

# SPORT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE CITY: BUILDING COMMUNITIES

by

VELINA BOTEVA BRACKEBUSCH

(Under the Direction of Billy Hawkins)

## ABSTRACT

There is a dearth of research in the area of sport for social change and spirituality. The purpose of this study was to understand (a) the main barriers low income African American parents face to sport participation, (b) how a nonprofit religious organization enhanced the life of its participants, their families and the engaged volunteers and (c) how the organization was able to foster social capital exchange and building of a community among its members.

The theoretical framework consisted of critical social science theory, social capital theory, and social learning theory. Data collection involved in-depth ethnographic methods and the study lasted a year. Methods included observations, interviews, and document analysis and thematic analysis was employed to find emerging themes. Participants in the study were children taking part of sport programming the organization offered, their parents, volunteers, coaches, and staff of the organization. The findings of the study are as follows: the organization was able to build a community through a family atmosphere, close relationships, turning barriers like transportation into opportunities to build relationships with children, provided child care to each other, some of the coaches acted as parents, and they also gave back to the community through various initiatives.

INDEX WORDS: Sport, social change, African American, ethnography, sport  
ministry, spirituality, community, and social capital

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VELINA BOTEVA BRACKEBUSCH

B.B.A., University of North Georgia, 2009

M.S., Georgia Southern University, 2011

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VELINA BOTEVA BRACKEBUSCH

Major Professor: Billy Hawkins

Committee: Rose Chepyator-Thomson  
Elizabeth St.Pierre

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2016

## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to Jesus Christ who has and continues to bless me beyond what is humanly comprehensible. Without Him and the people He put in my life at the right place and right time, this work would have not been accomplished. I also dedicate this to my loving husband Kyle. He stuck with me through being pregnant and grumpy, being a new mom and grumpy, and just plain old being grumpy while collecting data and writing. I also dedicate this to my son Titus, who has been the sweetest baby and allowed mommy to complete the care of her other baby (this dissertation). Kyle and Titus, I love you more than you can imagine and thank you for your support and unconditional love.

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“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13: 34-35) (ESV)

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

What if the beginning is not the beginning? I have to begin this work somewhere based on a start of some sort elsewhere. The beginning of this dissertation originated elsewhere a long time ago. Derrida (1993/2006) wrote about the concept of trace and that we can never go back far enough to find out what started something or how it was brought into being. It is the haunting ghost that continues to follow and influence us throughout our lives. Thus is my struggle with trying to figure out why I am interested in studying sport as a vehicle for broader change in communities. Did it start with playing sports and doing community service or did my parents instill it in me while laboring through three jobs and still making time to voluntarily serve our community? Or was this interest sparked by the fact that I was only able to practice the elite sport of tennis because I had a sponsor who wanted me to continue to play? I attempt here the unaccomplishable task of tracing the roots of why I am passionate about sport and community betterment.

*I am often reminded of how privileged I am – I have a roof over my head; food on the table; clothes on my back, and two loving parents that care for me. All else is just additional stuff that I don't need. I find myself pondering why some people are born in certain countries or to certain families and just have more. I think about choice, or the lack there of, and how some are stuck without opportunities which feeds the absence of their ambition. I've seen Bulgarians around me with master's degrees who make more*

*waiting tables than working a job in their field. Reality hits me but instead of putting me down it boils my blood and Che Guevarra's picture on my desk stares back at me and tells me "Fight!" Nikola Vaptsarov's poem "Prolet", spurs me on. Both Che and Vaptsarov fought for freedom for the lower classes of society and lost their lives with fire and passion in their hearts. My fellow countryman, Vaptsarov was sentenced to death by a firing squad for wanting to liberate workers from their oppressive state. He knew that there was more to life than being stuck in a social class without a future to grow into. It's about community. It's not about us as individuals but it's about community. Here is the poem that inspired me to keep pushing – "Prolet" or in English – "Spring" by the poet and revolutionary Vaptsarov:*

Spring of mine, O spring of mine so white,  
 as yet un-lived, as yet unfeasted,  
 alone in visions vague yet dreamt of,  
 how low above the poplars do you skim,  
 yet without pausing in your flight.

Spring of mine, O spring of mine so white!  
 I know you'll come with rain and hurricanes,  
 stormy and terrible, fiery, riotous.  
 To bring back hopes in thousands, wash out bleeding wounds.

How loud the birds will sing then in the cornfields,  
 how merrily will soar up to the heav'ns,

how people will enjoy their work,  
 how lovingly as brothers will they live.  
 Spring of mine... O spring of mine so white!

O once again but let me see your soaring  
 and giving life to squares so desolate,  
 O once again but let me die then on your barricades!

*A spring to come. A justice to come.*

*My involvement in sports started at a really young age. I tried out swimming, basketball, competitive ballroom dancing, and tennis. I fell in love with tennis at the age of 13 and wanted to become a professional tennis player. Around that time, 16 year old Martina Hingis became the youngest world number one tennis player and there were not many coaches that wanted to pour into a 13-year old who was just beginning to get better (even though I had played on and off since I was eight). I realized that it might be a little too late for me and as my brother left the family to pursue his bachelor's degree in the United States, I learned that in America universities give out scholarships to people who played sports and were competing on behalf of their school. I was so excited! Tennis was going to be my ticket to a degree recognized all over the world. But in order for me to advance, I had to move to a better tennis club which meant more money that my parents did not have. One of my dad's friends agreed to sponsor me and in return I was his hitting partner once a week. I was so behind the kids in the new club. The majority came from more privileged families, had nicer rackets, brand new clothes, and could afford individual lessons. I shopped at the second hand store and my shorts looked more like*

*what tennis players were wearing ten years ago. Most of the kids I played with were enrolled in the sports school, which meant that their courses were organized around their practice schedule. Since both of my parents were former athletes and now PE teachers, they did not want me to go to that school. What if I got injured? I would not have a good education and would not be able to go to a good university, thus becoming a PE teacher, not making much like them. So I studied hard and got accepted into an academically strong commerce high school where I studied business, accounting, marketing, money and banking, and statistics together with all the other subjects regular high schools teach. I was a true student-athlete: an outsider in my tennis club, and an outsider in my elite high school. But I was focused on my dream. I spent countless hours pounding a tennis ball against the walls of my local middle school. Every time I had a spare minute, I went to the school and hit against that wall – each stroke was getting me closer to my dream.*

*Today, after eleven years of schooling in the United States, I find myself in a PhD program. When I shared with my mother that I was reminiscing about how it all started, she recounted a story of when I was in the 6th or 7th grade. She said it was the hottest time of the day when everyone stayed inside, about 40 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit), and I was getting ready to go to tennis practice (I went by myself, having to travel for 45 minutes and switch 2 buses). She told me to stay home because it was really hot outside. My response was:*

*“OK, mom. Today I will decide that it is too hot and I won’t go to practice. Tomorrow, it will be raining and won’t go to practice. And the day after I would’ve quit playing sports altogether”.*

*My mom said that at this point I, the child, was teaching her that a person should be persistent and follow her dreams. She attributes my chasing of goals, dreams, and the pursuit of this PhD degree to my participation in sports.*

*Regardless of my training and accomplishments, in this cutthroat world of academia I feel small, uneducated, always catching up, swimming upstream. The area of sport for development is full of great scholars that at first glance look privileged to be where they are today. However, the work is tough and muddy as working in poor communities is challenging at the very least. I admire these scholars.*

*My low self-esteem in academia lies in a fundamental inability to realize how strong I am. My life has taken many unexpected turns my life has taken - in this area at least I have one advantage – I am a product of development and aid programs and many times have been given opportunities that came from external funding. My deficiency, and often times, inadequacy with reading and writing in English may be a starting place for my scholarship as an Eastern European woman who has seen firsthand the power of sport and what it can do to help socially excluded people to feel included and wanted. I just have to suck it up and turn my deficiencies into proficiencies... The kids in my research need me and I don't have time to feel sorry for myself...*

*My journey to the United States has made me humble. I have faced many obstacles and when I tell people my story, they call me resilient. Aren't we all resilient, I wonder? Somehow I feel a higher responsibility for all the kids that haven't had my "luck" and my experience - the kids who are stuck without opportunity because there are many hurdles in their way. How will they make it? Who is their sponsor? Who believes in them? Well, I do. And if I can make a difference for even a handful of children, my life*

*will be meaningful. I have been given this opportunity and a platform to be an advocate for sports and its possibility to positively influence and enhance the lives of children. I have to use it.*

The United Nations Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG) embraced the ability of sport to provide aid for various social issues. Since then, sport has been taken up by numerous governments and non-profit agencies around the globe to assist marginalized groups of people in the betterment of their lives (United Nations, 2003). Messner (2014) emphasized the importance of continuing to do research in youth sports in the United States as fewer children are participating in physical activity today. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Unhealthy diets and physical inactivity are key risk factors for the major noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes” (WHO, n.d.). Warburton, Nicole and Bredin (2006) wrote that there is a linear relationship between physical activity and health status, meaning that when physical activity increases, it leads to improvements in health status.

Some of the reasons why we see fewer numbers of people engaging in sport are due to: “lack of neighborhood recreation spaces, inadequate coaching, rising costs and exclusionary league and team policies, excessive time demands on families, safety concerns, cultural norms, and too few sport options to accommodate the interests of all” as some of the most prevalent obstacles facing kids and their parents (Project Play, p. 2). These obstacles mostly hurt low-income parents that work multiple jobs or lack the means to transport their children. Fortunately, nonprofit organizations have stepped in to provide sports for this demographic, however, there are many children who are not

reached either because they have no access to these programs, or because the sport of their preference is not offered.

Furthermore, as people in the U.S. become more and more isolated and individualistic (Putnam, 2001), the sense of community is lost. Sports remain one of the few areas where people still come together and socialize. Putnam (2001) argued that there are benefits to having close-knit relationships and community capital, as people can lower transactional costs by asking for favors and giving back to those that have previously helped them. As an individual increases the number and quality of their connections, there is access to more information, as they may be aware of more or different resources.

Many scholars have stated that sport can lead to positive youth development (PYD) when combined with purposeful programming and implementation (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005; Holt, 2008; Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Most importantly, PYD depends on the way sport is structured and delivered to the children and determines the success of achieving certain developmental goals (Holt, 2008). Nonprofit sport entities tend to use the “sport plus” model. This model is designed in such a way that NGO’s provide sport programs and activities in addition to giving participants other life skills training and after school programming (Coalter, 2013). Here, the idea is that kids and youth can build social skills on and off the playing field with the help of peers, coaches, volunteers, teachers, and adults in general.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sport participation in the United States has been declining among youth throughout the years, with less children than before able to reap the benefits of staying

physically active and having fun while playing. The numbers are even lower among people of color as sports have become less and less accessible to parents who cannot afford the associated costs or lack the time to drive their children back and forth from practices (Collins & Kay, 2003; Spaaij, Magee, & Jeanes, 2014). Cost of equipment has risen and there are many elite academies that focus on professionalizing children's sports or getting them ready to play "amateur" sports in college which leaves low-income children behind as their parents are likely to put their scarce resources into necessities.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the main barriers low income African American families face to sport participation and to understand how an organization serving this population succeeds in fostering communities within and outside the sports field. The organization being studied caters to low-income children who may not otherwise participate in organized sporting activities. They provide equipment, coaching, transportation, volunteers, training, and facilities to many families who live in low-income housing and do not have the ability to sign-up their children for sports. The organization offers American football, cheerleading, gymnastics, basketball, and most recently tennis. The organization is also interested in fostering a community among the children, parents, coaches, and volunteers that extends beyond sports. The goal is to create many forms of capital, such as social capital, that members can benefit from and exchange.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What are the main barriers to sport participation of low-income African American parents taking part in this program?

- 2) In what ways has the program enhanced the lives of its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?
- 3) In what ways has the program achieved building social capital among its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?

### **Definitions of Terms**

#### **Black/African American**

A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups in Africa and identifies as Black or African American.

#### **People of Color**

A group of people in the United States who do not represent the politically dominant voting majority of the total population, or who comprise a small percentage of the population, including Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, North American Indians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians/Asian-Americans.

#### **In-kind Donation**

A good or a service gifted to an organization as an act of kindness without expecting something in return.

#### **Social Capital**

A network of relationships formed by people that aid in the flow of resources. Also an investment in and cultivation of social relationships allowing access to resources that may otherwise not be available to an individual.

#### **Sport Ministry**

Usually a nonprofit faith-based organization which incorporate biblical teachings in its programs and/or organized its programs to reflect Christian values.

### **Sport for Development/Sport for Social Change**

The concept of using sport to aid in the alleviation of various societal problems or issues like drug use, exclusion, mental health, etc.

### **Nonprofit organization/Nongovernmental Organization (NPO/NGO)**

Non-business entities that aim to better the lives of others through partnering or servicing communities and/or aiding in the development of certain social causes.

### **Sport Participation**

Taking part in organized sporting activities.

### **Positive Youth Development (PYD)**

Sport programs that are well-run have the ability to positively impact youth by providing psychological, social, and physical benefits to children who participate.

