because if they're all playing on soccer teams, Saturday and Sunday looks like three games on Saturday and three games on Sunday. We don't do anything [outside of soccer] on the weekends in the fall (Chrissy).

I'll be making the lunches in the morning and um making sure he's got all his stuff, drop him off at school, then I go to work and then I'll pick him up. … Come home get something to eat, drink and then go back out. … I'm pretty much his transportation (Sally).

You always make the commitment to get your child there (Debbie).

Right and this team that they're on I mean they're beautiful soccer players and they are awesome. But the trade off is the only way to get there is to … a lot of practice and a lot of games and a lot of this and a lot of weekends and a lot of that stuff. So you know there's a trade off (Terry).

It's very time consuming. But I think in the end you know in years to come it'll pay off and you know make the kid happy, you know it makes them happy (Jill).

The Atlantic Breakers' coach set this tone of commitment at the beginning of the season. Tom met with the parents in order to express his need for them to commit to the team. His expectations for dedication from the parents to get their children to every practice and game and on time coincides with what the mothers believed should be done. The subjects pointed out to me that there were other non-Atlantic Breaker mothers who were not willing to make the effort or just did not understand why they would.

Despite the overwhelming amount of work they put into the development of another person, this lack of focus on themselves does not seem to upset them much. A few moms occasionally mentioned they would like more time for themselves, but no one did any really serious complaining. In fact they usually laughed a bit when mentioning

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their lack of time for themselves. No one seemed to be truly unhappy about putting their child's needs before their own. This was unlike Thompson's (1999) results; her subjects came across as somewhat more frustrated. My subjects actually insisted that they wanted to do this. Reasons for this satisfaction with their role may be explained through an understanding of why they are committed to having their boys in soccer and the desired product (i.e., "good boys") that would result due to their effort. This will be further explored in Chapter V below. Their stated satisfaction could also be explained in other ways.

This self-representation by the mothers as wanting to take on this role should not be overlooked. According to Bourdieu (1984),

> the surest sign of legitimacy is self-assurance, bluff -- if it succeeds (first by
> impressing the bluffer) -- is one of the few ways of escaping the limits of social
> condition by playing on the relative autonomy of the symbolic (i.e., of the
> capacity to make and perceive representations) in order to impose a self-
> representation normally associated with a higher condition and to win for it the
> acceptance and recognition which make it a legitimate, objective representation
> (p. 253).

In order to develop an understanding of these subjects' social reality, their representation of that social reality must be included. Their stance overall is that they want to be participating in the role of mother (and specifically nurturer/supporter of their soccer-playing children). These mothers have a specific "appropriate" means of behaving in their role and are agents struggling to represent themselves as different from other agents in the field (i.e. highly competitive and pushy parents of other teams).

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According to Bourdieu (1984), "the reality of the social world is in fact partly determined by the struggles between agents over the representation of their position in the social world and, consequently, of that world" (p. 253). These subjects reflected the middle class preoccupation with the symbolic by expressing great concern over their representation as mothers of young soccer players (Bourdieu, 1984). They continuously followed their team's own accepted behavior and avoided "soccer mom" values and practices.

By presenting (and believing) that they want to do this, their identity is not limited by social condition. They state they want to (i.e., they do not have to) invest this commitment, thereby presenting an aura of experiencing absence from necessity and reflecting a privileged class way of being. They have symbolically represented themselves as having autonomy. The subjects, of course, do have autonomy in the sense that they *choose* to invest their labor; however, they are working within the social constraints of the good mother status. They must maintain constant dedication to their children and value their individual achievement, activity, and success within a cooperative/team orientation. Following this role clearly becomes the expected practice in white, suburban, upper-middle class America.

The subjects were contributing agents within the field that produces the narrowly defined and often unhealthy confines of the "good mother" status. These mothers took part in what Bourdieu refers to as "symbolic violence." Symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu (1992):

> is violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity. …
> social agents are knowing agents who, even when they are subjected to

determinisms, contribute to producing the efficacy of that which determines

them insofar as they structure what determines them. And it is almost always in

the "fit" between determinants and the categories of perception that constitute

them as such that the effect of domination arises (p. 167-168).

Their own expectations of themselves as mothers work within societal constraints to

produce a role that becomes normalized and is understood by these women to be what is

right and necessary to perform.

Contributing to their extensive productivity surrounding their sons' participation in

youth soccer is the social construct of "good parent" described by Coakley (1998). As

noted in Chapter II, parents today are far more obsessed with performing as a "good

parent." This requires, among other things, that the parent be aware of what his or her

child is doing at all times and that the child is involved in safe and supervised activities.

The mothers of the Atlantic Breakers team members are successfully fulfilling this

recently recognized requirement by parents.

Each mother clearly made a commitment, to not only her own child, but to the

children of the other team mothers as well. I regularly saw parents during "drop-offs"

for practices with more than one child. And as I stood around with the boys during

"pick-up" time it was inevitable that I would hear a mother announce to a boy other

than her own "you're coming home with me tonight." There seemed to be no rhyme or

reason to this behavior, parents would just arrive scooping up random kids. And the

boys reacting so trustingly -- clearly a pattern of behavior to which they were

accustomed.

> And then like tonight we have a viewing, one of the other moms will bring him
> home for me (Sarah).

[B]ut like once in a while like the coaches will you know they'll help me out or whatever. So I, I have a lot of support from the team (Jill).

We know if we're not there when, if the practice was over early, parents watch out for the other kids (Melissa).

So we got everybody cell phones so if I'm stuck traffic or he's stuck in traffic or something we can't get there, we'll get a hold of somebody. Will you grab my son too and I'll come to your house and pick him up? (That's good) We're all good about that (Anne).

And what we do we just well you know what we do is we just help each other out. It's almost kind of an extended family. We're not that tight you know what I mean? But still we do that for each other. … We all do that kind of stuff for each other (K.T.).

Extra pair of shin guards cause someone always forgets 'em (Debbie).

Um there's usually always somebody to help out. You know if like [another family gets] into a problem they'll call us or if we have a conflict on Wednesday nights cause [youngest son] had his ice skating at six o'clock and Nicholas has soccer practice so a lot of times we call [another family] and you know could you bring him home or could you take him for us and we'll be home in time to pick him up. I mean and just about all the parents like I said to you we've known each other through school (Carrie).

Like last night after soccer, we brought another kid back with us so his mom could pick him up here. I mean I could call Tom or I could call Karen or I could call Susan or I could and I could say look I'm not off work until eight, practice is at six could you go by the house and pick up Steven. And they do it. I mean if they can, they will. So we're pretty, we help each other you know in trying to get kids to practice and things like that (Barb).

As K.T. said, these mothers were "not that tight" with one another, but as evidenced in this study the mothers were bonded over their mutual commitment to their sons on this soccer team and what that investment could produce.

Flexibility: Calendars, Folders, and Dry Erase Boards!

Chaos becomes common place in the everyday reality of mothering a soccer-playing

child. My subjects showed a great deal of flexibility on a monthly, weekly, and daily

basis. They often did not know when the season's tournaments, games, and practices

were to take place. The subjects just knew these events were going to take place and

that's all that mattered; when and where were mysteries. They would often tell me

when practices and tournaments were in previous seasons, indicating it should be

somewhat similar this time around, but they did not really know. After I asked about

when practices and games were, typical responses were as follows:

> It'll probably be the third week of July. They'll start seeing who is around and
> when to have them. It's usually probably going to be once a week to start.
> Starting the beginning of August they'll probably go two nights a week. Last
> year they went like Tuesday Thursday, Monday Wednesday kind of thing. Then
> come September, games will start. Games will be Saturdays and Sundays and
> they'll continue to have practices as long as until daylight savings time is over
> (Karen).

> I don't know. Morning, morning time, yea. I think usually like nine to eleven
> or something. … He [the coach] doesn't change the time until it starts getting
> darker. Um I'm trying to think, I don't know what days he'll be doing it. It
> really depends (K.T.).

> (When does the schedule change - fall?) I think it, I was gonna say I think it's
> like the end of August, actually (she walks over to the calendar hanging in the
> kitchen) Yeah I think it is the end of August. That's what I have it up through
> (then what will it become?) You know I'm not sure (Melissa).

> (Are there any games this weekend?) Who knows (she laughs) (Sarah).

As noted above in Chapter II, Bourdieu (1984) made the point that as one's economic

capital increases so does his/her distance from necessity. I believe that the flexibility

demonstrated by these subjects is an indication of these subjects' high level of

economic capital and distinct distance from necessity. Without these, the subjects

would not be able to devote the amount of time and labor they do. These women

successfully transform economic capital to cultural and social forms. According to

Bourdieu (1986), "the convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the

strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in

social space)" (p. 253). The subjects were converting capital in order to reproduce it in

their sons and establish their position is social space (i.e. upper-middle class status).

The transformation of their wealth (i.e. economic capital) to membership on the Atlantic

Breakers team (i.e. social capital) and to sons with appropriate character and body

deportment (i.e. cultural capital) requires a great deal of labor and manipulation put

forth by the mothers. Bourdieu, in his 1996 article "The Forms of Capital," emphasized

that it is a mother's ability to produce this transformation that will allow the family to

gain the long-term benefits. He noted that the effective transformation of capital:

> within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself
>
> accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the
>
> usable time (particularly in the form of the mother's free time) available to it (by
>
> virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) to
>
> ensure the transmission of this capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253).

