Familial and Community Influences on the Sports Socialization of Black Boys: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

From an early age, many children are engaged in or connected to various sporting activities. In a recent study, the Aspen Institute (2018) reported that 61.1% of males between the ages of six and 12 had played a team sport at least one day in 2016. Statistical data on racial differences and child involvement in sport activities is sparse. However, while the research on Black sports socialization is limited, Stodolska, Shinew, Floyd, and Walker (2014) were able to link Black sport involvement to cultural and gendered forms of socialization, which is often perpetuated through interpersonal relationships and interactions. Despite the prevalence of Black boys participating in sports, the research on their sport socialization is limited. The purpose of this study is twofold; (1) To examine the nuances of how parents and community agents integrate racial socialization and gendered socialization during interactions with young Black boys, and (2) how that socialization influences young Black boys' perceptions of the importance of playing sports. To investigate these questions, Black boys, their parents, and community agents were interviewed to see what external influences in a Black boy's life played a role in his sport socialization. Literature shows that interpersonal relationships can influence physical activity by providing social support and establishing social norms that constrain or enable health promoting behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the development and outcomes of the socialization of sports, race, and gender have been examined for various racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States. For example, The Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology published an article by Fredericks and Eccles (2005) that discussed Family Socialization, Gender, and Sport Motivation and Involvement. This study used analytic techniques to test the hypothesis that role modeling, parents' beliefs, and the provision of experiences for the child are related to children's perceptions of sport competence, value, and participation. Additionally, gender differences in sport participation rates are linked most directly to gender differences in competence and value beliefs, which in turn are assumed to derive from experiences in the home and elsewhere. Similar to this study, theoretical and empirical bodies of literature have focused on socialization as a very important aspect of human development, but researchers have not examined these instances equally for all populations within the United States. The examination of socialization in terms of sports, race, gender, and racial identity seems to be particularly relevant to Black communities because of their histories, the adversities that they have overcome, and the diverse circumstances that ethnically diverse populations face (2005). However, there has been little research conducted on Black communities in terms of the internal socialization that occurs within the black community. This lack of research is especially visible within the studies of Black child development. There has been some studies on the socialization of the Black children, but none of them have extensively looked at all of these factors in conjunction with one another. This research study will address that gap in the literature. More specifically, this study will further advance the research of the socialization of Black Boys by investigating how familial and community influences impact their decisions to participate in a sport.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
Racial Socialization

Over the past several decades, researchers examined racial socialization or how

parents shape children's learning about their own race and about relations between ethnic groups. Hughes and Johnson (2001), found that parents' race-related communications to children have been viewed as important determinants of children's race related attitudes and beliefs, and their sense of efficacy in negotiating the race related barriers and experiences. This could be primarily attributed to the fact that racism is still a prevalent factor within the United States and the parents would like to condition their children for the adversity and discrimination that is sure to come (2001). Furthermore, Hughes and Johnson emphasize the complex interplay between African American parents' recognition of their disadvantaged position in the United States in their normative goals for the children. Given the state of race relations in America, this racial socialization could be a coping mechanism to brace their children for events that may happen. For instance, Hughes and Johnson (2001) mention that verbal, nonverbal, deliberate, and unintentional parental messages to children transmit information regarding cultural pride awareness of racism and cultural practices.

Hughes and Johnson (2001), found that children whose parents emphasize their parent's ethnic or racial groups, culture history, and heritage have reported higher self-esteem more knowledge about the ethnic group, and more favorable in group activities (2001). These transmissions of both implicit and explicit messages about the meanings of one's race in a broader societal context will grow into how the child gains a sense of understanding for the cultural, traditional, and racial identities in which they hold (Yang et al., 2016). According to Hughes and Chen (1997), this pattern is attributed to the fact that the goals of racial and cultural socialization practices are to instill a sense of racial pride and cultural knowledge in children. Evidence exists that adolescents whose parents engaged in more cultural socialization have a greater tendency to question allegiance to the dominant culture's worldview of African-Americans, express greater appreciation for African-American culture, and manifest a stronger and more positive orientation to African-Americans in their culture (Yang et al.,

2016). This has proven to be effective because parents' efforts to prepare children for racial barriers have also been associated with favorable youth outcomes including higher grades, and feelings of efficacy (Yang et al., 2016).