### **Vision Ministries – Organizational Profile**

Vision Ministries is a nonprofit organization in a Southeastern United States city. Founded ten years ago, its mission is to:

*Build consistent relationships with youth and their families in the inner-city through programs that demonstrate Christ-centered hope and encouragement. We are a non-profit organization that engages youth and their families in this inner-city through sports programs, after-school programs, Vision Academy, and other community projects. Our programs and activities promote personal and spiritual renewal as well as community restoration.*

The organization started as a sport ministry that aimed to reach disadvantaged children of color and their families through an American football program. Then the ministry grew to provide different sports and as more families and children got involved,

the organization found a need to start a school. Today, Vision Academy provides a private Christian education to children K-4th grade, whose families can only afford to pay 5-10% of the annual fees. There are numerous donors who believe in community restoration through education, sport, and other after school activities.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a focus on the literature surrounding the topic of sport for social change and more specifically on areas that concern nonprofit organizations, their programming, and involved communities. Here, I give a general overview of the literature on sport for social change/development; nonprofit and sport nonprofit organizations; policies governing sport in the United States; barriers for sport participation; sport and parenting; positive youth development through sport and program evaluation; and social capital creation and social mobility through sport. These major topics guide the rest of the study as they pertain to sport for development and nonprofit organizations that aim to positively impact local communities.

#### **Sport for Social Change/Development**

Internationally, the area of sport for development has been researched increasingly and there is an abundance of studies that have come out to support the use of sport as a vehicle for social change. Sport is often paired with other tools and programming to tackle large social issues and aid community members in their quest for better quality of life, however there has been criticism toward the evangelical view of sport's ability to alleviate large social problems and the need for more monitoring and evaluation (Coalter, 2013a). In this section, I unpack the use of sport for social change in the literature and in practice.

There are many ways to look at how sport can be used as a vehicle for social change. From the grassroots movement of the modern Olympic games through the collegiate scholarships received by international and marginalized domestic students, to poor slums in African countries and the favelas in Brazil, sport has been directed to aid in the development of people who face a plethora of social problems both as individuals and as part of larger groups in society (Coalter, 2013a; Spaaij, 2011; Levermore, 2008a). There has been funding geared toward such programs in sport for development and peace (SDP). Levermore (2008b) listed goals such as conflict resolution, promotion for cultural understanding, and empowerment of women and children, with over 200 projects serving those goals in low-income countries picked up by governments and nonprofit organizations alike.

Many governments, Olympic committees, and non-profit entities support sport as a tool for development in countries where poverty and disease plague communities. The United Nations Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG) include the ability of sport to provide aid for social problems. Governments and non-profit agencies around the globe have begun using it to assist marginalized groups of people in the betterment of their lives (United Nations, 2003). Also, according to the *Magglinden Declaration* – a publication of the first International Conference on Sport and Development in 2003 – sport can achieve “physical and mental health, improve educational performance, sociability, overcoming social barriers, teaching mutual respect and providing the basis for partnerships” (Coalter, 2013).

Sport for development non-profits operate around the world to assist in the alleviation of many social problems. For example, in many Middle Eastern countries,

where women are discouraged from sport participation due to cultural and religious stigma, NGO's promote girls to play alongside boys and endorse gender equality. In many African countries, NGO's fight one of the largest issues that still plagues the continent – AIDS. They use sport to provide knowledge and understanding of the disease to its participants and also help alleviate the shame associated with contraction. For example, one of the biggest and most successful sport for development non-profits in Africa is the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA) in Nairobi, Kenya. It provides AIDS/ HIV awareness sessions together with scholarship opportunities and leadership training for its participants (Mathare Youth Sport Association, n.d.).

In 2001, The United Nations created an office of sport for development and peace (UNOSDP) with a main goal: “through advocacy, partnership facilitation, policy work, project support and diplomacy, UNOSDP strives to maximize the contribution of sport and physical activity to help create a safer, more secure, more sustainable, more equitable future” (UN, 2013). This structure of the UN governs the use of sport for various development goals around the world from peace building between countries like North and South Korea to inclusion of people with disabilities. In the United States, the State Department offers funding for collaboration among US and foreign sport agencies for exchange programs and various projects.

Other entities like the European Union (EU) have established programming and funding for social inclusion projects and volunteering activities. The program “Youth in Action” was established by the European Parliament and Council for the period 2007 to 2013 and its goal was to “inspire a sense of active citizenship, solidarity, and tolerance among young Europeans and to involve them in shaping the Union's future” (Youth in

Action Programme, n.d.). It also promoted “mobility within and beyond the EU borders, non-formal learning and intercultural dialogue, and encourages inclusion of all young people, regardless of their educational, social and cultural background” (Youth in Action Programme, n.d.). The budget of the program was 885 million euros for seven years. Within that structure, there have been many project that used sport as a vehicle to break down those cultural, religious, and socioeconomic barriers between participants from various countries. Youth development and its funding are important aspects of EU policy making and in December, 2013, the EU voted for a continuation of the “Youth in Action” program from 2014 to 2020, called “Erasmus +” with a budget of 14.774 billion euros. In “Erasmus +”, sport has its own designated funding for projects such as: anti-doping; sustainable financing in sport; and sport, health and participation, which call for a better understanding of how they work and their impact in their communities.

In other countries like Canada, there are sport for development organizations that assist in social issues facing Native people. Non-profits have stepped up in places where government welfare had declined to assist the native population (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013). They serve to aid issues such as low educational attainment, unemployment, juvenile delinquency, and other critical aspects that Natives face in larger numbers than the general Canadian population. Hayhurst and Giles (2013) argued that many of the approaches previously taken by the Canadian government and now NGO’s are external and Eurocentric or neo-colonial in nature. They advocated for a stronger involvement of the population being served versus approaches transferred from the practices of the privileged others who live in different circumstances. They traced the history of policy making in Canada and that it did not take into account the customs, rituals, and culture of

Natives and wrote that “such situations reify colonial relations of power” (p. 509). They wrote that “because aboriginal communities often lack the resources, structures, and institutions necessary to provide sport and recreation opportunities, it seems that they are left with few choices but to take offerings from NGOs and TNCs” (p. 514). This view and research can be applied to programs in developed countries, like the United States, where marginalized groups are receiving assistance from more advantaged groups who may not have full knowledge of the circumstances and lives of the people they are serving.

Together with programming that is designed to tackle larger social issues, physical activity and sport are tools for acquiring better health. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Unhealthy diets and physical inactivity are key risk factors for the major noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes” (WHO, n.d.). In 2013, WHO drafted a new Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases. It stated that in 2008 alone 63% of the 57 million deaths that occurred globally (or 36 million deaths) were due to noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases (48%), cancer (21%), chronic respiratory disease (12%), and diabetes (3.5%). Furthermore, 80% of all deaths (or 29 million) happened in low and middle income countries. Many of these diseases are due to low physical activity and can be controlled and prevented through a healthy lifestyle.

Research shows that at least 30 minutes of exercise daily can help prevent some of the diseases listed above and this is the recommended time in the United States and the European Union. In a comprehensive study evaluating numerous articles (or meta-analysis), Warburton, Nicole and Bredin (2006) stated that “There appears to be a linear

relationship between physical activity and health status, such that a further increase in physical activity and fitness will lead to additional improvements in health status” (p. 801). Therefore, ensuring that children are socialized to be physically active can aid in the alleviation of preventable health issues on the future. As mentioned earlier, nonprofit organizations have stepped up to provide programming and opportunities in places where the profit sector or government funding are lacking and sporting opportunities are among some of the services they provide.

### **Nonprofit Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations (NPO's) or nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) are institutions which aim to better the lives of others through the provision of products and services that aid people and/or specific causes. Those organizations are mostly privately funded - 84 % of donations for NGO's come from individuals; 12 % from foundations, and 4 % from corporations (Weinstein, 2009). In the United States, more than 800,000 of the 1,480,000 charities are classified as 501(c) (3) or tax exempt and revenues of nonprofit institutions account for approximately 8.5 % of the gross domestic product (Weinstein, 2009) which shows that NGO's are an important piece of the American economy.

Charities are an immense part of the culture in the United States, as the country was founded on Christian principles and people believed in helping the needy in their communities (Gross, 2003). The belief that they should be the agents of change and not wait on the government or the state to assist them when others were in need was deeply rooted in American culture. According to Salamon (2003) there are two contradictory impulses that are part of the American character: “a deep-seated commitment to freedom

and individual initiative and an equally fundamental realization that people live in communities and that they consequently have responsibilities that extend beyond themselves”(p. 2). Thus NGO’s are organizations that combine these two opposing traits “creating a special class of entities dedicated to mobilizing *private initiative for the common good*” (Salamon, 2003, p. 2).

Nonprofit organizations historically have had an advocacy role in American society. They have been agents of social and policy changes and often address problems that have not been brought to the public’s attention. Many social movements in the U.S. have started through and with NGO’s – “antislavery, women’s suffrage, populist, progressive, civil rights, environmental, antiwar, women’s, gay rights, and conservative movements” (Salamon, 2003, p. 12). The nonprofit sector has been an active agent of policy creation and policy change throughout history, taking into consideration the voices of otherwise marginalized and silenced groups like women and people of color.

One of the first comprehensive accounts written on the voluntary or nonprofit sector in the United States came from Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville who, while visiting in the nineteenth century, was inspired by the way Americans were involved in the community and civil life through connecting with others that have similar interests. He noted that through those associations people can influence and govern their own communities. He wrote: “Feelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind developed, only by the reciprocal influence of men upon one another ... these influences are almost null in democratic countries; they must be artificially created and this can only be accomplished by associations” (Tocqueville as cited in Salamon, 2003, p. 13). Salamon (2003) added that those human associations and involvements

teach cooperation that carries over into economic and political life and is the foundation of what many scholars call social capital.

Bryce (2005) wrote extensively on nonprofits as agents of social capital and policy change. According to him, NGO's are

“blossoming throughout the world and dependence on them is increasing by citizens, governments, and by international organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – both of which have commissioned expert manuscripts on the roles that NGO's as well as social capital may play in increasing the effectiveness of their programs” (Bryce, 2005, p. 3).

Frequently, large developmental organizations partner with local nonprofits who know more about the needs of their communities and offer them funding through grants to accomplish certain goals and objectives. Bryce (2005) identified major aspects that help pinpoint nonprofits as agents of policy: NGO's are in a relationship with society to provide service; this relationship has mutual expectations; both parties agree on certain performance based on those expectations; there is an agreement on measurement and evaluation of the performance; both parties can agree to modify or terminate the relationship; and those are voluntary actions.

Bryce (2005) took an economic perspective to the way nonprofits affect public policy. He argued that businesses, in general, provide products that are priced to make a profit at a quantity that they desire. Therefore, there are certain products and services that they will not offer if there is a projected loss. Nonprofits fill that gap at low or no cost to the public and in return are given tax exemption. Therefore, nonprofits are at the forefront

of identifying needs in communities which are not met by the private sector. Bryce (2005) wrote:

“as an agent of public policy a nonprofit may perform one or more of the following functions at the same time: It may be involved in policy investigation and development, policy information and advocacy, and/or policy implementation and evaluation” (p. 66).

In that sense nonprofits provide aid and partner with communities in need in various aspects of life. Frumkin (2002) wrote that the nonprofit sector is complex and that it has “at times conflicting desire to defend the pursuit of private individual aspirations, while at the same time affirming the idea of the public sphere shaped by shared goals and values” (p. 1) and that in the U.S. “nonprofit and voluntary organizations are seen as playing a central role in generating, organizing, and emboldening political oppositions, working through national networks and building international linkages” (p. 2). This account of NGO’s in American life manifests the role they fill and the uniqueness of their position in civic society. Nonprofits contribute to the political life of citizens who may not otherwise actively engage in policy issues, or even social justice, and the desire for people to be involved in something bigger than themselves.

On public activism, Felkins and Croteau-Chonka (2014) wrote: “activist nonprofit organizations serve as agents of change and play a significant role in the development and implementation of public policy” (p. 216). Often times NGO’s see an injustice and begin an active campaign to change that through collective actions with other nonprofits and various channels of communication. Felkins and Croteau-Chonka (2014) explained that social media has made a significant difference in how nonprofits are able to

disseminate information, gather more supporters, and publicly fight certain causes. Many activist NGO's lobby in the nation's capital, usually as social advocates by raising funds from supporters and the communities they represent.

Although many nonprofits aim to affect policy and bring social change in communities, they may have different views on how to go about it. They might disagree on what policies should be changed and how to implement them through various programming activities. There are several worldviews that illustrate the varying perspectives on change in the community. The rational/behavioral perspective is that change is causal and predictable and can be measured through objective data and quantitative analysis. The systems perspective sees change as “a holistic, homeostatic process that involves many interdependent components, cyclical patterns, and multiple conceptual relationships” (Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014, p. 220). The cultural interpretive perspective is that change is socially constructed and can be achieved through interactions with others. And lastly, the critical humanism perspective sees change as shifts in power relationships and can be achieved through direct participation (Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014).

Nonprofit organizations have been able to aid in several circumstances where governments and other aid groups have failed, but they have not been able to solve many of the issues for which they stand. For example, they have been advocates for equal rights but we still face racism decades after the Civil Rights movement. Not all responsibility falls on NGO's, however there is a need for more programs that are efficient and handle fundraising and financial responsibility well. Only then, nonprofits can grow their impact

on communities. The next section looks into nonprofit organizations which operate in the realm of sport and how they serve the public.