Overall, experiencing absence of necessity plays an important role since it helps

facilitate the mothers' opportunity to be flexible and invested.

These mothers were ready to go at a moment's notice. It is as if they were

constantly on-call for their job as "soccer mom." What seemed unbearably chaotic to

me, didn't bother them much at all. They were used to having to be flexible all the

time; their constant dedication was to their children, so it made sense to them that they

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would leave their schedules wide open for whatever practice or game may occur. Their organization usually came through their use of kitchen calendars, overstuffed folders, or a dry erase board with each child's schedule in a different color. Viewing these thick folders crammed with schedules and directions and the date planners with every inch etched with events and times left me feeling overwhelmed. But the mothers took it all in stride - this is what they were used to. This lifestyle choice had been made years prior when their sons and other children began organized youth soccer and other activities. As elaborate as their organization was what it all came down to was just being available at all possible times.

> I can't commit anymore, can't commit to a lot of things. You just know it's going to come up. It's pretty much the same time you know you just have to be pretty flexible (Karen).

> It's [a blue binder labeled "sports folder" sits on Jenny's lap] like my bible and it's funny because you just don't realize, oh my god every weekend just disappears all of a sudden (Jenny).

> I mean normally, normally there is a schedule. See this, see this dry erase board? … normally this is just filled with every single practice schedule thing all the tournaments everything is up there (K.T.).

> And we look at the calendar and see who's doing what and where I'm going and what if I'm not gonna be able to do something. We do on weekends because then we have to plan for an alternative … we kind of put our lives on hold figuring well in two years we'll get back together again (Anne).

> The issue this year if Greg plays on this [private school] team, the issue will be trying to put the two schedules together (Terry).

> It's just Saturday and Sunday I mean that doesn't bother me. I mean we expect to be out on the soccer field every Saturday and Sunday … You just expect to do it, it's kind of funny (Debbie).

While recognizing that the subjects explained that their efforts made in regard to their sons' soccer participation were done for the child, I'd like to entertain the idea that

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the subjects are motivated by more than just expected mothering practices. Instead, I view these women as agents possibly taking on a proactive role in situating their lifestyle practices. Based on average income level, educational background, and location of residence, the mothers in this study were of a relatively privileged class. It is because of this privilege that these mothers of young soccer players are able to play out their role in the way they desired. It is my belief that the mothers' behavior and expressed values were not only a result of their distance from necessity but also partially due to their attempt to *create* necessity. Many of these women may have experienced a need to feel needed or fill a void in their lives as a result of their extensive distance from necessity. If they perceived their reason for experiencing distance from necessity (i.e. for many subjects who were not working full-time outside the home) as a result of being married to financially successful men, then they may have felt that they were not making any contributions, or more specifically any contributions that are recognized. As indicated above, most of these women reject the "soccer mom" label. They are clearly aware of how they may be perceived or recognized by others and fearful of this negative labeling. According to Vavrus (2000), "media discussions tend to diminish them [soccer moms] in importance, make them seem trivial or cute, and/or link them with consumer products" (p. 209). Based on these media depictions and the majority of the mothers' expressed understanding of the "soccer mom" role as having a negative connotation, it is understandable that the subjects emphasized to me that what they did was a lot of hard work and not what was depicted in the media. The youth soccer environment, partially produced by the mothers themselves, is a field where their presence and labor *is* necessary.

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As agents in this field, they were contributing to the formation of the standard

suburban-soccer lifestyle. As noted by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) "social agents

are determined only to the extent that they determine themselves" (p. 136). By placing

their children in a youth soccer program and then insisting on commitment to that

program via their labor, their mothering role then becomes even more arduous. Fueling

this need to gain distinction for their achievement and labor in the mothering role is

their upper-middle class habitus. Ultimately, the more hectic their mothering role

becomes, the more necessary they become. Despite this *need* for the mothers, the

fathers' involvement with youth soccer was often viewed as more valuable. This led

the mothers to, once again, emphasize their labor-intensive role.

Mothering vs. Fathering

Observations of these women in a mothering role concurs with research results from

Thompson's (1999) study of mothers of tennis players as well as the work by Chofetz

and Kotarba (1995) on mothers of Little League players. As noted above in Chapter II,

these studies indicated that mothers were the ones to primarily devote labor in order for

their child to play. Throughout the season the mothers remained committed to keeping

their boys involved with their soccer team. The labor required in order to maintain that

commitment was so extensive that the women often did not have time for themselves.

For example, both Sally and Chrissy mentioned that they have a limited number of

hours to devote to their own exercise or sport experience. "I don't have time to golf, I'll

have to wait 'til I get older. I don't have five hours a couple times a week" (Sally).

"But I've walked three miles and I did that you know three or four times a week and

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I've kinda fallen out of it now with Christopher's um practice and different stuff like that" (Chrissy). While all the mothers were extremely busy and pressed for time, there were a couple who did manage to fit some time in to be active. For example, I occasionally saw Jenny and Debbie still wearing their tennis attire during pick-up time after practice. The fact that they were still outfitted and sometimes still sweating, left me with the impression that they were just fitting that time on the court in between running to and from other aspects of their mothering role. Overall, the mothers were expected by their families to be ready at a moment's notice to give of their time and energy. As Sarah expressed it "I'm supposed to be available all the time"…[it is an] "assumed thing that I'm here to take Rich" (Sarah).

The mother's labor was offered up unconditionally. They were to provide the never-ending supply of themselves; whereas the fathers of the boys on the Atlantic Breakers team got involved when it fit into their own schedules. I frequently sighted the fathers at practices and games, but the expectation for them to be there was not nearly as strong as it was for the mothers. The fathers' commitment was not a requirement; they, as the mothers put it, "helped out." The mothers' view of the fathers' role as secondary is evident in the following quotes:

> [M]y husband helps out a lot. … Depends on his schedule and who's doing what. My husband's job usually takes precedence over mine (Carrie).

> My husband is very helpful (Terry).

> So my husband will hopefully be able to pick of the slack (Sally).

> Well it's a long story about Timothy's father, real father just came back into our lives and now he's like you know getting every other weekend so some of the pressure now is being taken off of me with that (Jill).

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(You're always the one taking him to practice?) Typically unless I have to do something with one of the other kids and [my husband] can come home in a enough time to get him up to practice. … [H]e does help out a lot as far as driving and you know if I can't, I do more of the coordinating probably (Chrissy).

I would say I drop off probably I'd say ninety percent of the time and picking up probably maybe fifty percent of the time (Sarah).

Most of the mothers' descriptions of their role emphasized that it typically was only when she "failed" to accomplish her supportive role would the father step in. The mothers were clearly struggling with their position within this field; they did not want to experience a redistribution of power between parents (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1984). If the fathers were playing the "soccer mom" role, then the mothers would be loosing what little power and recognition they had. The *necessity* they had created for themselves would be lost to the fathers. Mothers considered fathers to "help," meaning they took on a very peripheral or secondary role, but my observations indicated that the fathers played a fairly significant role in their children's commitment to this soccer team.

By emphasizing the fathers' heavy involvement, I do not mean to diminish the mothers' labor intensive role, but the fathers' commitment does need to be noted in order to further understand the subjects' overall experience. Also, it is possible that the fathers' contributions seemed more significant to me than they really were since I went into this ethnography project with the bias that the fathers would be contributing very little. So perhaps any bit of involvement looked excessive; but the reality was that fathers were frequently at practices. The number of fathers present at games was often equivalent to the number of mothers in attendance. In fact, the number of fathers in attendance may have been even more significant than I realized since early on in the

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season I was unfamiliar with them, and therefore, unable to recognize most of them at games.

Fathers were frequently at practices helping out the coach and the assistant coach, both of whom were also fathers of boys on the team. Especially on warm nights before the fall time change occurred, I would see many of the dads arrive early for "pick-up." They would watch the practice wrap up for about a half an hour to forty-five minutes. One of these heavily involved fathers had "soccer dad" written across his car's driver's side window. I noticed this at one of their tournaments and asked the mother about it. She indicated her kids were the ones who had written it on the car.

As indicated above in Chapter II, Tardy noted that women hold an "idealized notion of motherhood" in their minds (2000, p. 440). Mothers feel pressure and responsibility to successfully fulfill their "good mom" status (Tardy, 2000; Nicolson, 1993; Reay, 1997). By indicating that while the fathers play a committed yet merely "helpful" role, the subjects in this study re-emphasize their necessity (i.e. creating necessity) in ensuring their boys' progression and well-being in and through soccer. The fathers didn't put in as much labor as the mothers, but their role should not be ignored. In fact, the fathers' contributions were often noted by the mothers to be preferred by the boys. And even some of the mothers gave indications of valuing their husbands' abilities over their own.

> (How do things go after a game? Do you have a chance to give Robert your perspective on how it went?) Mine's really cursory if I do, but my husband does that every single game. He sits there while driving back -- okay what did you do good and what could you have done better, every single game … analyzes every game (Anne).

[H]e tends to try harder and play better if his father's there versus just me being there … If his father's there he'll usually be the one oh you didn't run hard enough (Carrie).

