Examining the Effects of Race, Gender, and SES on the Benefits Obtained and Considered Important by High School Basketball Players and Coaches

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Despite the lack of clarity on how sport delivers the benefits intended, sport continues to be positioned as a panacea for social disparities (Coalter, 2010). The inconsistent and sometimes nonexistent evaluation of sport has raised doubt about sport’s capacity to deliver the benefits desired (Broh, 2002; Chalip, 2006; Coakley, 1979; Coakley, 1993). In worse cases, sport has been considered complicit in reinforcing the same oppressive social structures that created the initial need for its intervention (Hartmann & Depro, 2006; Hartmann, 2003; Shaw, Frisby, Cunningham, & Fink, 2006; Spaaij, 2009).

The belief that sport can provide benefits stems from the recognition that there are two groups of people: the empowered (i.e., those who employ sport for development), and the disempowered (i.e., those who are targeted to participate in these programs). Darnell (2007) asserts that “within the development through sport movement, a well-intentioned and benevolent ‘mission’ of training, empowering, and assisting is not only based upon, but to an extent requires, the establishment of a dichotomy between the empowered and the disempowered, the vocal and the silent, the ‘knowers’ and the known” (561). The crux of this assertion lies in the notion that the benefits provided through sport serve as social control mechanisms by reifying the values of the empowered as those that should be desired and reinforcing the social hierarchies that oppress the disempowered through the controlled (unequal) allocation of resources. Latent in the intent of these sport-for-development programs is the need to continually identify and socially anchor the historically disempowered. Social myths about their inferiority overshadow how social class, further distinguished by race and gender, was historically fashioned by the unequal distribution of resources and overpower the voices of those who are marginalized through this process. Therefore, what is considered “beneficial” becomes a contest between which group can put the most resources behind their ideals as opposed to the expressed needs of the participants (Coalter, 2007; Darnell, 2007; Spaaij, 2009).

To better understand what shapes perceptions about the benefits obtained from sport participation, the goal of this study is to examine how sport participants and sport administrators in American (US) interscholastic sport programs differ in their perceptions of the benefits obtained and considered important from sport participation. Upon receiving IRB approval, a pilot study was conducted on high school athletes (N= 450) to ascertain the benefits they obtained from high school basketball. In SPSS, exploratory factor analyses with varimax rotation were conducted on 109 benefits indentified in the literature to determine which groups of benefits were salient to high school basketball players. From the initial factor analysis, 26 factors emerged. In addition to feedback from sport-for-development researchers, coaches, and players, a second pilot study (N= 69) was conducted to refine the categories of benefits players obtained. The final instrument contained 41 items in ten categories of benefits: Academic Resiliency, Self-Expansion, Self-Discipline, Analytical Thinking Skills, Value Training, College Preparation, Leadership Training, and Relationships with Others, Sense of Community, and Career Development. Cronbach’s alpha was used to test reliability of each category and all were found to be acceptable for this study Nunnally(1978). The instrument was available in paper form and electronically for players and coaches to complete in a four week period. The final sample included 237 high school basketball players and 164 high school basketball coaches from Texas.

One- sample t-tests and two- sample t-tests were used to explore the benefits obtained and considered important by players and coaches and how the groups differed on those concepts. Multivariate analyses on the ten (10) benefit categories were conducted to observe the effects of race, role, gender, and SES (covariate), on the benefits obtained and considered important by players and coaches. Results showed that both players and coaches felt that players obtained all ten categories of benefits and that those benefits were important (p < .001). Race, gender, and role were significant in determining the level to which one believed that players obtained benefits from sport and the importance of that benefit (p < .001). SES, a proxy for access to resources, significantly impacted the level in which...
individuals agreed that players obtained benefits from basketball ($p < .001$). Overall coaches significantly agreed more to players obtaining these benefits and considering these benefits important. Female coaches agreed more to players obtaining these benefits than male coaches, yet female players agreed less than male players.

An important finding was that socioeconomic status was a significant variable in determining the benefits obtained through sport as it reinforces the need for sport to operate on a multilevel basis to address the needs of the participant and provided the intended benefits. SES was used a proxy for class and, more specifically, one's access to resources. The significance of SES in determining the benefits obtained from sport suggests that the resources available to participants outside of sport will affect the ability for them to obtain benefits through sport. This finding speaks to the need for sport to operate in tangent with the participants' social environment in order to provide the intended benefits. To this end, sport-for-development programs should contain components that use the resources available to foster the intended benefits and more importantly, to create more sustainable programs.

Another key finding was that race, gender, and role were still significant in creating differences in the benefits obtained and considered important even with SES, a proxy for class and access to resources, being held constant. While the results showed that "sport is good" for providing the benefits observed, the differences in how well these benefits are obtained by race and gender suggest that further investigation is needed in understanding what are the mechanisms that allow sport to be "good" in providing these groups with benefits.

Both findings push for more organic and long term studies in the benefits of sport participation. Using the tenets Critical Race Theory, theoretical implications include employing a socioecological approach to understanding how needs and benefits are conceptualized, the use of more emic approaches to studying these concepts, and providing more agency to the individuals in researching and understanding their needs and the benefits they desire from sport. The results promote the need to look specifically at one's access to resources, race, and gender in determining the components necessary and sufficient to providing benefits through sport. The concept of hegemony posits that these factors are not conditions inherent to an individual but identities and social positions constructed by the larger society. Therefore, sport researchers must create concepts of researching "needs" and "benefits" that are reflective of the individual as well as cultural and environmental factors that shape sport participation. These concepts must also be organic, taking into consideration that factors influencing the needs of participants are changing in concert with social norms and their effects on one's identity and access to resources.

The results of this study also provide practical implications in recognizing that sport do not exist in vacuum and to be effective in providing participants with the intended benefits, sport must be culturally responsive (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billing, 1992). To this end, sport administrators should be mindful of the cultural and structural factors that shape the student's environment and consequently their identities, and needs by implementing sport components that work on multiple levels. Asking players to list the benefits they desire, engaging school and community officials in providing access to resources, and using goal setting to help students exercise more agency in shaping their sport experience were also practical implications from this study.