### **Sport Nonprofits**

At the recreational level, sports in America are funded by taxpayer dollars and small participation fees. Local recreational centers function as part of counties policies for public well-being. There are non-profit institutions like Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA's), Young Women's Christian Organizations (YWCO's), Jewish Community Centers (JCC's), and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Many religious organizations form their own clubs and leagues where people can take part in sports (e.g. Upward Bound). According to Hums and MacLean (2004), "a nonprofit organization delivers programs and services for a particular sport or group with no intent to gain profit" (p.111). Nonprofits formed where local recreational and private programs were failing to provide certain sports and services. For-profit entities only offered popular sports in order to make money, and recreational departments could only provide certain types of sports (Hums & MacLean, 2004). Therefore, nonprofits stepped in to offer sport participation to people "regardless of class or financial background" (Hums & MacLean, 2004, p. 112). Coalter (2013) wrote:

"the hope is that, where national and local states are weak or non-existent, organizations in civil society and the degrees of trust and reciprocity they are presumed to engender can provide informal social insurance, increase community participation, strengthen democracy and facilitate various types of social development and economic growth" (p. 154).

Therefore sport nonprofits in the United States serve underrepresented populations and also operate under certain policies that govern the way sports are performed in America.

### **Policies in the United States that Affect Sports**

Sports in the United States are run and governed very differently than sports elsewhere in the world, even in other Western countries like Canada and the United Kingdom. This causes misunderstandings when people are making comparisons, whether they are American nationals or foreigners trying to interpret U.S. sports (Bowers, Chalip, & Green, 2010). Bloyce and Smith (2010) used Figurational Theory to explain how policy processes and their outcomes are a result of imbalanced power relations between people whose interests and views are more likely to differ. This leads to outcomes that are not planned or predictable and is often the case of policy creation and implementation in the United States.

Bloyce and Smith's (2010) research also focused on the importance of young people's participation in sport and its implications and shows that there is a significant increase in youth participation in sport since the 1960's and 1970's internationally, especially in Western countries. However, the participation frequency has not changed much, with a lot of children participating very little or very much and the majority still participating moderately, forming a bell-shaped curve and recently there has been a decline in participation among youth in the United States (Project Play Report, 2015).

Bloyce and Smith (2010) visit the policy issues, effectiveness, and achievement of sport for development programs which aim to create social inclusion. Their examination exhibits that administrators working in sport for development today not only have to show the main benefits of sport participation like mental and physical health, but also

how it acts as a vehicle to alleviate much broader social problems like crime (Bloyce & Smith, 2010). They concluded that it is difficult for sport to impact larger social problems by itself and the majority of scholars and practitioners agree that sport initiatives have to be carefully structured and combined with other goal-oriented activities in order to achieve such expectations of high impact on society.

Bloyce and Smith (2010) also investigated the topic of elite sport development and found that there is a significant increase in the funding of youth elite participation by governments. This type of sport development has achieved a different kind of social change. Investment in elite athletes throughout history has been done in order to achieve certain political propagandas both in communist and capitalist societies. Unfortunately, elite sport has been used as a vehicle to promote the political superiority of one nation over another; one class or gender over another; and has not promoted sport for all members of society.

In the United States, there are very few policies that govern the way sports operate because an integrated system for development of athletes does not exist (Sparvero, Chalip, & Green, 2008). Since sports in America function very differently on the youth and professional scale, it is difficult to gain a deeper all-encompassing understanding of how they function unless one is involved with a particular sport and at a certain level within that same sport (e.g. youth tennis). On a larger scale, at the federal level, there are three main policies that influence the way sports are governed in the US – Title IX, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Amateur Sports Act.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 (PL 92 – 318) states that any federally funded institution should provide equal opportunity for women and men, boys

and girls, to participate in programming. When it comes to sport, Title IX affords girls and women access to programs and services that are offered to their male counterparts. Title IX reports look at surveys distributed to university students to make sure the institution is providing (1) sports according to what the women and men have played in high school and at the club level, (2) if the proportion of women playing sports was representative of the proportion of women enrolled at the institution (less than 5% variation), and (3) whether the university had a history of making sure women's sports were accommodated in the past (e.g. progress toward better facilities). As most colleges are nonprofits and operate on federal funding, they all have to comply with Title IX and distribute similar surveys every three years to ensure women are equally represented.

In effect, Title IX has aided in the increase of women playing sports. It has provided opportunities for a historically marginalized group of people (women) the opportunity to participate in sports at federally funded institutions – e.g. schools and universities. However, it has also reduced the number of men's sports offered, which can challenge the social mobility of men. Institutions facing low budgets or budget cuts have discontinued men's programs instead of adding another women's sport. The intent of Title IX was to increase programming but institutions make their own decisions on how to proceed and comply with the policy. Despite the "hurt" that advocates against Title IX manifest, between 1971 and 2008, the number of girls participating in high school sports increased more than a 1000 %, and female collegiate athletes increased by nearly 600 %, thus providing social mobility for girls through education (Coakley, 2009).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was accepted in 1990 (PL 101 – 336) and then amended in 2008 (PL 110-325). Similar to Title IX it provides opportunities for

a marginal group by prohibiting discrimination based on physical ability which extends to employment, public accessibility, transportation, government, telecommunication, and commercial facilities (Bowers et al., 2010). The major influence that the ADA has had is accommodation in terms of disability access to all kinds of facilities and buildings – making sure there is wheelchair parking and ramps, special seating, and staff that can provide assistance. In the sport world, it has translated into accessibility at events like wheelchair accessible restrooms, concession stands, and more programming for children with disabilities. Recently, there has been a move to make sure universities offer sport opportunities for students with disabilities and recreational departments offer more sports like wheelchair basketball and tennis (Coakley, 2009).

The Amateur Sports Act, signed into law in 1978 (PL 95 – 606) govern US sports to a certain extent. It was amended in 1996 and granted authority over Olympic Sports to the United States Olympic Committee. Thus, this is the only official government policy that influences sport participation in the U.S., however there is “no enforcement provision in the legislation other than the requirement that the USOC provide report to Congress each year” (Bowers et al., 2010). This results in the USOC’s focus on training elite athletes and not giving support for grassroots sports organizations (Sparvero et al., 2008).

Both Title IX and ADA have given an opportunity for women and people with various abilities to be equal members of society. Title IX has forced many institutions to comply, though to this day no federally funded institution has suffered financial penalties for not complying (Coakley, 2009). This policy has resulted in increased girls and women’s participation in sport because institutions now provide staff and facilities for

both genders. ADA has required facilities and institutions to change their human resource, communications, and physical structures to make space and include people with disabilities like better health and a safe space for fun and play.

All of these policies have aided in including different people in sports, there are many barriers that still exist and are discussed in the following section.

### **Barriers to Sport Participation**

In the United States there are many barriers that children and youth face when it comes to sport participation. The Project Play Report (2015) cited “lack of neighborhood recreation spaces, inadequate coaching, rising costs and exclusionary league and team policies, excessive time demands on families, safety concerns, cultural norms, and too few sport options to accommodate the interests of all” as some of the most prevalent obstacles facing kids and their parents (p. 2). In the past, sandlots were a safe place for play but parents today are concerned about child abduction and safety to the point where all children need supervision. Consequently, parents have to devote more time to volunteer, coach, and provide responsible adult presence (Project Play, 2015). Often, parents have to provide transportation to venues where organized sports are played. These obstacles mostly affect low-income parents that work multiple jobs or lack the means to transport their children. Hoefer et al. (2001) suggested that when parents have to provide transportation to physical activity locations, it impacts minority children’s participation in sports teams and physical activity classes. The study also found that boys were transported more to sports locations than were girls suggesting that girls were participating even less in organized sports and physical activity. Non-profit organizations

have stepped in to provide sports for people of color, however, there are many children who are not reached or the sport of their preference is not offered.

The multitude of barriers which prevent participation can be classified in different ways such as structural: “lack of space, unsafe space, facility proximity, cost, and lack of programming”, social: “lack of social support from peers, peer teasing, criticism, and bullying”, and individual: “lack of perceived competence, dislike of the sport, fear of injury or embarrassment, anxiety about participation, or perception that sport available sport opportunities are not interesting or culturally relevant” (LaVoi, 2015b, p. 72). These structural, social, and individual obstacles affect people of color even more.

Historically, people of color have faced exclusion from sports in the United States based on their race. African Americans faced discrimination in many areas of life including sport participation, played organized sport in segregated leagues, and participated in all-black collegiate conference competitions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) (Coakley, 2009; Spivey, 1983; Wiggins & Miller, 2003). Today, there are more opportunities to play in organized sports, however, race remains a barrier and people of color still face discrimination based on race when it comes to participating in sport (Coakley, 2009). Therefore, it is important for children to play and interact with other kids that look like them and not feel inferior to other races or believe certain sports are only for specific groups of people. For example, tennis is an elite sport and whites are the majority playing the sport. By creating a space where black kids or a more diversified groups of kids plays that sport together, they are receiving the message that they can also play the sport and one race is not superior to the other in terms of sport

participation. Parents also play a role in children's decisions to be involved in sport and their influence is discussed in the next section.

### **Sport and Parental Involvement**

In North America research shows that parents play a critical role in every level of organization in youth sports (Messner, 2009). LaVoi (2015b) noted that sport is “an important salient social institution for millions of children and their families” (p. 62). Parents are involved with many roles, such as team parents, managers, coaches, volunteer board members, and other ways which ensure the facilitation of sporting events for their children (Dyck, 2012; LaVoi, 2015a). Dyck's (2012) research provided conversations with parents which confirmed how much time is consumed supporting their children's involvement. He offered accounts of why parents choose to have their children engaged in sports – stay out of trouble; away from computer games and sedentary TV watching; away from drugs and wrong crowds; be physically fit and instill a lifelong commitment to a healthy life (Dyck, 2012). He presented that information through the words of many parents – Canadians and former foreign nationals who also shared their stories of spending family time together at sporting events and meeting new people.

Dyck (2012) showed the multiplicity of opinions about sports and why parents and children are engaging in them. Some parents see it as a social club for themselves, while others said they are there strictly for their children and the extracurricular activities. Some see it is a great time to spend with family and others do not count it as quality time. Dyck (2012) portrayed the multiple discourses that surround community sports from parental perspective as well as the children's point of view through a comprehensive ethnographic study. Dyck (2012) pointed to the disconnect between what children are

looking for in community sports and what parents are delivering or striving for. While parents are focused on organizing youth sports around competition, children are most interested in having fun and girls are least interested in winning (Kerr & Sterling, 2013). Community sport was depicted as a “melting pot” where children from various backgrounds can come and thrive only to be surrounded by the boundaries of what adults perceive to be the purpose of sports (Dyck, 2012, p. 104). Parents usually design sport programs according to what the average child’s involvement should look like, but the experience of many kids is varied – from the overcommitted ones to the participants that are not very devoted to sports. A major concern that most kids recognized was that a lot of coaches are very strict and act like they are training a professional team and a negative effect of organized sports is that coaches have authority and power that can sometimes result in eating disorders, child abuse, banned substance use, and serious sport injuries (Dyck, 2012).

Parents are “the most critical sports socialization agents for youth, especially in childhood” (LaVoi, 2015a, p. 277). Child rearing and community sports offer a public space where parenting involvement is exposed and many exhibit very different behavior than what they normally do at home. This can become problematic as parents choose to discipline their children or support them in ways that others find wrong and that can make participating kids feel uncomfortable. Accordingly, Dyck (2012) stated that organizations take one of two approaches to community sport – “strictly *as sports* and enjoyed and valued in their own right or, conversely, be treated as pliable social instrumentalities that can be harnessed to more fundamental projects of child rearing” (p. 145). Fear of losing and jealousy between parents whose children play or do not play well

arise when teams are competing in leagues and all participating figures (parents, children, and coaches) become vulnerable to exhibited unpleasant behavior.

Holt (2008) found that competitive sport participation can contribute to PYD. However, his research shows that parents' involvement is necessary in order to mediate the influences during participation. Parents' intervention is necessary because they play a key role in the developmental experiences in sport. However, in later adolescent years, coaches and peers play a greater role when it comes to influence.

Internationally, Kay and Spaaij (2011) studied how families may effect participants in sport for development programs and found contradicting evidence which suggested that while families can be widely supportive, they can work to resist development programs through sport. The authors called for more research around the families of those participating to better understand the social and cultural environment of programs which aim to aid communities (Kay & Spaaij, 2011). There are many factors that can affect why families withhold their children from participation. In low-income communities, parents have to direct their limited resources to purchase necessities and with the rising costs of sport participation, sport is not a priority (Collins & Kay, 2003; Spaaij, et al., 2014). Therefore, children cannot reap the benefits of sport like healthier lifestyle, having fun, and positive youth development in general, which are all discussed below.