[My husband will] go a half hour ahead of time and watch the last half hour. Especially when when you know every year you tryout two or three new kids he'll like check them out. You know just to see you know what the team looks like … Kevin and [my husband] will talk about what they think of the team. … My husband kept a notebook for soccer probably because we're the keeper, but our wins and loss, how many goals for that we scored and how many we gave up. He has all that for whole soccer season, outdoor season he kept it and gave it to Tom cause Tom was very interested in knowing that (Susan).

[My husband] can remember specific plays far better … And Steven will say did you see that time when I was standing there wide open and Bob will go (Barb).

[M]y husband's very, he's committed too. Coming to their games extremely committed … yeah, he'll tend to talk to them about the game after the game … I think they appreciate my support when I come. When I don't come, I usually hear about it, but I'm never the first choice (Sarah).

Now this year I'll probably make more of Sam's games because [younger son] getting to that age now where [my husband's] influence on [younger son] is needed more (Melissa).

This kind of preference for the father's contributions and assumptions about the father's greater understanding of soccer was surprising since the mothers consistently impressed me with their vast knowledge of the game. Even the mothers that claimed they did not know anything, came across as quite knowledgeable. Many of them understood the various soccer positions and rules. They could follow the games' referees and made assessments from the sidelines.

Despite their knowledge, the mothers indicated that the boys did not want their feedback and were even told not to yell out when on the sidelines during games. The subjects' role continued to be one of support:

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Tom will say I need a mother to coordinate um the end of year party. …he wants the mothers, like he needs us to coordinate our hotels for each tournament. … Jenny's always the one who does registration (Susan).

Well I'm like the short order cook around it would be nice to have it change, but I don't know how to change it. But I try and get food into Jake's stomach before he goes. Sometimes it's just a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a glass of milk. … I'm the giver. No I'm the glue. I'm the glue (Sally).

I don't know I just feel like I need to be there supporting them (Jenny).

Now practice typically I try and make him eat something a couple hours before so by four or something even if it's just a peanut butter sandwich just to have something in his stomach (Chrissy).

Yeah, I'm more the support, make sure he's got a drink, make sure he's got his clothes clean … I mean more the comfort, make sure you have a shirt on underneath so you're not cold. Flip flops for after, cause he can't stand wearing the sneakers home … Um and I'm the one who has food for every game. I mean it's just planning … pack the car. I mean now when you get in the car … soccer chairs, and your cooler and an umbrella and something warm like a blanket. Extra pair of shin guards cause someone always forgets 'em (Debbie).

This extremely supportive role that the subjects played left them dependent on their children. It was this relationship they had created with and for their sons that provided the subjects productivity. Through their maternal sacrifice, the mothers were creating good boys, but this left them wondering what they would do when they had successfully created what they wanted. With some of the subjects experiencing their older children heading off to college, they were left on the soccer field with one another openly discussing this concern. I was saddened by their conversations full of questions about how they would fill their time. They were searching for some meaning, purpose, and identity beyond their relationships with their children. This experience is likely unique to the mothers, since the fathers still had their jobs outside of the home environment and therefore had another identity wrapped up in their career.

The subjects' undervalued maternal sacrifice was performed with the intent of producing what they referred to as "good" or "nice" boys. The following chapter details the product of their labor by providing data analysis on the mother's reproduction of their upper-middle class habitus and development of social and cultural capital for their sons. Participation in youth soccer, particularly with the Atlantic Breakers, enables the mothers to accomplish their goal.

CHAPTER V

PRODUCING "GOOD BOYS"

The consensus among this group of mothers was that the Atlantic Breakers team consisted of a "good" group of boys. Once I ascertained this information, I determined that my research needed to include an understanding of how these parents produced this group of "good kids" and if soccer, in their minds, had anything to do with it. I attempted to understand the meaning upper-middle class mothers (that is this group in particular) affiliated with "good boy". What that actually refers to I think is the compelling part of this theme. Since this was an ethnography on just one group it is limited in its results (i.e. I still don't know how other classes' determine what constitutes a "good boy"). This chapter explores the upper-middle-class demands the mothers placed on their sons, the influence their suburban location had over their choice of sport, the reasons soccer fit with their upper-middle-class body schema, the social capital gained from being part of this sub-field, and finally, how the coach contributed to maintaining the boundaries of that sub-field.

Commitment

Over the course of this ethnography project, I came to realize that these mothers' "nice boys" were being manufactured through a certain type of commitment to soccer. As noted above in Chapter V, the mothers themselves maintained a commitment to the team; but, as will be described below, they also desired this same level of commitment from their boys. These mothers were investing *themselves* in their boys. For most of them, their time and energy were not utilized for their own development, instead they

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made personal sacrifices in order to be devoted to the development of their sons.

Because of this, their "soccer mom" role defined who they were and gave them purpose.

Therefore, success in their role was determined by the success of their boys (i.e. the

product of their labor). The boys' successful status was partially determined by their

ability to maintain their position within the sub-field -- the Atlantic Breakers team.

Affiliation with this team brought the mothers desirable social capital within the larger

field of their suburban residential location; it also enhanced their ability to infuse a

particular form of cultural capital in their boys (Bourdieu, 1986). The subjects,

therefore, insisted on commitment to this team to reap the benefits of this particular

social network. Promoting commitment also reflected their upper-middle-class habitus,

since dedication to the team would enhance the boys' achievement.

The subjects were quite direct with their sons about what was expected of them.

Dedication to soccer was to be established prior to taking on a position among their

teammates. The mothers emphasized that the choice to participate was made by their

children. While the boys were not being forced to play, the decision to play was not to

be taken lightly; they would be making a commitment to the team and to Tom -- the

coach. They were to commit because it was what they had chosen. Activities these

twelve year olds participated in were not to be done halfway. The parents, while

refreshingly not focused on pushing their children to win at all costs, insisted on

commitment in order for the boys to be good at something. This was clearly a

requirement for the boys, as indicated in the following quotes from the mothers:

> This age group of kids is borderline now where they're gonna have to make a
> choice. Some kids and their parents don't want them to make that choice so
> they juggle two spring sports which is extremely hard to do. … I mean you get
> to a certain point where a kid balances his time and energy on two different

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things and can't give 100% to either so they're both suffering and they're not you know what I'm saying (K.T.).

And you know it's funny cause the kids themselves and I can only speak about this group obviously. The kids and the family and it has a lot to do with the kind of families and stuff and a lot that kind of stuff. I mean for the most part the kids really want to excel, they want to do well. Um the parents expect them to work hard. You know what I mean. Being lazy is just not something they would be you know as a group that they would be happy with. So the kids have bought into for the most part I mean there are personality differences and stuff like that but for the most part they all want the same thing (K.T.).

I want him to I want him to be happy I want him to play something he really enjoys playing and it's, I hate for him to have to make a choice, because right now I know he wants to play he wants to do all three again next year. But it's just too hard. It's too hard because you know he couldn't he can't we told him [at] … thirteen he'd really have to start focusing cause then you're not going to be really good at anything you're just going to be pretty good at everything (Anne).

I do try to expose my kids to as many things. It's not just sports too I want him to branch out and keep playing his saxophone, keep playing the violin you know um but it's what we see them being good at. It's also self-esteem um it helps to build that which if you feel like you're really accomplishing something you're really good at something it means a lot. And as you see that you know they they're good soccer players or they're good baseball players then you just keep going with that as long as they want too. Sometimes you need to push a little but and you know when you're pushing too much and when you get to the point where they absolutely hate it and then what's the point, everybody's miserable. So let's, let's choose something else (Anne).

I think the heart of it is the fact that we all want our kids to be successful. In however you want to perceive that. You know some parents take their kids to chess matches some kids [means parents here] take their kids to soccer and some take their kids to saxophone lessons and all that stuff (Terry).

I think you know for me I just want him to keep working at improving himself. … I hope that he's able to continue to improve (Sally).

And I'm not saying that the parents don't think winning is a good thing. But they do not well a little bit of variation, they don't judge their kids value on what happens on the field unless they know their kids are not doing what they're capable of doing. You know what I'm saying. The win loss thing is less important than whether their kids have done everything they could to do what they know they can do (K.T.).

Being good at something, in this case soccer, equals success. The boys were expected to find their niche and stick with it. As the mothers worked on character development in their children through their activities, the subjects were essentially doing their job. As noted above in Chapter V, the subjects expressed such extreme commitment to their mothering role, they thereby created necessity for themselves. The more committed the boys had to be, the more committed the mothers had to be.

For most of the boys this was their friend group -- boys they had known for years in fact. A lot of these boys were involved with additional activities, including other sports and playing musical instruments. So why such a dedication to soccer in particular?

Soccer: "Everybody's kids play soccer" (Jenny)

The mothers informed me soccer was "huge" in their area and that everyone plays. Having their children start off in soccer at age four or five was often cited as a result of perceiving soccer as easy. They believed that children at any age can manage to run around and kick a ball, and therefore, they did not need to worry about the skill level of their sons entering soccer. They did not perceive purchasing a ball, shin guards, and cleats to be an expense of any concern; but costs were noted to increase as their boys advanced.

By noting the popularity of soccer, I realized a lifestyle choice was clearly made by my subjects as a result of being influenced by the American suburban landscape.

