Understanding Participants’ Lived Experiences and Their Involvement in a Sport-Based Youth Development Program

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Sport participation has been limited in marginalized communities due to access to facilities, cost of participation, and overall lack of opportunity to engage in physical activity (Aspen Institute, 2019). Sport-based youth development (SBYD) programs have been one avenue for sport/physical activity in underserved populations (Perkins & Noam, 2007). These programs have been shown to support the development of transferable life skills (e.g., leadership, communication, relationship building). These benefits can transcend beyond SBYD settings and provide future benefits as well (Perkins & Noam, 2007). The current study seeks to highlight the characteristics of one SBYD program and how, according to youth participants (i.e., research collaborators), the program’s services impacted, and potentially continue to impact, them.

Examining SBYD programs allows for a critical understanding of larger societal issues (Eitzen, 2015), and the impact of such programs on participants’s life course development. All SBYD programs are not identical (Hasson, 2018). Community-driven models prioritize the inclusion of the host community alongside the sponsoring organization (McBride, et al., 2006). Participatory planning and implementation may empower host communities and lessen power differentials (Chambers, 1997; Ehrichs, 2002).

Utilizing a combination of SBYD Theory, Life Course Theory, and Critical Race Theory, we are conducting a phenomenological study aiming to understand better the lived experiences of Black male collaborators who participated in an SBYD program as teens. We examine fateful moments (Elder, 1998) that transpired in collaborators’ lives while participating in the program. We also examine life skill acquisition and transferral beyond the program. Finally, we focus specifically on the impact of gender and racial identities on lived experience. Criteria for participation include being involved with the SBYD program for 5 years. The collaborators all identify as black men ages 18-30.

Data will be collected (Early Spring 2021) through each collaborator diagramming his individual “life map” to record transitions, important experiences, and critical relationships in maturation into adulthood. Next, each collaborator will participate in an individual interview connected to the tenets of CRT, in particular counter storytelling. One focus group will then take place that will engage in-depth with the life mapping process, in addition to discussion of the collaborators’ review their interview transcripts, and their preliminary analysis of the data. From there, Colaizzi’s (1978) method of descriptive phenomenology will be employed and NVIVO qualitative analysis software will be used to assist in data organization.

Using CRT in combination with SBYD and Life Course Theory can not only center race, but also challenge how SBYD programs define life skill development over time. Much of SBYD literature promotes life skill development in accordance with social norms and with immediacy to program involvement (Kochanek & Erickson, 2019). SBYD programs could be doing a disservice to youth by conforming to the dominant narrative rather than questioning inequities, and representing short-term life skill acquisition with long-term development. By using this integrated framework, sport management researchers can potentially ensure that youth from minoritized racial backgrounds benefit more than with race-neutral implications and that life skill development is examined over time.