### **Positive Youth Development and Program Evaluation**

Sport has been known to build character and positively impact its participants when there are specific structures and programming in place (Coakley, 2009). LaVoi (2015b) divided the positive outcomes into physical, psychological, and social. Physical

are: physical health, health and performance-related physical fitness, physiological capacities, motor skill competencies and movement literacy, physical activity competencies, physically active lifestyles, and knowledge about physical activities, sports, and games. Psychological are: commitment to physical activity; positive values toward physical activity; interpersonal competencies, teamwork, cooperation; positive body image and physical identity; mental health, positive affect, and stress relief; cognitive functioning and intellectual health; self-determined motivation pertaining to physical activity. Social assets are: support from significant others (coaches, parents, peers); meaningful and close personal relationships and friendships; social capital; learning, life skills and empowerment; boundaries and expectations; constructive use of time for active living, and healthy gender identity (LaVoi, 2015b, p. 65). All of these positives can be achieved through purposeful programming.

Scholars Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) developed an applied sport-programming model that can be used to promote positive youth development and can alleviate behavioral problems in youths, such as drugs and delinquency, combined with changing social forces, such as both parents working or single parent homes that lead to more time at home alone for adolescents (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Due to inequities in today's society, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) sought a model that covered three main issues: "emphasizes the vital role of policy-makers in assuring the accessibility of youth sport programs to all youths, regardless of socio-economic status, race, culture, ethnicity, or gender; highlights the role of sport organizations in designing programs that develop better people, rather than simply skilled individuals; and proposes the critical role of coaches in implementing programs on a day-to-day basis, and of parents in supporting

their child throughout their involvement in sport programs” (p. 20). They used prior research that measured the positive and negative effects that sport can have on youth and looked at other studies which focused on how to organize sport programs in order to accomplish more positive than negative outcomes. All of these earlier studies were combined and integrated into the applied model in hopes of providing a framework to develop and direct youth sport programming that will ensure positive sporting experiences, as well as emphasize future research capabilities in this area of study (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

The applied model developed by Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) aimed to create the 5C’s of positive youth development (as outlined in Lerner et al.’s Model of National Youth Policy in 2000) - competence, character, confidence, connection, and compassion/caring - in adolescent athletes through close attention paid by policy-makers, sport organizations, coaches, and parents in developing sport programs that embrace specific type settings and developmental assets. The researchers were also realistic in noting, “positive youth development through sport is not automatic, but to the contrary, is dependent upon a multitude of factors that must be considered when planning and designing youth sport programs” (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005, p. 35). This suggests that future research is necessary to strengthen the implementation of this model in various sport settings and sport cultures, which will most likely share only certain factors with one another, in order to promote the highest level of positive experiences and outcomes in each respective setting.

Other scholars like Coalter (2013a) and Wells and Arthur-Banning (2008) promoted the use of logic models to ensure sport programming activities reach their goals

and objectives. These models provided a “clear” and “easy” way for stakeholders to see how the programs for youth development work (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Logic models are useful tools to see how these programs achieve their goals, help stakeholders visualize the program goals and accomplishments, and provide ways to seek external funding. It is easier to find donors when there is a clear picture of how the program operates and what it achieves. Wells and Arthur-Banning (2008) used the Basic Logic Model developed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2004 to illustrate how the model works. It included a Planned Work component with two parts – resources/inputs and activities and the second component is Intended Results with three parts – outputs, outcomes, and impact (W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). Essentially, this model resulted in a clear view of what the NGO is planning and then accomplishing. This assures an easy way to assess its effectiveness. Examples of resources and inputs can be facilities and volunteers. Activities are sports and after school tutoring. Outputs are what the kids do to achieve these goals like playing sports 20 hours a week or doing homework for 10 hours a week. Outcomes are the achievements that youth are accomplishing like higher GPA and higher academic motivation. Impact could be a larger percentage of kids attending college (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008).

There are three main reasons why logic models are resourceful for recreational administrators. First, they help with planning the program and determining how it will be best implemented to achieve its goals. Second, they aid during the implementation stage because it is easier for administrators to stay focused on program goals. Finally, the models help with evaluation of the program since it is easier to see whether goals and objectives were met in the outcomes area (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008).

Youth development outcomes can alleviate “problem” behavior. Catalano et al. (2004) looked at various youth development programs and found that they seek to achieve one or more of the following fifteen constructs: (1) promoting bonding; (2) fostering resilience; (3) promoting social, (4) emotional, (5) cognitive, (6) behavioral, or (7) moral competencies; (8) fostering self-determination, (9) spirituality, (10) self-efficacy, (11) clear and positive identity, or (12) belief in the future; (13) providing recognition for positive behavior; (14) opportunities for pro-social involvement; and (15) fostering pro-social norms (p. 102). Along with the positive outcomes, there were several concerns. Different traits models like the 5 C’s model, have been developed to help identify how exactly sport activities shape positive characteristics in young people. One common theme was that even though sports promote positive youth development or positive development in general, there need to be tools that will ensure the proper implementations of programs (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008; and Schulenkorf, 2010). Depending on the program goals, administrators should bundle them with after school tutoring, social skills development, life skill development, and nutrition. Therefore, apparatuses that will help leverage the input of resources and benefits from sport participation with positive long-term development in sport has to become part of policies that guide such programming. Frameworks need to be developed to direct sport programs and ensure their successful implementation (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Plans of how to monitor the programs before, during, and after execution is vital to achieve these goals (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008).

Astbury, Knight & Nichols (2005) conducted research in the United Kingdom (UK) to assess how sport programming impacted disaffected youth. They implemented the theory of change model, used by many NGO's, to assess the progress made by participants in a nationwide program which used sports and other leisure activities to work with disaffected youth throughout the U.K. where there was a prevailing view that youth centered programs should focus on developing individual personal skills. These thoughts draw on "criminological theory" which as it sounds, identifies factors that may potentially lead to criminal activities. There is a history of using sports to help develop social and interpersonal skills of young people in the U.K. but the view has not been met with optimism (Coalter, 2013b). The program aimed to "use exciting and fun activities and set up physical, personal, and social challenges tailored to the individual needs of the young people in order to increase their personal and social skills" (Astbury et al., 2005, p. 85). Thus, after the program, the staffers believe that students will no longer have the same issues as when they arrived to the program. The evaluation method used to measure this claim was based on the theory of change approach. The theory of change approach identifies "a set of beliefs that underlie action" (Weiss, 1998, p. 55 as cited in Astbury et al., 2005), which are "a set of hypotheses upon which people build their program plans. It is an explanation of the causal links that tie program inputs to expected program outputs" (Weiss, 1998, p. 55 as cited in Astbury et al., 2005).

In-depth interviews showed feelings of despair and worry about lack of prospects in their future. The self-assessment quiz showed 30% positive changes; 40% some improvement; 30% no improvement, and also that females were more likely to improve. Semi-structured interviews results showed most young people felt the course brought

them tangible benefits including: increased confidence, improved family relations, better understanding of people, help finding a job, and taking up constructive leisure activities. A repeated self-assessment quiz at the end of the program showed that increase in social skills was not maintained.

Overall, Astbury et al. (2005) found that the Fairbridge program does seem to work and contribute to the positive development of young people. However, this needs to be qualified by the methodological difficulties of distinguishing between the program and the predisposition of participants as determining factors. The researchers found that most important contributing factor to PYD was staff who served as mentors during the initial stage and then as a medium for personal development during the main part of the program and sports activities.

Nicholas Holt (2008) viewed young people as a potential waiting to grow and develop and described sport as a tool that can help youth reach that potential. However, he acknowledged that sport alone does not lead to positive youth development (PYD). Most importantly, PYD depended on the way sport is structured and delivered to the young audience. This determined the success of achieving certain developmental goals.

Holt (2008) focused on the PYD from an ecological systems theory perspective which suggests that the environment in which people interact influences human behavior (Bronfenbrennen, 1977). Bronfenbrennen (1999) developed the PPCT model – the process – person - context – time structure that suggests development is a product of the person going through a specific process in a certain context for a certain period of time. This model helps explain that PYD occurs through a process and is useful when

developing sport programs. It can be used to design programs that promote physical health, motor skill development, and psychosocial development (Holt, 2008).

There are numerous valuable factors that contribute to the importance of sport in the promotion of PYD. Sport participation can be used to build leadership among youth; relationship building among youth contributes to PYD; participation in sports helps build life skills. On a broader scale, sport can be used for social inclusion, development of youth in difficult situations and environments, and peace education. Overall, Holt's work is a beneficial resource of information on how programs and educators should use their assets in order to ensure PYD. It is also an invaluable supply of channels and ways to successfully impact youth to reach their full potential using sport. It is important to know that the unique setting that sport provides has to be understood and monitored in order to achieve positive development in youth.

Together with positive youth development, research shows that sport can be used to build social capital and aid in social mobility and is discussed in the following section.

### **Sport, Social Capital and Social Mobility**

Social mobility in sports refers to “changes in wealth, education, and occupation over a person's lifetime or from one generation to the next in families” (Coakley, 2009, p. 337). It can be downward or upward and sports on television mostly show success stories like the one of Venus and Serena Williams, who made it from the tough streets of Compton to the holy grass at Wimbledon. These are stories often used by marketers to promote products by evoking positive emotions from viewers through their inspiring stories of success but in reality very few playing sports competitively make it to the top.

Spaaij (2011) studied four different programs globally that engaged disaffected populations and described how social mobility, cultural capital, and social capital relate to sport. Social mobility was defined as “changes in an individual’s social position, which involve significant alterations in his or her social environment and life conditions” (Spaaij, 2011, p. 19). He distinguished between a few types of social mobility. Horizontal mobility occurs when an individual moves from one social group to another that is situated on the same level and vertical mobility exists when an individual moves significantly downward or upward. Structural mobility occurs when there is a restructuring of social stratification from an institutional standpoint or when one class falls or raises due to shifts in labor markets. Non-structural mobility happens when individuals change status due to education, experience, personal relationships, and knowledge (Spaaij, 2011).

In general, class social mobility through sport exists in the United States. High-profile athletes in the U.S., usually playing American football or basketball, are used as an example to keep feeding the American Dream ideology that through hard work you can achieve anything. However, the numbers show that only 2.9 out of 10,000 male high school athletes playing basketball make it to collegiate sports teams; and even lesser number of college players make it to the professional leagues – 1.3 out of 10,000 male basketball players (Coakley, 2009, p. 338). The numbers are similar for baseball, football, and women’s basketball. Furthermore, football players’ careers are relatively short and many of them file for bankruptcy a few years after they have finished playing professionally. Therefore, class social mobility through professional sport is very minimal.

On the other hand, nonprofit sport entities are not aiming to produce professional athletes. Quite the opposite, they tend to use the “sport plus” model. The “sport plus” model is designed in a way that NGO’s provide sporting programs and activities and additionally they give participants other life skills training, after school programming and aim to build social skills on and off the playing field assisted by peers, coaches, volunteers, teachers, and adults (Coalter, 2013).

One of the goals of many sport non-profits is to build social capital through participation in both sport and the plus activities that they offer. Putnam (2001) explained that the American community is less and less socially engaged, using the metaphor that Americans are now bowling alone whereas bowling has been a major place for socialization and interaction. Putnam (2001) argued that there are benefits to having close-knit relationships and community capital, as people can lower transactional costs by asking for favors and giving back to those that have previously helped them. There is access to more information by being connected to others who might know more or have different resources. Putnam (2001) distinguished between two types of capital – bonding and bridging. Bonding is capital between people in a close-knit community like family members and people that are more alike with access to similar recourses. Bridging capital is what more non-profits are trying to provide. It is a relationship between people of different backgrounds and where one could assist a less privileged person with, for example, getting a job. The big question is where does community happen in America today? Some sport non-profits use programming to build social capital by engaging people from different socio-economic statuses in various activities. Coalter (2013) wrote that in sport there are certain aspects of bonding capital: “like-minded people, often from

similar economic circumstances, ages, educational background, sex, social class, race and religion come together to produce and consume a common interest – a particular sport”(p. 159). Many nonprofits strive to bring people who already have bonding capital together and help them bridge their capital with less privileged groups who can benefit from their knowledge and connections.

This notion of building social capital through interaction can also be linked to the work of Russian psychologist Vygotsky. From a developmental standpoint, Vygotsky (1978) believed in the social construction of knowledge and that we learn in an environment where we socially interact with others. Unlike another psychologist, Jean Piaget, who believed that development precedes learning, Vygotsky believed that learning precedes development. “The most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge”(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 24). He expressed his ideas that we internalize spoken language in a social setting, assimilate it into private speech, then through thinking we create new ideas and finally put them out back into the public setting (Vygotsky, 2012).

Vygotsky’s social constructivism has a few central tenets that make it unique. The two most known ones are the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). MKO refers to “someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept” (Galloway, 2001). MKO was described by Vygotsky as an essential component of learning. He wrote:

“learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers...once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90).

He also introduced the concept of ZDP that contributed to the building of the social construction of reality. He believed that we are in different stages of learning even though we are the same age, consequently making mental and actual age different. Vygotsky defined ZDP as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Therefore, we develop cognitively at a different pace with the help of More Knowledgeable Others.