> But it's I mean he's played since he's been four years old. (Why did he start?) You know I think it was just the you know the peer thing, again everybody else was doing it. You know and it's just all of our friends have had older kids they had always played soccer so this just you know. It's like okay he's old enough we can sign him up. It was just something we didn't even think about (Melissa).

The choice to place a child in soccer is hardly "made" by the parent. It appears it is just done. Although my data on the decision process to place a child in soccer is somewhat limited since this choice occurred years earlier, it was clear that there were certain parental expectations on the part of the suburban mothers and fathers. As a result, there were child expectations their sons needed to follow as part of their cultural norm. As noted above in the review of literature, Andrews (1999) has indicated that suburbanites look to one another for insight into lifestyle choices; this in turn homogenizes experience. The results of this study support this understanding of the American suburban landscape. My subjects internalized this external factor to such an extent that placing a child in youth soccer was naturalized. The mothers' social structure was therefore contributing to the formation of their habitus. As indicated by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), there is an "ontological correspondence between habitus and field" (p. 127). According to Bourdieu, agents are partially products of a social structure because it is their field that conditions their habitus. This habitus, as a result, "is the product of the embodiment of the immanent necessity of a field" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Through the dynamic relationship between field and habitus, these mothers ultimately embodied the suburban-soccer landscape.

For these subjects, placing their children in youth soccer is not only the thing to do, but the *right* thing to do. They do see purpose in having their children in soccer. The mothers explained there were numerous benefits their boys could gain from participation in youth soccer. Some of these benefits included exercising, gaining leadership skills, and being part of a team.

Well the most important thing is he likes it. So that's the most important, it give him exercise. It gives him a chance to work as a team, it give him a chance to be out with his friends. So it's social (Terry).

The whole idea of being part of a team is such an important lesson for kids to learn. … They've learned so much as individuals from the sport. Both good and bad. I mean they've you know how to deal, how to deal with difficult situation and personalities and, and how to deal with defeat. I mean just all those things and not, um learning where to put it, how to put it into perspective in their life and stuff (K.T.).

For me it's more a sense of the teamwork that he gets from soccer um I think he's I've seen him mature on the soccer field um realizing that that there's no sense in complain, I mean it use to be he'd come off field and say oh the ref made a horrible call … and we wouldn't listen to him, it got to the point where we wouldn't listen to him (Barb).

Well they get a lot of things. Working with other other kids um developing your leadership skills because some of these positions you know they do require you to take a very active role in leading the team (Anne).

I think he gets a sense of um like achievement. You know he feels proud of himself when he scores goals. He's one of the main goal scorer. And um I think he, he's met a lot of close friends on the team you know. They've been together for so long. I mean you know. We really don't have any kids around here so that's like his social life … it gives them structure. I mean it's a discipline thing which you know children need discipline … He's a great student, he's uh um, he made the merit roll you know last year. I mean you know it's just (doing well with everything?) yeah, I think it does trickle over into other parts of his life in some way (Jill).

As noted above in Chapter IV, the upper-middle class habitus incorporates an emphasis on "individualistic achievement within the framework of group cooperation and collective responsibility" (Booth & Loy, 1999, p. 13; Kahl, 1957, p. 201). These upper-middle class mothers wanted the boys to experience working together as a team, to understand that this was effective means of achievement. The "collective responsibility" went beyond just the boys on the soccer field, but extended to the mothers and coaches. As a result, the bond created within this soccer program was formed not only among the boys on the team but between the boys and the parents.

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> I mean and that's part of it too with soccer you have to be involved 'cause they can't drive themselves to the soccer field. So you have to be there and you have to be involved. And it's a mechanism to keep you involved and the kids know that you're involved (Chrissy).

> It's like I think it's a good bond for the kids too with the parent you know. It's like also oh yeah my parents are here. … You know I think it helps to have a better relationship. You know like when they, when they're older and they look back they're gonna be like oh god my parents were great supporters you know they took me to all those games (Jill).

Beyond just emphasizing what can be gained from participation in soccer, the mothers also stressed the point of what can be avoided. The proverbial "keep them out of trouble" was mentioned over and over again. This goal for their boys was in line with the mothers' class habitus, since the upper-middle class "stress planning for the future" (Booth & Loy, 1999, p. 13; Kahl, 1959, p. 193). These mothers set their sights on getting their boys on to the high school soccer team. The mothers were following their upper-middle class habitus and utilizing their labor in order to produce cultural capital in their sons. As a result, these well respected, skillful, team-oriented soccer players could then effectively gain what the mothers believed to be necessary social capital (i.e. placement on the high school team) (Bourdieu, 1986).

Surprisingly this intended goal of becoming part of the high school team's social network did not appear to be for status or recognition purposes, instead it was the means by which these moms were planning to keep their boys out of harm's way. There were things they wanted to steer clear of and by keeping the boys with soccer, they saw the possibility of successfully finding their boys a safe track into adulthood.

> It's a good place to keep them, keep them out of trouble (Jenny).

> I want my kids involved in sports now so that they can be good enough to play in high school. So the ultimate goal is that my kids will be busy and active in

high school so that they're not you know hopefully to avoid some bad situations is what the real goal is (Terry).

Cause you know today's kids alls they do is sit on the freakin' couch and you know I mean that's what Timothy would do. He would just sit there, play video games, and watch TV. You know this forces them to get out. … nowadays people supervise their kids a little bit more because you know we're more aware of all like you know the bad things out there like you know and you know (Jill).

We're there to support our kids to uh keep them out of trouble … make the high school team so he stays out of trouble (Anne).

I think it's a release. You know school can be very intense for children … I prefer them to do something. Spend their time not sit around watch TV, coach potato (Carrie).

I would like him to play high school for one reason, because I think that um staying in team sports in high school keeps you out of other trouble (Chrissy).

As mentioned above in Chapter II, today's parents perceive society as more dangerous than in the past. This shift in beliefs has been cited by Coakley (2001) as a partial explanation of the increased number of kids in youth sport programs. Parents believe these organizations provide the safety they deem necessary for today's youth. The mothers in this study played the "good parent" role as described by Coakley. Another issue regarding the boys' safety came up as the mothers discussed why they chose soccer over football for their sons.

Soccer vs. Football

While it was acceptable for their boys to play a few sports other than soccer, such as basketball and lacrosse, football was rarely deemed appropriate for their sons. On a whole, these boys loved football. Footballs could be found in their backyards, they played pick-up football games at soccer tournaments, they watched college and

professional football games, and some even dared to request they play on organized

youth football teams:

> He loves football. … Oh when there are these tournaments what do they play in
> their free time -- football. They played football the whole time in Cape May on
> the beach. Tom [the coach] said I thought we didn't have a prayers chance in
> this tournament because these boys they didn't have a game until like that
> afternoon. They played football from [the] moment they got up until their game
> and he let them (Susan).

> He enjoys football, they play tag football, they play it at school, they play it in
> the back, as you can see there's a football (we look at the backyard). There's no
> soccer ball, but there's a football, see there you go (Barb).

So why was their fall season sport soccer and not football? Discussions with the

mothers made it clear why these boys were not on youth football teams:

> I steered him away from it [football]; he wanted to really bad last year (Jenny).

> He's asked to play football, but I just don't pursue it (Jill).

> I'm not fond of football. … I just think it's a waste, I think it's a waste cause
> he's got a lot of [soccer] skills (Debbie).

> Why would you go to football, everybody's playing soccer (Susan).

The reason the boys weren't playing football was that their mothers didn't approve of it.

The mothers' control over the direction of their sons' activities clearly limited the boys'

experience. This is ironic considering that just based on appearances it seemed the boys

had opportunities to participate in any number of activities; but it was only the *right*

upper-middle-class appropriate activities that were usually allowed. According to

Bourdieu, "habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world, a world

endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy" (Bourdieu

& Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). While the subjects' habitus enabled the successful

incorporation of soccer into their boys' lives, it did not allow for investment into

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football. The mothers portrayed football in a negative light and avoided having their

sons in any organized youth football programs. The subjects acted as agents

contributing to the formation of their field. The mothers' upper-middle class habitus

was influencing the social structure of the suburban landscape. Part of their problem

with football was a concern over the possibility their sons may be injured, and this point

will be examined below in a discussion on body deportment; but perhaps more

importantly, football seemed to stand for something in opposition to the habitus these

subjects were trying to reproduce in their boys. In the last quote noted above, Susan

explained, what was the general consensus among the mothers, that "everybody's

playing soccer." In reality, not everyone is playing soccer and the mothers knew this.

They indicated that football was played by children in other counties and even in other

parts of their own county; but the boys in their predominately white, upper-middle

class, well educated area were not. "Everybody" in their world represents those

following the same habitus, utilizing similar forms of capital, and understanding how

best to navigate their specific cultural field.

The mothers knew other areas were different from their own. The promotion of

football required a different perspective on what was acceptable behavior for boys. The

mothers indicated that in these other less affluent areas where football was heralded as

the sport, masculinity was understood in terms of toughness and heterosexuality; in

these middle to lower class locations soccer would be seen in opposition to this and

dubbed the "wus sport":

> I think if you took some of these boys to maybe over [lower class on the other
> side of the city] area whatever and even high school, I think they even laugh at
> the soccer kids (Susan).

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> Football has a different mentality to it. I mean it's a lot more you know (holding her arms up in front of her with fists balled up) you know. You know you get out there and you're out there to hurt somebody (Melissa).