Influences on Physical Activity

Regular physical activity is associated with important physical, mental, and social benefits. Participating in physical activity on a day-to-day basis is associated with better health outcomes (2011). Therefore, if children were to participate in physical activity on a regular basis, they would be more likely to have healthier lives when they are older. The likelihood for a child to want to participate in physical activities will increase depending on their surroundings. For example, research has shown us that the social environment may influence behavior in a number of ways, through socialization processes, social integration, interpersonal relationships, and social support (2011). Social influences are often understood within the context of social learning theory, whereby health-related behaviors are acquired and modified through observational learning and direct learning experiences involving interactions with significant others. Existing literature suggests that the pressure associated with peer and parent influences or support may lead some to feel obligated to participate in physical activities even if they originally had no desire to do so.

A range of social factors have been shown to be associated with physical activities amongst children and adolescents; these include parental physical activity, parental support, having physically active friends, peers and socializing, family cohesion, and child parent communication (2011). These interactions and conversations have been noted to increase the child's chances of participating in a physical activity. Another factor that could encourage a child to participate in a physical activity is positive reinforcement (2011). Kirby and colleagues (2011) mentioned how interpersonal relationships can influence social activity by providing social support in establishing social norms that constrain or enable health promoting behaviors. The provider of social support may have varying effects on physical activity among adolescents. Those who influence adolescents

tend to change overtime. Early in life, young people referred to their immediate family members to provide positive attitudes and behaviors, with parental influence having the greatest impact.

The articles reviewed indicated that the socialization of children, parental and peer support could influence the child's likelihood to participate in an activity. However, nothing was specified for the Black community. Given differences in cultural practices between the African American community and mainstream White America, the socialization of children is likely to be different as well (2008). Research studies should focus specifically on the interrelatedness of racial socialization and sport socialization among African American families to explain the influences that impact African American boys' decisions to participate in organized sports. The goal of this research is to examine the family and community factors in Black boys' lives that influence them to participate in sports. The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) To examine the nuances of how parents and community members integrate racial socialization and sports socialization during interactions with young Black boys, and (2) How that socialization influences young Black boys' decisions to play sports.

METHODS

This research study analyzes how family and community members influence young Black boys' experiences of and their perceptions about the importance of playing a sport. This research design looks specifically at how and what parents and community members communicate about the importance of playing a sport to young Black boys.

Research Design

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Winthrop University. The case study analysis was completed by using multiple cases. Two Black boys and their families participated in the research study. Community agents who work directly with the boys were also included in the study sample to gain a more nuanced view of the process of sports socialization among young Black boys in a community setting. Snowball

sampling techniques were used to recruit participants through local branches of the YMCA in York County, SC and Chester Park Center of Literacy Through Technology in Chester, SC. For example, an administrative contact at the school served as a liaison between the researcher and potential participants, and recommended families that met the eligibility criteria to the study. Additionally, participants who meet the study criteria will be asked to refer families that they know fit the criteria to participate in the study. The researcher also passed out flyers advertising the study to Black families who attend the YMCA and Chester Park C.O.L.T. Demographic information about children and parents will be obtained through use of a demographic questionnaire to be completed prior to gathering qualitative data. Parents will respond to the demographic questionnaire and will report on information about them and their children. This study will involve three interview protocols (i.e., a child interview, a parent interview, and a community agent interview). Probes will be used to elicit stories from participants to gain a deeper insight into the process of sports socialization among Black boys. All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed immediately (Merriam 1998).

Transcripts of interview data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis (Saldana, 2016). Data collected for the interviews was coded in three phases: focused themes, subthemes, and major themes (Saldana, 2016). This helped the researcher identify similarities that emerge across all of the participant interviews to obtain a collective depiction of the sports socialization process. The data collected was coded in three phases: focused, major themes, and subthemes. The researcher also took analytic memos throughout the data collection and analysis stages of the project to record ideas about possible connections among participant responses and initial thoughts about codes and themes (Saldana, 2016). These additional memos served as another source of data for the study.

DISCUSSION

The first major theme, sports socialization as a normative aspect of parenting,

captured how socializing young Black boys to become involved in sports happened naturally and instinctively for the parents in this study. Black boys were exposed to sports at an early age through intentional means such as parental structuring of sports activities and through the modeling of sports involvement by extended family members, in particular older cousins. Black fathers and extended family members who are men were more likely to be directly involved in the sports socialization of young boys. The second theme, reinforcing sports involvement, reflects how young Black boys are receiving positive reinforcement from their parents and communities for being involved in sports. Children were reinforced through pleasing parents and a lack of alternatives to being involved in sports in their communities, thereby leaving sports as an only option. Child involvement in sports was positively reinforced through community support for being successful at sports; further, community agents used sports-related activities as teaching tools to scaffold children and engage them in the learning process of academic skills. Black boys appear to be socialized to participate and be successful in sports from their families and their communities.

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