Non-profit sport entities apply this notion of MKO and ZDP when they provide services for youth that come from different social backgrounds and attempt to give them the same learning and playing opportunities that children from more privileged backgrounds have. NGO’s also want to encourage interaction between adults and children with different knowledge and social environments hoping that the less advanced and privileged would benefit from this collaboration and exchange of capital. Human interaction is very subjective to every individual’s experience and nonprofits strive to educate and train their volunteers to reach the goals and objectives of their programs as the difference in social realities can and usually does provide challenges for both sides.

### **Sport and Spirituality**

According to Perrin (2007), spirituality is something that human beings possess innately, regardless of the religious tradition they belong to:

“Spirituality, as an innate human characteristic, involves the capacity for self-transcendence: being meaningfully involved in, and personally committed to the world beyond an individual’s personal boundaries. The meaningful involvement and commitment shapes the way people live and allows them to integrate their lives.” (p. 20)

The United States is a country founded on Christian principles and sport, as a big part of American life, has also been impacted by the Christian Gospel. The Christian community has had various conflicting relationships with sport. The early church in the United States did not see sport as a meaningful Godly activity, however later, evangelicals began incorporating and scheduling their services around big sporting events, like the Super Bowl (Baker, 2007; Hoffman, 2010). An activity once seen as a waste of time, or even sinful, was being praised and evangelical colleges now offer courses in Christian sport ministry, where students are taught to incorporate sport activities with the church population (Hoffman, 2010).

Recently, evangelical churches have begun to use sport as an avenue to reach people who do not know Christ and have poured substantial financial resources in this direction (Hoffman, 2010). Some churches participate in recreational leagues and have, for example, basketball gyms and other athletic facilities on their campuses (Baker, 2007). The reason for this growth, is the belief that sport builds positive character traits (Hoffman, 2010) and can aid in the shaping of the whole person.

Spirituality can positively affect youth through the notion that Christianity helps unify the human person. Kelley (2015) wrote, “an emphasis on the unity of the person means that the bodily experience of young people in sport will necessarily impact them at the level of mind and spirit” (p. 133). Theologians emphasize the value of play to the human spirit, and that a person should not be studying and working all the time (Kelly, 2015). Apart from the benefits of play to the human soul, the author also stated that “one of the most important things that young people can experience from participating in sport is the enjoyment that is associated with doing something for its own sake” (p. 146). This aligns with the review of the literature that play is important for the development and growth of children.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have laid out the foundation of this research and the importance of continuing to study nonprofit organizations in sport; youth sports; parents in sport; barriers for sport participation to low-income families, and the need for programs which foster positive youth development. The goal of this study is to look deeper into the experiences of children, parents, volunteers, and coaches in a sport for social change program which aims to create positive sport development and foster community relationships between its participants. In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology of how I plan on studying a sport for development program and its community.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

In chapters one and two I explained why it is important to study sport for social change and the impact of sport nonprofit organizations on local communities. The purpose of this research is to investigate the main barriers that families, taking part in a local nonprofit organization, face in terms of participation and to understand how Vision Ministries succeed in fostering communities within and outside the playing field. In this chapter I describe how this research topic will be explored through specific methodology. I discuss (1) theoretical framework; (2) methods of data collection; (3) data analysis and write up; and (4) trustworthiness.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Maxwell (2013) noted that one of the advantages of using high-level theories is that it helps make sense of what we see in a framework. In other words, it puts our ideas and thoughts into a perspective that has been previously used by other researchers in similar or different ways. Having a good theoretical framework helps to always stay within a certain spectrum, which guides our thoughts when we are shifting away from the core concept of our study. Interestingly, Maxwell (2013) also argued that this attempt to stay within a certain framework robs us of the opportunity to explore different routes that our study might naturally take. Therefore, it is ultimately up to us to sense when the framework is helping us and when we need to move beyond it to produce more valuable research. The theory I have chosen to look deeper into is critical social theory.

As a sport sociologist critical theory allows me to gain a better understanding of the relationship between sport and society. According to Coakley (2007), critical theory is commonly used in sport when “there is a connection with changes in (1) the organization of government education, media, religion, the family, and other spheres of social life, (2) cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and physical (dis)ability, and (3) the visions that people have about what sports could and should be in society” (p. 41).

### **Critical Social Theory**

Critical social theory is the metatheory or the high level theory that will guide my research process and analysis. The lower-level theories that I will use in my study were explained previously in chapter two. In the words of Brian Fay (1987): “Metatheories invoke fundamental, general beliefs as to how the world is, just as ontological conceptions about the nature of the world implicate metatheoretical claims about what a good understanding of it involves”(p. 45). Thus, metatheories guide our view of being in this world and I chose to use critical social theory because it aligns with the way I see the world operate and the manner we function in it.

Critical social theory is part of a tradition, which includes theories like historical materialism, feminism, and structuralism. All critical theories challenge the established rules and regulations created by powerful groups, which marginalize others in society and look at social order from the lens of power, domination, and conflict (Prasad, 2005). Scholars in that paradigm critique power relations and are also activists for social change. Often, critical theory perspectives have political implications and aim to disrupt the systems of social order. This is supported by sport sociologist Jay Coakley (2007), as he

stated that “critical theory is based on the desire to understand, confront, and transform aspects of social life that involve exploitation and oppression” (p. 43).

Critical theory is deeply rooted in Marxist philosophy. Marx’s “ideas about history, conflict, and emancipation” are the vision of the critical tradition as a whole (Prasad, 2005). Mainly influenced by Marx and so-called neo-Marxists, the Frankfurt School’s original members are the forefathers of critical theory. Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse together with German philosopher Jurgen Habermas form the foundation and inspiration for critical theory today (Prasad, 2005). The most important concept that symbolizes critical theory is ideology-critique. The power of ideology explains the most undesirable components of capitalism, socialism and fascism (Prasad, 2005). Critical theory aims to reveal the perpetuating ideological forces that dictate every aspect of social life.

Fay (1987) wrote that we should be capable of interpreting our social world in a way that “this world’s oppressiveness is apparent, and in such a way that it empowers its listeners to change their lives” (p. 23). He also added that the three main components of critical social science are: “to *explain* the social world, *criticize* it, and *empower* its audience to overthrow it” (p. 23). Even though critical social theory aims to bring about social change, we have witnessed many times through history that people can be even further oppressed and suffer tyranny as a result of anti-oppression movements (e.g. Communist Block). Therefore, we need to be conscious of the power we possess as scholars who are also activists for change and remember the words of Fay (1987): “The idea of critical social science needs to be supplemented by an account of human life which recognizes these other facts about human existence if it is to avoid its own

tyrannizing potential, if it is to offer an acceptable approach to understanding human societies and be a genuinely positive force for social betterment” (p. 9). Critical scholars are responsible for helping people understand oppression and offer advice on how to empower them but also they need to look at whom these new ideas and solutions are oppressing and marginalizing. One of the components that Schwandt (2015) listed as important to critical social science was that it aims to “integrate theory and practice in such a way that individuals and groups become more aware of the contradictions and distortions in their belief systems and social practices and are then inspired to change those beliefs and practices” (p. 50).

### **Marxism on Capital and Social Class**

Social class inequalities were addressed by Karl Marx and his writings on the ways societies are structured and operate. He theorized that there are two classes – the proletariat (the working class) and the bourgeoisie (the ruling class in possession of financial capital). Althusser (1971) and earlier Marx, have both come to the realization that the root of class and the reason why class continues to exist is ideology and as Althusser calls these structures – Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA’s). To understand class ideology, we first need to understand how labor is reproduced in society. Althusser (1971) wrote that the reproduction of labor power is "ensured by giving labor power the material means with which to reproduce itself: by wages"(p.130). By giving the workers wages that barely cover the minimum, the bourgeoisie ensures that the laborers will come back to work the next day. Ideology is exactly that – people reproducing and actively participating in their own oppression. This cannot be truer today in America. The apparatus works in such a way that people keep working hard (proletariat) and earn funds

that go in the pockets of the few (bourgeoisies). The system in America can be illustrated by the way people buy everything on credit and have to work really hard to make payments and most of the time only cover the interest and very little of the principal. That keeps them in the “rat race” and the pockets of the rich bank owners full.

It is important to understand how the Ideological State Apparatuses affect us today because they shape the way we are produced and reproduced in society. The ruling class ideologies dictate the way we function in society. "If the ISA's function massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of 'the ruling class'"(p. 146). Laws, education, sports – those are just examples of the extent to which the elites control the working class. For example, if we look at sports we see that athletes or the people that actually perform the labor come from working class families and the owners of the teams (the ones that profit continuously over time) are upper-class businessmen that may have never played the sport they own a team in. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1848/1992) wrote on the creation and domination of the bourgeoisie: “It has agglomerated population, centralized means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands” (p. 7).

In all this, Marx and Althusser situate the majority of human beings as subjects of oppression. Their reality is dictated by a ruling class ideology that exploits them and is only interested in its benefit. As people continue to live stuck in those structures of oppression, they become more and more de-humanized and objectified – “The more the worker produces the less he has to consume, the more values he creates the more value-

less and worthless he becomes, the more formed the product the more deformed the worker.... (Marx, 1977/2008, p. 14). Marx is relative today as people are trapped in various ideologies without rebelling or striving to overtake those who oppress them, ignorant of their submission to power structures ingrained deeply in our society.

The most important concept to take away from Althusser is interpellation. This is the act of reproducing class, gender, and race by interpellating individuals through various ideological state apparatuses; the ruling class secures its reign and the status quo remains untouched. Althusser wrote (1971): "I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (p. 174). There are apparatuses in place that secure this very interpellation of individuals and the most effective one is the education system. Children are being taught and re-produced into the citizens the state and corporations want them to be.

Social class intersects with race and gender and Crenshaw (1993) looked closely at how women of color do not have the same experiences as men of color and at the same time do not face the same challenges that white women face. Women of color suffer violence because laws and social activists often times protect only one or the other but do not address this intersection of race and gender, where women of color often find themselves. Crenshaw (1993) stated that "Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize the experience of people of color have

frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains” (p. 1242). She continued on to say that “Because of their intersectional identity as both women *and* people of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both”(Crenshaw, 1993, p. 1244). Hence, there is a need to look at race and gender together in light of the struggles that many face due to the separation of the two.

Crenshaw focused on violence against women of color because that is where they are most vulnerable and this is an area that needs to be addressed. Often times we tend to overlook certain social issues, depending on their scope. As C.W. Mills (1959) named them – “personal troubles” and “public issues”. Before Crenshaw called for deeper understanding, the struggle of black women with domestic violence had been overlooked as a personal trouble or something that only a few women experience. The low publicity of violence against women of color had been in place in order to protect the already marginalized men of color and their high profile of violence portrayed in the media. In order for it to become a public issue, or something that in reality affects many women and has to be addressed, the facts of violence against these women have to be publicized and receive attention. Women of color continue to be oppressed when the laws apply and are only accessible to white women that have education, can afford a lawyer, and understand their rights.

People fall under different spectrums of social class, race, and gender. For example not all black women have the same experiences and returning to Marx, women of color have very distinct experiences based on their social and economic class. As Collins (2008) wrote “Living life as Black women requires wisdom because knowledge

about dynamics of race, gender, and class oppression has been essential to Black women's survival" (p. 367). Black women of upper class may have more in common with white women because of their access to education and resources as opposed to black women of lower class that do not have similar privileges. However, Crenshaw did mention that different races of immigrant women have varying experiences based on their race and country of origin, which confirms that notion of inequality.

Classism and intersectionality are prevalent in sport today and especially affect minorities in the United States (Coakley, 2009). The main focus of my study is to recognize the barriers for participation marginalized families in the United States face and to understand how a sports program is enhancing their lives within and outside the sport context. The overarching research questions are:

- 1) What are the main barriers for sport participation of low-income African American parents taking part in this program?
- 2) In what ways has the program enhanced the lives of its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?
- 3) In what ways has the program achieved building social capital among its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?

### **Methods of Data Collection**

In order to gain answers to these questions, I used ethnographic methods of participant observations, interviews, and document analysis which are widely used in qualitative data collection and research. They originated from ethnographers' long traditions of lengthy stays with foreign cultures, however, they are now used for shorter periods of time and in local cultures and environments to inquire about various

phenomena. Here, I give an overview of the mother field of ethnography and then move into ethnographic methods largely used in qualitative research. It is important to understand ethnography as a method because it precedes ethnographic fieldwork as a form of data gathering. Then, I explain the rationale behind my choosing of this particular ways of collecting data as they pertain to my topic.

Ethnography as a method of inquiry originated in the field anthropology and it was the desire of cultural anthropologists to learn about native or primitive peoples, their customs, and ways of living. Prasad (2005) wrote that “commonly used to indicate intensive fieldwork and high level of research involvement with subjects, ethnography is, above all, very much part of the anthropological discipline within which it developed as a way to understand “natives” in their own cultures” (p. 75). The desire to learn more about “the other” or cultures unknown to many, is what sent numerous anthropologists in foreign lands and exotic islands to study natives for lengthy periods of time. They brought home extensive accounts of how other peoples lived their lives away from the “civilized” world.