> All the football guys will say that soccer's gay. … They think they're … much more macho (Sally).

The subjects recognized that football was popular in other places, but explained to me that it was not that way in their local public high school. It was this school that was considered the best in the county. It was academically challenging and mothers explained that it was not uncommon to see parents remove their kids from private schools in order for them to take advantage of the offerings at this public facility. The schools my subjects chose for their boys were in upper-middle class areas where the habitus of the parents could be further reproduced, as opposed to these other areas and schools the mothers spoke of where due to class differences parents had a different agenda for their children.

When talking with my subjects, I heard all about how their team had "lost" four boys this past season to football.

> These four boys … I think are all playing football for their middle school and just quitting soccer totally. So that's why we lost those four. … their heart wasn't in it as much and they want to try football. They may hate it (Susan).

I found it interesting that mother, after mother, after mother, would use this term "lost" in their descriptions. I couldn't help but get the impression that these four boys and their parents had done something wrong. Football was viewed as keeping them away from soccer and ultimately the right track in navigating these boys into adulthood.

Many of the mothers explained that they didn't want their boys in football because they thought participants could be easily injured.

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> In a lot of the rec leagues with football there is no weight limit and if you look at the six grade class, which is just what he just finished, the weight differential between Steven at seventy-two pounds and another kid … I just think it would have been dangerous - a dangerous situation (Barb).

> I think he's not quite that rough and tumble kid. I don't think he enjoys getting hurt (Sally).

> A lot of parents probably just didn't want to get involved in all that and plus you think they're gonna get hurt much worse in football (Jenny).

> I think as a parent I would worry more about injury to my child playing a sport like that [football] um and I don't know if that's really true with all the pads and stuff … running into each other on purpose … So as a parent I would probably rather my child did not choose something like that you know what I'm saying (K.T.).

> (What would you think if he wanted to play football?) No, I would say no. … I just can't see little kids playing there's too much injury. I'm very happy that … [he's] not (Anne).

> (So why not football?) Um from my standpoint it's always been like the injury. Football just is too much of a contact sport. And in this area football hasn't been with the kids hasn't been as popular (Melissa).

While the subjects feared having their boys in football because they saw it as a dangerous sport, they also did not feel that the sport was appropriate for their sons' bodies. According to Bourdieu "we can hypothesize as a general law that a sport is more likely to be adopted by a social class if it does not contradict that class's relation to the body at its deepest and most unconscious level, i.e., the body schema" (1984, p. 218). Soccer provided this middle and upper-middle class group of mothers an activity that required their sons to use their bodies more appropriately than football would. Bourdieu also noted that "a sport is in a sense predisposed for bourgeois use when the use of the body it requires in no way offends the sense of the high dignity of the person, which rule out for example, flinging the body into the tough and tumble of 'forward-game' rugby" (1984, p. 218). The following quotes from my subjects indicate their

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satisfaction with the use and appearance of an athlete's body in soccer and lack of

suitability in football:

> Because my son is a very big boy I know when he gets to high school, they're going to want him to play football because he's a big kid. … Well (lowers voice) some of these boys are little too. … They know they're not going to be big boys. … You can be small and be a soccer player. It's hard to be small and be a football player (Susan).

> It's just I mean as far as physical attributes. I mean you definitely have to be fast. He's you know he's fairly fast. Um usually there's not a lot of contact. Um you know the injury you know guideline you know rarely see a serious injury in soccer. … I'm not sure he's got the build for being a really good football player (Melissa).

> And the other thing with sports is you know you have just the athleticism you know that's required to stay in sports and you just gotta you can't be doing you can't be smoking I mean (you have to take care of yourself) you do. And there's more attention paid to what you're eating and taking care of your body and doing that and it's emphasized in high school by the coaches and the trainers and all that kind of stuff. And so that's the kind of influences that we want to stay you know keep around the kids so that they uh you know stay focused and concerned about what they're eating (Chrissy).

> I think he's actually growing to like soccer more as time passes. (What if he said he wanted to play a different fall sport?) Well I would prefer he doesn't play football (difference between football and soccer?) because I don't think he'd be good at, he doesn't have the uh brute strength that football I think requires (Terry).

> Nicholas has never played football because of his size and because it interferes with the soccer season (Carrie).

> Well for Rich you know soccer's better than a contact sport. … Rich's slight in stature and weight (Sarah).

> Size isn't necessarily an advantage in soccer because it affects your speed. …(Do you think Christopher will desire to play football in high school?) No no, he doesn't have the size. He's one of the smaller kids in his age group (Chrissy).

> Steven's a relatively short kid. He can be more successful at soccer than he can in some other sports because of his height. You don't need to be tall to play soccer. However in the World Cup, Germany was able to head the ball far better than the USA (laughs) because they were tall. (There are some

advantages.) There are some advantages but I think quickness, I have seen these kids, I've seen Tom's spring soccer team take on kids you know like an under fifteen team …. but because of the quickness and the ability to pass the ball and control the ball we'd beat 'em every time (Barb).

You don't see any soccer player with a gut, there's no way anybody isn't in awesome shape. Incredible thighs and just, I hope Jake stays (Sally).

The corporeal deportment required in soccer, as well as the resulting aesthetic form, were agreeable to these upper-middle class women. The boys' bodies were "habituated" by their youth soccer experience in the same way that the professional boxers Wacquant (1992) studied were "habituated" into the boxing culture (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 196). According to Wacquant (1992), " to learn how to box is imperceptibly to modify one's bodily schema, one's relation to the body and to its uses so as to internalize a set of dispositions that are inseparably physical and mental" (p. 246). My subjects were effectively using youth soccer to ensure not only what they believed to be appropriate use of the body but to ingrain in their sons' bodies characteristics of the upper-middle class habitus. Through their experience with soccer, my subjects' sons were exposed to "a diffuse complex of postures and (physical and mental) moves that … exist only *in action*, as well as in the traces that this action leaves within and upon the body" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 237). The mothers desired this "habituated" body for their sons and were relying on the boys' embodied habitus to cross over from the soccer field to the much larger field of the upper-middle class suburban landscape.

In addition to finding soccer an appropriate sport for their boys' bodies, these mothers also believed soccer was the right choice for their sons' mental abilities.

It's a mind game as well as, so if they're not um some kids you know they're just not focused enough to think about it. … Soccer yeah I mean you have to play you have to play smart you have to know you have to have good field sense (Anne).

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He has a brain that I think is perfect for soccer. … He's got, somebody who can look at a field and make decisions pretty quick. You know he has to do that in football too but I think that soccer is such a dynamic sport requiring judgment and decision making every second of the game (Terry).

He's got a good field sense of where to be and what to do and he's got a real sense of teamwork. He will set something up. Um one of the things he has that I envy is that field sense (Debbie).

According to Bourdieu (1984):

just as a history of the sporting practices of the dominant class would no doubt

shed light on the evolution of its ethical dispositions, the bourgeois conception

of the human ideal and in particular the form of reconciliation between the

bodily virtues and the supposedly more feminine intellectual virtues (p. 218).

The mothers believed that soccer promoted a connection between the right use of the

body and desired use of the mind. They believed soccer required a certain intelligence

and analytical ability that they claimed their boys had which was why they were capable

soccer players. Basically, their understanding was that it took more mental ability to

play soccer than football, and thereby, gained further distinction for their upper-middle-

class sons.

Not only was soccer the best choice for the boys, according to my subjects it was

the best choice for the parents too. Most of the mothers despised the long hours

associated with others sports, especially baseball. Soccer's required two to two and a

half hour pre-game and game time was far less taxing. The games were time limited

and while they were required to arrive forty-five minutes ahead of the scheduled game

time, they were satisfied with knowing that it wouldn't run all day. The exception to

this would be if they were at a tournament, in which case the times of games and the

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number of games played in total would not be determined until they were in the

tournament and learn if they advanced. They also enjoyed watching soccer. Most of

them paid a great deal of attention to their boys as they ran up and down the field.

Some of them would even yell out encouraging words to the team. The following

quotes from the mothers support the notion that they preferred soccer over other sports.

> [O]ne thing I like about soccer though, it's time limited. It's not like baseball (Barb).

> No, I don't miss games now because travel they don't play during the week. In-house did um but travel we don't have to play in-house when you play travel, which is really nice for soccer. It doesn't work that way for baseball, but it works that way for soccer. … It's so much more fun to watch. I mean watch those little kids clump around the ball, it's just hilarious as opposed to T-ball which is painful [to watch] (Anne).

> From a parent's perspective it's a nice short time frame. Game wise, I mean I love soccer for that reason. It's an hour. I mean game time. You're there for maybe an hour and a half for a regular, well maybe like two hours cause you're usually there a half an hour before hand. And they usually talk to you at the end. And the game's you know close to an hour. Baseball can be three and four hours stretch (Melissa).

> You're coordinating, you're overseeing. You're driving and you're giving of your time but unlike a lot of the other sports it's not that long of a commitment. The game is an hour. … I don't have the patience for baseball (Sally).

It was understandable that the mothers did have patience for the demands of soccer, not

only because games were less time consuming, but because soccer was contributing to

their formation of "nice boys."

A Team of Nice Boys

Positive comments about individual boys on the Atlantic Breakers team, such as

"he's [Kevin] a really great kid" (Sarah), and "Timothy and Andy are very good friends.