Ethnography is an interpretive anthropology and one of its central tenets is the belief that knowledge is socially constructed. Prasad (2005) wrote: “Although interpretive traditions uniformly subscribe to the belief that our worlds are socially created, they also assert that these constructions are possible only because of our ability to attach meanings to objects, events and interactions (p. 14). The interpretive turn made it possible for researchers to explore the human experience beyond the limitations of positivist science and question the uniformity of that experience. Ethnographic inquiry aims to look deeper into the lives of groups of people and understand their experience in

community and as individuals. It is powerful to see how other cultures interact with objects and how they have their own “scientific” inquiries like different counting systems, various ways of classifying animals, letters that symbolize whole words or actions, and other phenomenon that shows how human beings in various parts of the world have developed differently and construct being and knowledge in their own ways.

Cliford Geertz (1973) wrote of culture:

“Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning”(p. 5).

This account demonstrates the intent of the interpretivist to search for meaning among the multiple webs of interpretations we live in and are surrounded by. There is no culture to be found out there– we go observe and come back interpreting what we saw based on our own cultural understanding built on living and interacting with others.

An important feature of ethnography is the emic perspective that is used in learning about culture. Emic is the perspective of the participants in that culture and the way they interpret their lives. Therefore, the task for the ethnographer is to interpret lives and relationships through the insider, emic, eye that he or she develops over time with the extensive stay within a culture. Most people are used to the etic perspective or the objective view of the researcher that looks at phenomenon from the outside in, largely used in positivist research. However, as Wolcott (2008) wrote, “the emic approach seeks to “get to the heart of the matter” (p. 144). Using this approach makes it easier for readers to understand and relive the experience of the ethnographer in the field.

Van Maanen (2011) wrote that ethnography is political and that we need to be conscious of the ways we write about others and their existence: “Indeed, I think that we need now, more than ever, concrete, sharp, complex, empathetic, and politically sensitive portraits of what others might be like if we are to learn, tolerate, balk, help, confront, instruct, or otherwise adjust to the uncountable ways of living and being that surrounds us” (p.xvii). He continued on to explain that the choices of representation we make impact the people we write about and we have to be intellectually and morally responsible because our writings are not neutral and added that: “ethnographic writings can and do inform human conduct and judgment in innumerable ways by pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life” (p. 1). Ethnographers are not innocent bystanders. Often times they become activists and fight on behalf of the people they are studying, as in the case of critical ethnography (Madison, 2012).

As stated earlier, ethnography has laid the groundwork for many qualitative researchers who study not so foreign cultures and spent less time in the field. A typical ethnographer spends at least six months to a year inquiring about a culture or doing fieldwork, whereas qualitative researchers might spend as little as a week observing an environment. Nevertheless, they still absorb as much information as possible and write about the studied culture. Ethnographic fieldwork is comprehensive and entails observations, interviews, and document analysis.

I was involved with the organization for about two years and collected data for ten months. This extensive stay in the field allowed me to collect a large amount of data which I later sorted out through thematic analysis to arrive to the interpretations and

conclusions of this study. The first data collection method I used was participant observation and I describe it below.

### **Participant Observations**

Participant observations allow the researcher to get access to the community she is studying. Glesne (2016) wrote that “through being part of the social setting, you see patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected; and develop a quality of relationship and responsibility with others in the setting” (p. 64). She also wrote that it is important to continue to observe and be part of the setting, as it helps with forming interview questions, which are based on observed behavior and relationships.

In my study, I led one of the sports programs (tennis) and thus I was actively participating in the construction of the service provided to the participants and their families. For two of the other sports, I acted as an observer, and for the fourth sport, I was a volunteer coach. This variety of positions for participant observations granted me the opportunity to interact with the children and their parents in various roles and settings. As an organizer of a new sports program and the person in charge, I received phone calls and e-mails from parents with diverse inquiries from babysitting to clothes and fundraising. As a volunteer coach, I was more involved with the children and that helped me see their worldview and their needs and not as much the needs of the parents. These different roles allowed me to paint a larger picture of the program and how it impacts and has impacted the participants and their parents.

### **Interviews**

The interviews were an hour long and semi-structured. This is a technique commonly used in qualitative research and it aims to gain insight into the subject's life

world and add a deeper comprehension of how they make meaning of certain processes. This approach looks at questions of social reality and their complicated constructed nature. Furthermore, the role of language has a deeper meaning than what we usually see on the surface (Prasad, 2005). “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1). Semi-structured interviews have a guideline with broad questions that help keep the researcher on track but at the same time provide freedom as new important themes might unexpectedly emerge.

Roulston (2010) listed consent for the study, participant recruitment, scheduling of interviews, conducting and recording the interview, and transcribing it as some of the major components of carrying out a good interview study. She is also a big proponent of reflective interviewing which engages the researcher throughout the interview and later in the analysis process. Qualitative researchers are the instruments in their studies and thus play a vital role for the duration of the study and their experiences are an inevitable part of the final research report.

As stated earlier, semi-structured interviews have some predetermined questions that the researcher has prepared in advance, and usually are the result of lengthy observations in the field. The following were some of my questions to the parents involved in the sport programs:

1. How long have you been involved with this organization?
2. How many sports does/do your child/children play or have played?
3. Can you tell me more about your experience with the organization?

4. Can you tell me about the impact it has had on your child?
5. Do you see any benefits of the program that extend beyond the playing field?
6. Have you been able to establish relationships with other parents in the program or with coaches and volunteer? What do these relationships entail?
7. Tell me more about the faith aspect of the organization and how you see it played out in sports?

### **Documents and Document Analysis**

During the study, I collected documents and artifacts in order to provide another angle for my analysis. Documents included program advertisements or pamphlets, volunteer manuals, parental guidelines, training sheets distributed to volunteers before or after practices, donor communication, grant applications, monthly newsletters, information posted on their official website and other social media accounts. Those artifacts added another layer of data that provided more depth to the study and aided in the thick description I wrote during the analysis stage. Furthermore, I used the documents to cross-reference my experience as a volunteer and what the organizational goals are for their volunteers. I used the stories on their donor pamphlets to compare to how the children described their actual experience.

Throughout the document analysis I kept in mind Prior's (2003) words: "never look at documents in organizational settings as isolated tools, but seek to discover how a document is linked into the wider information storage retrieval system of which it will form a part" (p. 87). Thus, I tried to link my observations, interview data, and documents to provide a clearer analytical picture of the lives of parents, children, and volunteers involved with the sport program.

### **Data Analysis and Write Up**

During the ten months of data collection, I wrote up my observation fieldnotes as soon as possible – when I came home at night or the next morning. This assured that I did not forget important parts and moments, as memories become blurrier the more time passed. It was difficult to write notes when I was actively engaged in the sport I was leading, which was tennis, so I was not able to jot down anything as I was constantly talking to children and parents. My tennis fieldnotes were written up the next day mostly out of memory. During football I had a notepad, where I was able to write the majority of my observations as only an observer. During gymnastics, where I was a volunteer coach but was not leading the program, I kept note cards with me and a pen to quickly write down a few words during breaks.

Van Maanen (2011) described three main ways to write up ethnographic tales – realist, confessional, and impressionist. Realist tales take the “I” out of the story and sound more subjective in their interpretation of what happened within a specific culture. Confessional tales are more personal and written from an eye-witness perspective versus the third person in realist tales. Often they are written representations of the ethnographer’s struggles in the field and her personal field experience that portrays her as a regular human being immersed in a new culture. Impressionist tales are personalized perspectives and startling stories that an ethnographer writes to evoke certain feelings and emotions in his readers. In my writing of this ethnography, I used all three ways of expressing mine and my participants’ experience in the field. Writing up stories from the field was the most challenging aspect as I was portraying the life of a non-profit

organization and the realities of low-income inner city children and families that I was highly involved with.

Once an observer returns from the field with her stacks of fieldnotes, interviews, and artifacts, she has to sit down and produce the actual writing up of the research. What makes an ethnographic writing vivid and believable is the thick, rich description researchers provide of the culture they experience. Van Maanen (2011) wrote that “culture is not strictly speaking a scientific object, but is created, as is the reader’s view of it, by the active construction of a text” (p. 7). Ethnographers engage the five senses when writing up their tales – taste, hearing, smell, touch, and seeing. The strength of ethnographic writing is the ability to show, versus tell the reader what was experienced so that they can see for themselves the reality of the culture studied. Therefore, ethnographers have another difficult task to embark on – they must be engaging writers who can manifest the lives of others in ways that readers can feel present with that culture. Van Maanen (2011) noted that “writing ethnography is an isolated and highly personal business” (p. xix). During the write up is when a lot of the analysis also takes place. This was true for my experience as I kept a researcher journal where I jotted down thoughts of analysis while I was writing up fieldnotes or transcribing interviews.

I began analyzing my data by thoroughly reading through the interview transcripts. Then I started open coding, following Corbin and Strauss (2008): “Open coding requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (p. 160). Coding for the interviews was separate for each participant. I did have my research questions in mind, but went through the transcripts and did more of an “open coding”. As

I completed coding the first interview and started coding the rest, I began to see some common themes and started writing them down so that I do not forget my thought processing and reasoning behind the common themes.

I wanted to stay consistent with my critical theoretical framework and kept the participants' "vivid and descriptive" terms, forming in-vivo codes (Corbin & Straus, 2008, p. 160). Buter-Kisber (2010) wrote that in-vivo codes are useful because they "can help push the analysis further and get at the insider/emic perspectives" (p. 31). Furthermore, keeping the codes consistent with the participants' own words, allowed me to stay close to the raw data I collected, as opposed to refining it through my researcher language and views already guided by episteme and theory. I was representing my participants' voices and not silencing them with my researcher positionality and power.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) one has to come up with a systematic way to turn codes into themes. They suggest that every researcher has to come up with that system as data sets and research questions are very different for everyone. The interviews I conducted asked the same questions, however the participants had different experiences with the organization. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that "the 'keyness' of a theme is not necessary dependent on the quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 86).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important aspect of any well-designed qualitative research project. Some of the pioneers in the field of qualitative research have emphasized the importance of the reliability of data in studies (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are many ways that an author can ensure that her research is not simply anecdotal and that

she is inferring and concluding from theory and data. Glesne (2015) also wrote that “trustworthiness is about alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out” (p. 53). There are three aspects that add to the trustworthiness of my study – rich, thick description; triangulation, and an extensive stay in the field.

Rich, thick description is part of the ethnographic methodology and ensures that observations and interview transcripts are represented descriptively and allows the reader to see the context and understand the researcher’s interpretations (Glesne, 2015). It also makes the data more engaging and brings it to life, allowing the reader to connect with it on a more personal level.

Triangulation uses multiple data sources to ensure trustworthiness. In my study, I used observations, interviews, and documents to analyze and make conclusions about the research study. These three data points allow for a more thorough analysis and representation of my participants’ experiences with the sports program. These multiple sorts of evidence give credibility as others read the results and relate to the stories and experiences of my participants.

Extensive stay in the field provided for many layers of data which added to the credibility of my interaction with participants and the fieldnotes I produced. It allowed me to have an insider perspective of the realities of the parents, children, and volunteers taking part in the program and later making claims about their experience which were valid.

In addition, all semi-structured interview participants reviewed their transcripts to confirm they have meant what they said and if there is something they disagree with or I

have not heard accurately on the recorder. That way, I was able to make changes when necessary and interpreted the data in a manner that represents them precisely.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter three has provided the theory and rationale behind the methods of collecting and analyzing data. In this chapter, I gave an overview of critical social theory and how it will guide the methods in this study. I also described ethnography and ethnographic methods, data analysis, and measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data presented in this research.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the main barriers preventing low-income, African American families from participating in sports and to understand how the organization being studied succeeds in fostering communities both within and outside the sports field. The following research questions were investigated: 1) What are the main barriers to sport participation for low-income, African American parents taking part in this program? 2) In what ways has the program enhanced the lives of its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers? 3) In what ways has the program achieved building social capital among its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers? The results of this study provide useful information for organizations that provide sport programs for low income and African American families and their children by showing the successful practices employed by an organization serving such populations.

In this chapter, I present the document analysis, describe my field site, introduce the participants, include observations, and list the emergent themes under each research question. I conclude with the overarching theme of spirituality in the organization, show how it appears multiple times in the data, and how it was intertwined with the rest of the highlighted themes. I have compiled data from document analysis, ethnographic observations, short ethnographic interviews, and hour long semi-structured interviews to illustrate the overarching themes that appeared during my analysis. I served multiple roles during data collection and this allowed me to see the organization and its

participants from multiple angles. I volunteered for gymnastics, lead tennis, and observed football and cheerleading. Additionally, I was able to attend a board meeting, donors' Christmas dinner, and visit the Academy which really brought my involvement full circle. I begin with a few fieldnotes, as I would like for the readers of this work to place themselves on the field with me and then I continue with a more structured thematic analysis.