He's a really good kid. … we took him overnight down to Busch Gardens" (John) were

commonly made by the subjects. Parents' knowledge of the individual players went

well beyond just their abilities on the soccer field. Most of the boys were friends with

one another and had spent quality time with each other's families. The boys would go

to other team members' homes, go out to dinner with other team parents, and travel

with other team families.

   The subjects also approved of the boys overall as a group. Besides being pleased

with their quality of play out on the soccer field, they were extremely happy with the

values and behavior of the team outside of soccer. The boys, with few exceptions, were

very friendly with one another. Most had played together for years and had developed a

strong bond that the parents were pleased with.

> And he has been asked by other teams would you want to try out for us. And you know my son and Ethan they'll say we want to be with our friends (Susan).

> So he you know having a group of kids pretty much the same kids is great because you can see their progress over the years I mean it's just really neat. And how they rely on each other and stuff it's pretty cool (K.T.).

> It's almost like our team's been together so long that they must know what each other's are thinking or what they're gonna do before they do it (Jill).

> Many of those boys are Rich's hopefully life long friends; good, good boys (Sarah).

The mothers were enabling their sons to develop a durable social network via the

Atlantic Breakers. This finding is similar to Light and Kirk's (2001) analysis of boys

who played rugby for an elite school in Australia. The researchers found that the boys

gained social capital as a result of their team affiliation, leading them to perform well in

school and later in life (Light & Kirk, 2001).

My subjects expressed their satisfaction with these boys, explaining that they

considered them nice boys because they were respectful, well-mannered, worked well

together as team, and didn't take the games too seriously.

> I think this is a great group if they lose a game it's okay. Within a half an hour they're talking about something totally different and goofing off I mean they're just good kids. Nobody takes it so seriously that you know that they're bawling their eyes out (Sally).

> We're very hard on our own child and you know and like Jenny and even Kevin, you know [my husband] will say why didn't you get that. Not hard like to make him cry. We don't ever yell at them, you know we're not like those lunatics out there (Susan).

> I think that they develop a lot of skills, leadership telling each other talking to each other where to be and they recognize that in each other. And usually they take turns being leaders out there. … seemed to make them look around and look to each other and see what they did well that game. I mean they look for good things in each other instead of complaining how you know don't pass to him he always loses the ball (Debbie).

> Well you picked a good team with [the Atlantic Breakers]. Really I mean it's nice, a lot of nice people. Well we were on another team just for indoor and it wasn't this like relationship what we have [with the Atlantic Breakers] … where Tom and Dan are so good with kids you know they're don't down on them. … He's with a group, a good group of kids. Their parents are all stable people. You know it's no, like real dysfunction there (Jill).

The subjects believed their boys' involvement in soccer was contributing to the

production of such good-natured kids, but they also indicated that they were involved

with a good group of parents. The subjects all kept the same agenda for their boys and

clearly recognized that in each other. Their mission was to produce nice boys and they

were successfully doing just that. As John put it "These kids are going to grow up to be

just like their parents - really good. They're going to be good citizens, good parents."

One of these "good parents" was Tom, the coach. This placement of a parent as the

coach just further enhanced the subjects' agenda, as they were all able to work together in reproducing their upper-middle-class habitus.

The Good Coach

The main coach is just terrific (Karen).

Tom's a very good coach (Susan).

Tom's … excellent. He's really worked really well with the boys (Anne).

He is the greatest. I love Tom (Jill).

Tom is a phenomenal coach (Melissa).

Why such high praise for the coach? The accolades never ceased. I heard all about how the coach, Tom, was a draw for new parents, his approach to dealing with the kids, his unique coaching style, and most importantly his reinforcement of the parents' agenda.

The coach, for many parents, was the reason they chose the Atlantic Breakers as the team to pursue for their sons. He had a strong reputation within the soccer community and the mothers indicated they were attracted to what they had heard. The Atlantic Breakers in essence was Tom; in fact, I heard the team referred to as "Tom's team" far more often than as the "Atlantic Breakers team":

> Now he just tried out for Tom's team probably every single year and has never made it. (So is Tom's team a really good team?) mmhm in this area. Yeah, it's very I mean and the reason why we had always wanted was not you know not so that we were on you know the Atlantic Breakers but Tom is a phenomenal coach. I mean we've watched him and I just wanted not for anything other than for Sam to have Tom as a coach. … we've been in the … Rec. Council and you know Tom just has a very good reputation and we know him personally too we know. And we knew he had older sons and his older sons are excellent players. Um so basically, basically that's why we wanted Sam to be on the team. And we've been trying every single year. … That was hard core practice and I think

that tightened him up a little bit to be able to make Tom's team this year (Melissa).

So he went and played with Tom in the winter. … and then he made this [spring] team with Tom (Terry).

Plus I think well we've heard very good things about Tom. … They say Tom is just you know incredible you know (Chrissy).

We chose Tom. We chose Tom because we like him. This was a very different team (Debbie).

The mothers' and the sons' social capital resulting from participation in youth soccer was further enhanced by having Tom as a coach. While being part of a competitive team may have been on their minds, parents did not indicate that they wanted to be part of "Tom's team" in order to make their sons winners. The mothers' behavior throughout the season indicated that they generally lacked a strong interest in having a winning record. Perhaps behavior to contradict this understanding would have occurred if the team had experienced poor performances more frequently than they did. They strongly approved of Tom's approach to coaching. They liked how he dealt with the kids by always getting to know them and spending time with them individually if necessary. He and the assistant coach would also go beyond just interaction with the kids on the playing field. They took the boys on excursions such as visits to a World Cup match and college games. As indicated by the following statements, the mothers were pleased with Tom's dedication to the boys:

Tom does sheets on schedules - he's really good about that. He even does like little, he calls it homework. He'll give him little hints of what to work on (Karen).

Sometimes Tom and Tom is wonderful about this their coach Tom will uh say o.k. we'll work Mondays and Wednesdays, Kevin do you want to come up for an hour on Tuesday and I'll work with you. And he'll work with him. He'll bring a couple of his boys and he'll work with him. … Well Tom takes them,

they all went to a World Cup qualifying game last year. … He takes them to college games too up at Messiah cause his one son was playing so they've taken them up there too (Susan).

Anybody he picks for his team gets the same amount of playing time as anybody else for the most part because he believes that if the kid is good enough to make the team then he deserves the time to be playing (K.T.)

That's Tom's philosophy and that's what he tries to teach the kids that you know all I ask of you is to do everything you can to work together as a team and do what you know you can do. And that's basically the end of it. … They really it real they love doing well and don't get me wrong they are disappointed when they don't win. But Tom would never just knowing my husband he would never berate kids for not winning if they did everything they could. That's not he would never do that to em. To him he sees these kids I mean it cracks me up (lowers voice) they're like his own kids. I mean he would never treat them any differently than his own kids. In that he thinks as much encouragement and enthusiasm and support you can give them, whatever they do beyond this point it's going to serve them well (K.T.)

Sometimes you know personalities are all different which is understandable, but Tom knows the kids well enough he really knows how to work with them (K.T.)

If a kid makes a mistake, ball goes the wrong direction, ball gets kicked out of bounds, Tom's response is "unlucky." And we've all learned to say that - unlucky. Instead of oh my gosh how could you kick, okay no one gets, it's it's a very calm, Tom's a very calm coach. Not that he doesn't at times say oh come on ref. But never screaming and never down on the boys. I think that's helped, Steven doesn't see his coach get upset (Barb).

He just is very good with the kids. He's got the soccer skills, but he is just very good with the kids. I mean he's he always has seemed to draw the best out of all the players (Melissa).

Where Tom and Dan are so good with kids you know they don't down on them, they don't yell at them. You know very supportive to them (Jill).

So he has a really good philosophy and he plays everybody. I don't know that he plays everybody equally but he makes an effort to play everyone. There's a real sense of teamwork (Debbie).

The mothers were clearly aware of Tom's coaching style. It mattered to them that he took the approach that he did. His approach was *their* approach; he was encouraging the embodiment of upper-middle class habitus in these boys. Tom was molding the

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boys' "habituated" bodies (Bourdieu 1972, p. 196; Wacquant, 1992, p. 237). The

parents were not necessarily going to receive assistance in reproducing this in their sons

if they were involved with any other team (i.e. sub-field). I rarely asked the subjects

any questions about what they thought of the coach, but they continually brought it up

in my conversations with them. Much of their satisfaction with Tom came as a result of

being exposed to other coaches. It was not just the parents that were enthusiastic about

Tom, but the boys as well. Tom's approach was described as unique within the youth

sport realm:

> In most cases on a lot of teams and I'm not going to say ours because I think our coaches are dedicated to their kids. Just like the kids are dedicated to the coaches. That a lot of teams they'll say oh you're not as good as you were last year and you're going to be cut. And you know you've been with this team for five years and see ya later. They've never done that on our team (Karen).

> Tom doesn't really do this too much, club is where you would bring kids from outside your area (Susan).

> But oh yea everybody gets along really well um we I think and I really think a lot of that has to do with this team and probably most teams I really think that the flavor of the team has to do with the coaching. Tom and Dan have a certain way with the kids. And a certain attitude about what they want to do for them and that kind of thing. And that kind of just spills over to everybody else. Because I know of some coaches who um have a totally different attitude (K.T.)