### **Document Analysis**

I collected and analyzed various documents including pamphlets, volunteer manuals, parental information, monthly newsletters, social media communication, and information posted on the organization's official website. Vision Ministries has a mix of tools to communicate with its participants, donors, coaches, and volunteers. Those include a website that gets updated daily with upcoming events and announcements of schedule changes (school, sports, etc.) and an active presence on Facebook where pictures of field trips, sporting events, fundraisers and other happenings are uploaded. Most participants use Facebook as way to stay updated with changes in scheduling. For example, when I have had to cancel tennis due to rain, I would call or message one of the full time staff and they would post a status update on Facebook: "Tennis is cancelled due to rain tonight. Next practice is on Monday". I would also send personal text messages to parents but many of them changed phones frequently and social media was an avenue to ensure everyone had access to those updates. In that sense, social media and the organization's website manifested the dynamics of activities as they were happening and it was useful for everyone to stay connected.

The organization sent out a monthly newsletter to all of its funders, highlighting the accomplishments that participating kids achieve on the playing field and in the classrooms. For example, past newsletters have highlighted achievements such as: first graders in the Academy enrolled in the after school program, achieved beyond fourth grade reading levels this past year; three of the football teams made it to the playoffs; the organization now has a tennis programs due to a \$5,000 grant we received, and other similar newsworthy achievements that were also consistent with the life of the participants.

During the analysis, I found that the documents sent out were congruent with each outlet; the mission of the organization is being followed in the activities organized and carried out by the various programs. Social media was regularly updated with photos from sporting events, updates from academy accomplishments, and field trips. Sponsors also received recognition on social media and printed materials frequently, which gave them exposure in the local community where they live and operate their businesses. These outlets mainly targeted the families as most of them use Facebook to look at schedules and changes in practices. It also targeted the donors (mostly the local businesses segment) of the organization, as they gain exposure to their businesses and can share posts on their pages when mentioned.

The monthly newsletter was well-designed, included well-distributed pictures and text across the page. It folded in three and could be mailed without an envelope, but opened up into one fluid page that was readable. The text was easy to read because it contained short paragraphs and bullet points, instead of one large chunk of text. The reader would be able to skim through information that is not interesting to her and move

on to other sections that are more exciting. The information was also split into three sections - sports, the academy, and the after-school programming and was easier for the donor, who is supporting various causes, to focus on the developments he is invested in. This form of communication targeted current donors and people already involved with the organization.

Vision Eagles' sports flier was a tri-fold brochure. On the front cover page it had a picture of a coach fixing a very young player's helmet. This illustrates the mission of the organization to impact the low-income community through leadership and mentorship. Underneath the photo was the mission of the organization. When one opens the brochure, there is information on who the organization is, who is being served, and how the organization is serving its audience. Under the "how" are listed all the sports the organization provides. On the back of the flier is information on how to get involved through volunteering and giving with the physical and digital ways to come in contact with the organization.

Vision Academy's flier looked very similar to the sports one. The difference was that academics takes center stage. On the front of the brochure was a picture of a classroom with three boys working on a task with pencils and papers. They look engaged and focused on their work. Under the picture was the mission of the academy to provide quality education to inner-city children. Inside the material were listed the three pillars of the Academy – knowledge, character, and purpose. On the second page was text providing information on the teachers and curriculum of the schools. The next page highlighted how to apply to the school and included more information on scholarships and funding and that the organization makes sure every child in the academy has access

to all of its resources despite financial restrictions. The back of the brochure had volunteering and giving opportunities with physical and digital ways of communicating with the organization.

Overall, the documents the organization provided to donors and future participants reflected its mission and represented the activities that actually happen during sport programming. This congruency helped the organization send consistent messages which is important as it not only provides transparency and trustworthiness but also keeps communication to all stakeholders the same.

### **The Football Site**

*I drove into the parking lot of a local park and wasn't sure which way to go. I've been to a football game here before and on another occasion tried reserving the courts for my tennis program, but the park complex is quite large with fields to the left, courts to the right, a swimming pool ahead of me, and the parking lot going in every direction around all the venues. I saw a chain of vehicles coming from one area with many African-Americans driving so I thought that they might be parents of the participating children and followed where they came from. Luckily, I was right. Those were parents or relatives who had dropped off their kids earlier and practice had already started. As much as I try to be on time, my seven-month pregnant body always finds ways to resist and remind me that things are different now and I have to accommodate the changes.*

*As I waddled towards the fields, there were little clusters of parents talking to each other outside of the green fields' fenced area. There were younger children playing in the playground with a few parents keeping an eye on them. I saw two Black gentlemen chatting and greeted them as I passed by. As part of my reflexivity I wrote with capital*

letters when writing up my extended fieldnotes that day - TALK TO THEM NEXT TIME! GEE! YOU NEED TO ENGAGE WITH THE COMMUNITY! YOU ARE THE ETHNOGRAPHER!!! I knew I was nervous to engage with people that I don't know by my racing pulse and shortness of breath. I felt different in this homogeneous crowd and wondered how people perceived me. I stood on the sideline with a pen and notepad – now I stuck out even more than just being one of the few white folks on the sidelines. I try to remember that I look Hispanic and thus am often perceived as a person of color, which in this case is an advantage. Many parents sat on portable chairs spread out across various corners of the field but most were in clusters of 2-3 people and there were many toddlers running around.

I continued on through a little pathway between two large green fields with two sets of teams playing on my left and two teams of older and bigger kids playing on my right. I proceeded forward because I saw the cheerleaders practicing. Yes! I see familiar faces and tiny bodies jumping and dancing around. Some of the girls were in my tennis program and others I have coached in gymnastics. As I got closer, I completely interrupted their rehearsal - most of them were looking at me and pointing at my big belly. One of the girls remarked: "I didn't know you was pregnant." I said, "I've been pregnant" as she was part of my tennis crew in the summer. The girls that didn't know me were also distracted and looking my way, puzzled: "Who is she?" The woman leading them, who helped me with tennis, gently smiled at me and continued leading practice. I hollered at the girls to keep paying attention and that I will talk to them later.

The environment was jolly and friendly. There were girls dancing, cheering, giggling, and simply having fun. During breaks, the girls talked to the parents around

*them and played with the little toddlers other parents had brought out here. They had 1001 questions for me and I enjoyed chatting with them while they sucked the frozen popsicles someone had brought as a gift. They were happy to cool off and were ready for another round of cheer practice.*

### **Participants**

The participants in my study became my friends either long before I interviewed them or shortly after. They are a big part of my life now as we constantly text message each other and catch up on how our lives are going. I have greatly benefitted from their wisdom and as a new mom have soaked all of their advice and examples from their lives. Here, I introduce some of the main participants in my study whom I either spoke with extensively while in the field or interviewed for about an hour individually. They have all been given pseudonyms and some of them chose their own “new” names.

Miss Octavia, African American, is in her sixties and wears glasses. She always welcomes me with a wide smile exposing her pearly white teeth. I first met her at tennis practice when she brought three boys with her. She mostly stayed in her car because the grueling humid July weather with its unforgiving baking sun were the usual setting on the tennis courts. It was easily over 90 degrees because of the heated courts’ surface. On the court, I sport a cooling towel, a hat, and multiple layers of sunscreen. Miss Octavia mostly watches from the car but when the boys need to be straightened she would shout, and on a couple of occasions get out and make sure they are listening to the coaches. She has trouble walking. Originally from up North, she never had an accident with snow, so she was surprised how here in the South the ground freezes as she fell down twice in one winter bringing groceries in the house and messed up her back and knees. She is the

guardian of the youngest of three cousins that all live with her - Steve. His mom also lives with them but has been dealing with some tough health issues since she was born, so Octavia has custody of Steve. Everyone loves her. Though a spectator at tennis, she proudly serves as the cheerleaders' grandma and sits next to them when they practice to keep them "straightened up", as she would say.

Jasmine, African American, is the mother of two girls: Cameron and Jessie. Jessie is not old enough to be in the programs but is always there with her big sister no matter what activity Vision Ministries (VM) organizes. Jasmine is a busy doctoral student who I first met at cheerleading practice. Our relationship grew as we confided in each other about the PhD experience and continues today. She is always smiling kindly and welcoming to others. Our conversations on the sidelines about tenure-track position interviews were very beneficial as I was going through the hiring process and she had already worked at a couple of community colleges. She made sure I sent personalized thank you e-mails to all the people involved in the search and is very much part of "the village" that helped me get to where I am today.

Coach John, White, was one of the first people I met when I contacted the organization for my study. He is the director of all sports at the ministry and a former collegiate athlete. His passion for his job and the children involved with the ministry was evident from my first meeting with him. I remember sitting in his office two years ago and discussing my interest in the organization. He spoke about how it all started as a church outreach avenue to bring families and kids from the surrounding low-income downtown communities and how it kept growing every year to evolve into the organization it is today. His phone is always ringing and buzzing with messages. Parents,

coaches, kids – people call him all the time about practice and events coming up. Even though he gets pulled in many different directions, be it rides for the kids or important fundraisers, I have only seen him frustrated once at tennis practice when his back started hurting and he could not continue to assist me in teaching the kids how to play. He is always kind and loving toward the kids. When he shows up at an event or practice, all the kids rush up to hug him and jump in excitement trying to tell him a story of what happened when... When the kids act up, he quickly puts them in line and I am truly amazed at the respect they have for him.

Patricia, African American, is in her thirties and a mother of two – a boy and a girl. She is the top team mom for the football team. I remember seeing her the first time – she was all business. She gave out personal towels to the players with their names and numbers. I asked Coach John who she was and he said, “Oh, that’s Patricia. You should interview her. She’s awesome!” When she came back from the field, he introduced me to her. During the next practice she remembered me and called me by name. Later we exchanged contacts, and planned to meet for an interview. She knows everyone – all the kids and their parents. She always greets each one and asks how so and so is doing, and they reply to her with respect calling her ma’am.

Coach Fred, African American, is a coach and a parent. He coaches the youngest football players – 5-7 year olds. He got involved with the organization about seven years ago when the team, in his own words, was comprised of “the last of the last and the least of the least.” He and other coaches built up the program and earned respect in the city for both the mission of the organization and their winning record. They have gone from no

one wanting to be on the team to wait lists today. I got to experience his occupation in real life when I interviewed him at the barber shop he worked at.

Tammy, White, is in her twenties and coaches gymnastics. She is a graduate student at the university and has been involved with the organization for a couple of years. She is a former college athlete in the sport and the girls at practice adore her. She is always surrounded by curious little girls wanting to be close to her and learn. If she is teaching the bars that night, all the girls want to be on the bars. If she's teaching the beam, they all want to skip their stations and go straight to the beam. She encourages them to push and try harder at every station and they seem most disciplined around her as opposed to the other volunteers and coaches.

Lael, White, is also in her twenties, coached gymnastics, and was the program director during the season when I got involved with the sport. I have learned most of my organizational skills for leading the tennis program from her as well as gotten many of her resources – spreadsheets, sing-up sheets, etc. I wanted to interview her because I knew her story was different. While at the university, she mentored a girl who got pregnant and she helped raise her child. After college, she wanted to give them space to grow separately but things were not going so well so she moved back to the city after hearing about Vision Ministries and their Academy. She wanted to help the child get involved with the programs. Soon thereafter, she thought all the other things like sports and after school program the organization was doing were great and got involved on many fronts – after school, cheerleading, and gymnastics.

Mr. Jones, White, is the principal of Vision Academy (VA). I have interacted with him at fundraisers, seen him at the school, and he has brought some of the kids to tennis practice a few times.

Ms. Jennings, White, is a teacher at the Academy. I did not personally meet her or interview her but she came up multiple times in the data. She teaches first grade and some of the kids involved with the sports are her students.

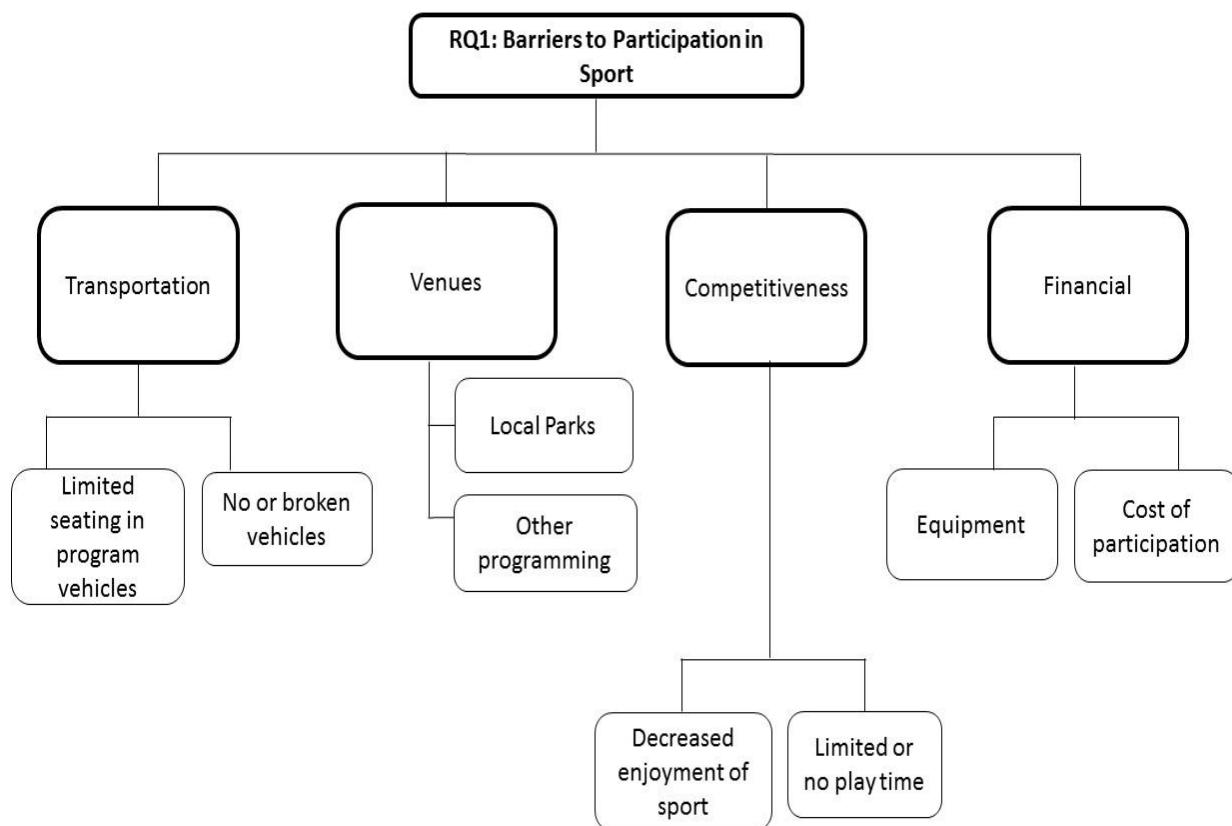


Figure 1: Sports Participation Barriers

### **RQ 1: Barriers to participation**

There were three major barriers for taking part in the sport programs offered by Vision Ministries: transportation, teams that are too competitive, and cost of participation. In this section I provide descriptions of each barrier and supporting evidence that appeared in the data.