> Tom is a good coach. I mean when, when Nicholas did substitute for them could see a big difference in the coaching. … talk to them and relate to 'em … I mean Nicholas's played a lot of different sports and he's played for a lot of different teams (Carrie).

> Tom continued the team this year last year. He [Jake] didn't he ended up playing with [another league] and had fun with that but he definitely likes working with Tom much better. (So what's so good about Tom?) Well he I believe he's firm but he's fair. He's he's not screaming at them and making them feel like crap. He's instructing them. He's a good instructor. … Shockingly different (Sally).

> No last year he played spring soccer and lacrosse and you know and I tried to push lacrosse for him because he's really good at that, but he's kind of ?… losing a little bit of interest in that. And it's due to the coaching I mean he's not

real happy with the coaches I don't think. And um. (They're lucky with Tom) They are, they are. Timothy left the team during like the indoor session. And he was gonna play on another on SBB whatever and Tom was real you know upset about losing him and kept saying oh you can come back any time. But um I think Timothy got a taste of what it was like to be you know coached you know here he's been used to Dan they're like father, you know they're like his fathers, they're not just the coaches you know. They know, I mean they can read Timothy's mind. They know 'em like their own kids you know. And um when he went on this new team he didn't have that kind of relationship with with the coach and he was like always screaming, that's the way he handles the kids you know (Jill).

Being part of "Tom's team" provided the mothers with distinction within the soccer-crazed suburban field. In order to maintain the boundaries of this sub-field (Atlantic Breakers team), Tom acted as a gatekeeper (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Boys who did not fit in well with the team were eliminated, thereby maintaining its authenticity and distinction. For example, subjects explained to me that one boy was not asked back this last season because he was a "ball-hog" and did not follow Tom's directions to avoid such behavior. Tom would determine each spring which boys would make the team, even boys from the previous season had to try-out. Try-outs were a stressful time for both the boys and the mothers. Mothers well established with the Atlantic Breakers would work with Tom in determining the team by suggesting particular boys. For example, Susan informed Chrissy of the Atlantic Breakers and recommended to Tome that he include Chrissy's son. Chrissy had just recently moved into Susan's neighborhood. Susan had known Chrissy previously because their two sons played together on the same basketball team last winter. Chrissy and her son had clearly proved themselves with this former sport experience to be Atlantic Breakers material. Susan knew of Chrissy's son as a hardworking, nice boy who was certainly worth

Tom's attention. The connection between Tom and the parents was strong as they all

maintained their commitment to these boys.

> The dynamics between the coach and the parents is really important. Cause they have to buy into what he's doing and this group of parents seem to feel very comfortable with whatever Tom was doing with the kids. Now if they didn't, I'm sure they would let him know (laughs). … Now Tom has talked to the parents a little bit about um you know because what he's trying to do is get these kids ready to play for high school (K.T.)

> But like once in a while like the coaches will you know they'll help me out or whatever. So I, I have a lot of support from the team (Jill).

> Or we'll get the coach to pick him up or something. (So Tom will come out?) Yeah Tom will, if you know if he had to he will. Now we try not to 'cause Tom lives on the other side of the world (Anne).

> Steven plays indoor two sessions and then this past year while Tom felt it was very important, kids that want to get into possibly soccer in high school that they play spring soccer also which Steven did this year (Barb).

Tom and the parents believed if they provided enough of their time and energy they

could assure that their sons would end up on the high school team -- an appropriate and

safe place for their upper-middle class "nice boys." They supported one another in their

continued attempt to transform capital and reproduce upper-middle class habitus in their

sons.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The subjects not only had knowledge of the game taking place on the soccer field but also had knowledge of how best to maneuver their children through the cultural field in which they lived. As indicated in Chapter II, Tardy noted, in her analysis of health-oriented conversations among a group of women, that "a mother must be savvy to ways of maneuvering" through health and medical related issues (2000, p. 445). I found that my subjects were "savvy" in their understanding of what needed to be done in order to produce "good boys" and work their sons through the youth sport programs in their area. As Bourdieu indicated it is in "relation to certain structures that habitus produces given discourses or practices" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 135). My subjects' upper-middle class habitus acted as their guide as they confronted the demands of suburban mothering. The mothers' "unconscious dispositions and acquired schemes of thought and action, perception, and appreciation" led them to try and produce a particular environment for their boys (Booth & Loy, 1999, p. 5). In reaction to the responsibility of mothering, the subjects' upper-middle-class perception of the right thing to do for their sons was to produce a safe environment of constant activity, with youth soccer at the center. Youth soccer effectively encapsulated the upper-middle-class habitus that the mothers wanted to reproduce in their sons. The subjects were cognizant of utilizing soccer as a means by which to habituate their sons' bodies and minds. The end result was what they considered to be a team of nice boys. "Nice boys" ultimately meant boys that exuded the upper-middle-class habitus the mothers so desired.

The American soccer-crazed suburban landscape acted as the subjects' field where struggles over identity and distinction ensued. These women fought for an identity separate from the stereotypical "soccer mom." They made their distinctions by emphasizing that they did not get very caught up in the competitions and played a very nurturing, yet undervalued role. As a result of their level of economic capital, most of these subjects experienced a great distance from necessity. It is my interpretation that in response to this, these women created necessity for themselves. The subjects did this by involving their children in youth soccer and insisting on commitment, thereby developing a necessary and key role for themselves. The greater the concern the mothers have over getting their sons through soccer and onto a safe track, the greater their own need becomes.

The personal sacrifice by the subjects as described in this research can only be understood in the grander schema of class reproduction practices. The mothers, as agents, were responding to the demands of the broader social structure. The subjects played a self-sacrificing role, as most of them left careers to raise their children. Giving of their labor so that their boys may participate prevented them from developing individual interests and exercising to any great extent. This was made evident as the mothers stood on the sidelines discussing how they wondered what they would do once their boys go off to college and are no longer in youth soccer. The overwhelming standards of upper-middle-class mothering within the context of rampant, suburban consumption patterns, leaving them to scramble for an independent identity. Research like this study is essential, as women's current expected mothering practices can ultimately be understood as an issue of wellness. Examination and awareness of the

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nuances of the field through studies such as this one, can contribute to an examination and restructuring of suburban, upper-middle-class, mothering practices.

A Unique Team?

The question becomes, as I conclude my research, whether all suburban mothers are struggling in the same way. Whether this group of subjects was unique or not can only be determined by further research, but according to the mothers this was a unique team ("team" represents all affiliated with the Atlantic Breakers, including parents). The were interacting within the same field as many other mothers also playing the role of "soccer mom," but it was their habitus and particular use of capital that shaped their own sub-field. While all "soccer moms," not just Atlantic Breaker mothers, may be experiencing similar demands of their labor, the meaning they affiliate with their role may vary. The combination of the subjects' field, habitus, and use of capital produced this youth soccer team.

They chose soccer over other activities because of its appropriate fit with and ability to reproduce upper-middle class habitus. The boys were encouraged to be active and achieve within their sport in order to establish a place for themselves in the future and to do this through cooperation with one another on the team. The boys as a result of their "unique" soccer experience, come to embody the upper-middle class habitus, or as Bourdieu explained they develop a "habituated" body (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 196).

Future Research

The current research allows for some insight into the everyday reality of mothering. But to further understand the complexities of a mother's role in relation to her child's sport experience future research must be undertaken. Similar studies of upper-middle class "soccer moms" would help to ascertain if this is truly a unique group of subjects whose understanding of their role in their children's sport experience differs from other team mothers. Mothers of various social class backgrounds could be studied with the intention of comparing and contrasting habitus and lifestyle choices. An obvious follow-up study to the current research would be an ethnography of mothers of football-playing children, since the results of this study indicated a strong contrast between the subjects' perceptions of these two fall season team sports.

Another direction future research might take is the production of a more complete picture of what is happening among all the individuals involved in youth sport organizations. An intense focus, including one-on-one interviews with the fathers would develop insight into whether or not both parents share in their habitus and lifestyle choices for their children. As noted above in Chapter VI, the coach in this study played a key role as gatekeeper. All indications of the coach provided me with the understanding that his views coincided with those of the mothers'. I believe the coach plays a significant enough role that an entire case study could be dedicated to just his involvement. But rather than continually segmenting the research, a grand scale project, even more so than this one, could produce a great overview into the inner workings of dominating classes reproducing their habitus in their children through sport.

Some of the subjects in the current study not only had sons but daughters as well. While I was focused solely on the mothers' production and maintenance of their boys in soccer, I did at times encounter data regarding their girls' experiences with sport - particularly in relation to food and exercise. Just based on what little I heard from my subjects about their daughters, I'm convinced a future study on parents of girls in youth sport could produce a very interesting and telling study of the maintenance of the female body.

I believe one of the significant contributions of this study to the sociology of sport is the ethnographic approach to the research. I believe this ethnographic work expands upon our current understanding of the contribution that this approach can make toward explaining and interpreting human behavior related to sport and activity (e.g. Silk, in press; Wacquant, 1992). Ethnography is a powerful and effective approach by which to expand our knowledge of the various meanings and identities represented within culture. I hope that future researchers will continue to incorporate this methodology in appreciation for the unique cultural insight that can be gained by immersing yourself in your subjects' world. While clearly an arduous task, the benefits of ethnography are extraordinarily rewarding.

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: An Ethnographic Explication of the "Soccer Mom" *(This means that the researcher will attempt to describe the "soccer mom" subculture.)*

I state that I am over 18 years of age and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Lisa Swanson in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20742.

The purpose of the research is to bring academic attention to the "soccer mom" phenomenon present in upper-middle class America.

The procedures involve interaction and conversations with the researcher over the course of the next few months. The researcher will attend soccer practices and games in order to discuss the role of "soccer mom" with you. Examples of questions that will be asked by the researcher are as follows: What is involved in the role of "soccer mom"? Does the role take a lot of time and effort? Why do you take on the labor required to fulfill the role? Audio-tape recorded conversations with the researcher will only take place with your permission. The recordings may only be accessed by the researcher and the researcher's advisor. The tapes will be destroyed no later than September 2003. Please check one of the following:

      ____ I permit the researcher to tape our conversations.
      ____ I do not permit the researcher to tape our conversations.

To the extent permitted by law, all information collected in the study is confidential, and my name will not be identified at any time. The data I provide will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. Once the project is complete, the data will be retained by the investigator for possible future research.

I understand there is minimal risk involved. Questions will not address inappropriate, questionable, or criminal conduct.

I understand that the research is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigator hopes to learn more about the "soccer mom" phenomenon. I understand that I am free to ask questions or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. I also acknowledge that if I decline to participate in this study, it will have no effect on my child's role or standing on his/her soccer team. I understand that I must be given a copy of this consent form for my records.

Researcher's Name: Lisa Swanson
Phone #: (443) 394-3937   Email: lswanson@towson.edu
Home Address: 1 Wellhaven Circle Apt. 1231
                Owings Mills, MD 21117

Participant (please print)_____

Signature _____ Date _____

Demographic Survey
Profile: Mothers of the Atlantic Breakers
Fall 2002

Race _____ Ethnicity _____

Religion _____ Practicing (please circle one): yes or no

Highest Level of Education Attained_____

Annual Household Income _____ Age _____

Occupation _____ Part-time or Full-time

Previous Occupation _____ Part-time or Full-time

Estimated Current Social Standing (please circle one): lower class, lower-middle

class, middle class, upper-middle class, or upper class

Leisure / Recreation / Hobbies / Clubs_____

_____

_____

Media Usage:

     Television_____

     Newspapers_____

     Magazines_____

 Number of Sons_____Ages_____

Number of Daughters_____Ages_____

If married: spouse's highest level of education attained_____

      spouse's occupation_____

      spouse's leisure / recreation / hobbies_____

Comments / Concerns:_____

_____

Profile: Mothers of the Atlantic Breakers
Fall 2002

<u>**Estimated Current Social Standing**</u>
7 upper-middle class
3 middle / upper-middle class
4 middle class

      50% = upper-middle class
      29% = middle class
      21% = middle / upper-middle class

<u>**Highest Level of Education Attained**</u>
2 - High School
2 - Two year college
Four year college
B.A.
BA in Art
BSChE
College - BA +
B.A. & currently in a graduate program
B.A. & Graduate Accounting
Post Baccalaureate degree
Masters
Masters of Education

      71% = B.A. or higher
      14% = Two year college only
      14% = High school degree only

<u>**Annual Household Income**</u>
75,000
75 - 150,000 -- mean = 112.5
85,000
85,000
95 - 100,000 -- mean = 97.5
100K

100,000+
125,000
150,000
150,000 - 250,000 -- mean = 200
160,000
200,000
200K+
too personal

> 13 Reported:
> Range: $75,000 - 200,000+
> Mean: $130,000

Race
14 White / Caucasian = 100%

Ethnicity
2 American
2 Irish
Irish American
Irish-Polish American
Italian
Italian American
"Combo" Irish, German, Welsh
Irish, French, English, Welch
German, Irish, Swiss
German, Irish
Lithuania
Multi European

Religion
8 Catholic
1 Roman Catholic / Christian
1 Lutheran
1 Methodist
3 Presbyterian

> 64% = Catholic
> 21% = Presbyterian
> 7% = Methodist
> 7% = Lutheran

Practicing
11 Yes
2 Not indicated
1 No

> 79% = Practicing
> 7% = Not practicing
> 14% = Not indicated

Age
37
40
41
42
5 - 43
45
46
48
50
51

> Mode = 43
> Median = 43
> Mean = 44 (43.9)

> 79% = in their 40s

Occupation

Personal Representative	Part-time		
Homemaker	Full-time		
N/A *(Assume homemaker in this case)*			
Sr. Budget Analyst	Full-time		
Physical Therapist	Part-time (very)		
Teaching	Part-time		
Teacher	Part-time		
Customer Training Rep.	Full-time		
--- *(Assume homemaker in this case)*			
Special Educator	Part-time	Homemaker	Full-time
Accountant	Part-time		
Homemaker	Full-time		
Industrial Sec. Specialist	Full-time		
Homemaker	Full-time		

<u>Previous Occupation</u>

Ch Engineer	Part-time & Full-time
Industrial Sec. Specialist	
Secretary	Full-time
Accountant	Full-time
Homemaker	Full-time
Teacher	
Home - Housewife (13yrs.)	Full-time
Account Exec.	Full-time
saa	Full-time
Physical Therapist	Full-time
Bank Teller	Full-time
Accountant	
N/A	
Homemaker	Full-time

# of Sons	Ages	# of Daughters	Ages
2	4, 12	1	17
2	12, 19	1	16
1	12	2	14, 10
1	12	1	19
3	19, 17, 12	X	
4	21, 18, 16, 12	0	
2	12, 19	1	5
2	16, 12	1	14
1	12	1	11
2	17, 12	3	15, 14, 10
1	*blank*	2	*blank*
1	13	1	11
3	12, 17, 18	1	26
1	12	0	

<u># of kids:</u>
>Mode = 3
>Mean = 2.9

<u># of sons:</u>
>Mode = 1
>Mean = 1.9

<u># of daughters:</u>
>Mode = 1
>Mean = 1.1

Leisure / Recreation / Hobbies / Clubs
Skiing, snowboarding, skydiving until my son was eight, dirtbike riding and riding my
      Harley
Gardening, oil painting, cooking, music
Hillendale Country Club, swimming, tennis, golf
Cards, cooking, watching kids, play sports
Tennis, Prayer Group, Women's Basketball, Gardening, Boating, Reading
Reading, knitting when time which is very, very little
Skiing, reading, crafts, home décor
Soccer, baseball, ballet etc. … I plan to have more when I retire!
Tennis / Skiing / Gardening
Sports, outdoors, gardening, music
Reading, arts & crafts, gardening
Coach daughter's soccer team, book club, sail, volunteer in the kids' school
Watching soccer, no time for hobby at this time
Walking, swimming, indoor plants

Spouse's Leisure / Recreation / Hobbies (Includes one "boyfriend")
Skydiving, Snowboarding, Riding Dirt Bikes
Golf, walking
Golf
Tennis, cards, being with children
Sports, boating, coaching
Golf
Skiing, running, basketball
Horse racing
Skiing / Golf / Running
Sports
Reading, sports
Boating / sailing / stuff around the house
Hunting & coaching soccer
Woodworking, outside gardening

Media Usage
  Television
  Comedies
  Maybe five times a week
  ER, Judging Amy, Not a lot, Watch the Orioles and sports
  West Wing, CSI, Weather Channel, Discovery Channel
  Usually news, 20-20 type shows
  Sit-Coms
  Daily - 11:00 p.m. News, Weekly - West Wing, ER
  Very little, CNN -ESPN

News everyday, CSI, West Wing
None
Evenings 1-2 hrs.
Sapranos, W. Wing, 10 p.m. television
Rarely - news 2 hrs a week
1 hr M - F Sat. night a movie, little on Sunday evening

Newspapers
Not much
Balt. Sun / daily   10 min. a day
Balt. Sun, Wall St. Journal
Balt. Sun - read daily
None
Weekends
Sun, Aegis
daily - read basically on weekends
Sun Papers (Weekday & Weekend)
The Sun, local weeklies for sports news
Sunday Sun
Sun everyday & it stinks
Read daily
Sun Sun (when possible)

Magazines
Chesapeake homes
Read occasionally
Subscribe to, but don't read them (kids have a magazine drive)
left blank
Gardening, decoring (?)
Better Homes & Garden / Prevention / Baltimore
Monthly - Southern Living
BHG
Southern Living
None
Cooking light, Southern Living
Southern Living, Baltimore
Cooking mags., historic pres., environ. mag (1 hour a week)
Not Much

Spouse's Highest Level of Education Attained (Includes one "boyfriend")
Eighth grade
High school
Assoc. Degree Electronics

College
College
Five yrs. College
BS
BS
B.S. degree
Master's - Finance
MBA
MBA
Dr.   *(this husband is a lawyer)*
Law school - graduated J.D.

Spouse's Occupation (Includes one "boyfriend")
Diesel Mechanic
Tournament director, golf
Self-employed business owner
Attorney
Pres. SunTrust Leasing Corp.
Optician
Sr. Vice Pres. Operations
Sales
Civil Engineer
Sr. Specialist World Wide Tec Support
Lawyer
Engineer
Salesman
Contractor

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