#### **Transportation**

Most participants stated that the biggest barrier to participating in sporting activities was transportation to and from practices. Sometimes low-income parents needed as long as two weeks to fix a broken vehicle or had to miss practice due to hectic work schedules. Patricia talked about filling up her car with kids that live nearby on the way to practices due to the parents working or having trouble with vehicles:

The three kids that I pick up this year, I met them at conditioning this summer. I never knew them before. So I see one kid was walking home and I was like, hey you live around here? And he was like yeah, I live right there. Well, OK, if you need a ride let me know so I talked to his mom and she was like, yeah, I work at night and I can't get him there, if you can get him there I'm willing to pay you. Oh no, no need to pay me, I'm going right past your house. We're going to the same place, I have no problem. Another child, his mom actually was having car trouble. She just asked can you pick him up a few days until I get my car back running? I said yeah, that's no problem. And once she got her car back running she started bringing him but I said you don't have to go and she said no, I'll bring him but whenever she can't take him, she'll call me and I'll just swing by and I'll pick him up. And then I have this other kid that I drive from our neighborhood.

Patricia already did a lot organizationally for the team but she was also willing to assist troubled families that were not able to drive their kids. Since the kids lived nearby, driving did not add additional time to her commute to practice. Coach Fred also talked about his time commitment with the ministry picking up kids and how it was a big time commitment as he sometimes had to commute further out of town:

I gotta go pick kids up, two hours of practice, then take kids home – 45 min or an hour. One year, I had to pick kids up from all over the place. The parents move, their cars get messed up, they wanted to play, and I needed them to play.

Jasmine mentioned the help she and other parents received in terms of driving and how it helped her when something unexpected has come up:

Ms. Jennings, her teacher, she takes another student from the class to basketball practice which is kinda far out. I don't even know the name of that road so but it's not close. Earlier this week we had a situation. I couldn't drive on Tuesday and I had to take the little one to gymnastics and I texted her teacher if there's anyway Cameron could ride with you out there. She was totally fine with that.

When a parent or coach mentioned transportation, the story often ended with a connection or a positive experience beyond just driving. Thus this barrier to participation in sporting activities for these kids turned into a positive bonding experience for coaches, parents, and children. I explain this phenomenon further, under research question three, where I write about the building of relationships and the creation of a community where many forms of capital are exchanged.

Most participants had good experiences but one parent said it was difficult at times when she needed a ride to one of the sports' practices. She felt like other parents were not genuine when they offered rides. She overheard a conversation one time:

I was coming home and we was gonna walk and catch the bus 'cause two people was arguing – “well, I don't wanna go on the West side, *well I don't wanna go on the West side either!*” Can't you take her? *Well, can't you take her?* So when the lady decided to take me, I said, “Are you sure? Cause you really don't have to do that. You could just drop us off at the bus stop.” But you know she went and took us.

However, throughout her interview, she said multiple times that people were helpful in terms of offering rides and assisting her. She just wanted to make sure it was genuine and came from the heart. For example, she felt like the abovementioned lady only took her home because one time she took her son to urgent care and cared for him when his mom had to be at work:

So instead of her getting off of work, which I know was hard to do, I said I'll take him to the emergency room. Or I'll take him to urgent care. And so I did. I didn't even think about it. Come on, go to her mother's, get the insurance card, have her grandmother write a note that I can take him and I took him right on. I wasn't like no, I shouldn't take him, no it's your turn, you know and I think that's what made her think. She took my son to the urgent care a couple of weeks ago and say well you owe me some and you do this so I think that's why she took me home but now when they see me they kinda dodge and see who I'm gonna ask and so I just

let them find out on their own that I have the car now (*one of the members where they attend church gifted her with a car*).

At the same time, she mentioned that there have been other people that offered her and her daughter rides when they did not have a car:

If I say something to the head coach, he always makes sure I have a ride home.

And it's a couple of other ones that have been really good about it. Like last year when I couldn't go and my daughter took Steve, a couple of guys made sure she got home.

When I inquired why she does not just ask the coaches, she responded with:

Sometimes I don't want to bother people. 'Cause we've caught the bus there and we've caught the bus back a couple of times. And then sometime I said is a school night and I don't feel like catching the bus and catching the bus back so we're not gonna go to practice but he's not missed one game. So it's worked out so I don't have to worry about it at all next year because the Lord's blessed us with this car for a long time.

Overall, most parents were thankful for coaches and other parents driving their children.

Other parents took this opportunity for granted. For example, I often drove to the other side of town to pick up a girl for tennis. There were numerous times when I would get to her house and her mom would show up and tell me that she was at a friend's house or she was supposed to be back but is not yet. Initially I was frustrated for having to drive all the way there but then thinking of the reality of this family and all the unknowns they face, (switching jobs multiple times, unemployment, phone and internet cut off, among others)

I just shrugged it off. Her mother never apologized which made me feel like my time and commitment were taken for granted.

Patricia also talked about transportation being a big barrier. When I asked her what other obstacles she thinks the participating families are facing, she said:

Not the financial part, more so, sometime the parents can't get their kids there. They signed them up saying that they will be responsible for getting them there, but as time goes on, you see them like: "well, he won't be there because I don't have a ride", that kind of thing. But Tobias does pick up a few kids cause it's only 13-15 seats on that bus. And then some of the coaches will swing by and pick up some of the kids. Me, personally, I pick up three other kids that's right in my neighborhood and only one is a Pee Wee. I pick up a senior and a midget as well and then my two kids and then another Pee Wee. So I'm loaded out trying to get them there. But, I don't mind. They are right there in my neighborhood. I pass right by their houses as I go, why not pick them up?

The parents involved in VM and its programs often face a multiplicity of difficulties when it comes to sport participation. Transportation was deemed to be their biggest hurdle because of time constraints due to work duties and car issues where they either did not have a vehicle or it was broken. The organization has stepped in by providing a small bus, where about 12 kids can get to the football fields; parents driving kids that live close by; coaches and volunteers picking up kids on their way to practice and often times driving out of their way to do so. None of the people that aid in transporting the kids to sporting events gets paid to do so. It is all voluntary and as I describe in RQ3 the rides to

and from practice have become spaces to interact and mentor the children and extend beyond just transporting from place to place.

### **Venues**

Some of the research pointed out that access to facilities is a restriction of children's sports. In the case of Vision ministries, the organization has spaces for their football, basketball, and gymnastics programs. The football team plays at a local park and was considered a partner as part of the community outreach mission of city parks. Basketball is played at a local church's gym, again as an in-kind space for the ministry. Gymnastics is hosted by a private local facility once a week as an in-kind donation. All of these sport programs exist because people in the community believe in the organization and its mission and provide a free space for its programs.

My experience with tennis though was fairly different. When I began applying for the grant, I wanted to estimate the cost for tennis courts and the possible options (hopefully free) that exist in the city. I was not able to find the number of courts I needed for free at the desired times. I called the park where football was played, established connections, and was given the contact information of the person in charge of tennis for the county courts. That person gave me a rate for the same park where football was played. I was really happy that we could share the same venue, as families and volunteers were already familiar with that space. Upon receipt of the grant, I tried to schedule the courts and it seemed that they were taken. Then, I requested the times when I was told they were available and soon after received an e-mail stating that this venue will not be appropriate for my program because I am in direct competition with the park's programs. At the end, we were offered a different park which had only one old tennis court and two

basketball courts which we repurposed. I was very discouraged because I wanted the best for the kids in the program, not a lesser option. This experience shows that access to appropriate venues is a challenge and programs often rely on the goodwill of other facilities to operate. Therefore, most of the programs relied on free or in kind space donated so that the children can take part in sporting activities. However, this led to very little choice of where and when the children can play, and the conditions of the parks or facilities where they played.

### **Competitiveness**

A participation barrier for many kids was the competitive aspect of teams around the city as football is a big part of the culture. Many of them sign up for teams and do not get any playing time. For example, many teams start practicing very early to be competitive. Coach Fred described it this way:

Most teams start around here like in May, June. They start training. Start going to little camps and stuff like that. The whole month of June is fundamentals. They just go there and just train. No helmets, no shoulder pads. They just teach you football without no equipment. Well, the Eagles started in July cause all the other teams were filled up and the Eagles were the last of the last and the least of the least. So say if you can't make it with the Dolphins, you can play with the Eagles till next year.

He explained how he got involved with the ministry. One of the reasons was that his son was not getting any playing time on the field:

I got involved about eight years ago. I was on one team in the city and they was a good team. My son never got in the games but you know, it was a good

organization. They were the best of the best. It was an honor to play for them. But my little boy was one of the ones that he never got to play and I remember just going to church and becoming a believer and I didn't really like the atmosphere that was there (*the previous football team*). It wasn't like a bad atmosphere but there were some things that I just didn't agree with no more.

When I asked him to elaborate more about his reasons to switch teams, he added:

It was nothing bad but it just wasn't the atmosphere I wanted to put my child in at that time. I was changing my life and you know God led me to the Eagles that's why I knew... They were telling us it was \$125 to play for his current team and they said that if you wanted to play with the best, you are gonna pay it. And then they said you can go right down the street there and pay only \$25 and they give you the equipment. So when he said that I felt like at peace and thought that I should actually do that. When I was going through the parking lot I almost ran John over with my truck... Yeah, I almost killed John (*laughing jokingly*). I asked him "Do you all need players? He was like "Yeah" and I was like "Do you all need coaches?" He was like "Yeah".

One of the parents also mentioned wanting her son to be on the Eagle's team because she wanted to make sure he was getting playing time as she recalled a conversation with Coach Fred:

I don't care about the money just tell me what I need to do because I want my son to play. I want him TO play. Not just you paid your registration fee but now you can't play because somebody's better than you. Because he'd never played organized ball. He took right to it and I didn't have any problems. I kinda pitched:

Hey my son can throw. He's gonna be your quarter back. Fred said: All right. I'll see what he can do. First year - my son was quarterback.

For some of the parents, it was important for their kids to play after they invest financially in their sports activities. They wanted to make sure their children are getting playing time and not just sitting on the sidelines. Vision Eagles provided a space where most kids get an opportunity to practice and play during competitive games.

### **Financial**

The financial burden of paying for sports has been an obstacle for many of the parents who talked about VM and their low or no participation costs. Patricia spoke about the difference in fees between Vision's program and other teams in the city:

When I look at other organizations, most of their registration fees are \$55 or more. And with that \$55 you just get a slot on the team. After that \$55 you still have to purchase your equipment and with the Eagles you pay \$25 holds your slot and it gives you equipment, may be pants, your pads and your helmet. You, yourself have to purchase your cleats and they provide the mouth pieces. So the only thing that you may be out of is may be \$75 at the most. It depends on what kind of cleats you want to purchase. I think we are the cheapest organization when it comes to fees. I think it's a plus but it's up to whoever, whatever you decide what team you want your child to play for.

I asked a follow-up question of whether she thought that cost was a decision maker for many of the parents:

I think that this is something that they already had in place before. When I first came it was \$25. Is it a plus? Sometimes. We ask that all parents pay the \$25. It

doesn't have to be at one time. It could be in installments. We'll take some now, some later, whenever. This year we tried to implement fundraisers to help the ones who weren't able to pay and get them more involved. Well, I can't pay the \$25 right now, then I can help. I can just lend my time. I could just say, hey, I don't have the money but I'm here to help you make some money. And that's what we were really trying to do this year.

Coach Fred added similar thoughts on the topic:

If your momma didn't have no money, you know it's just \$25. If you don't have a ride – the Eagles are gonna pick you up. You know they was last of the last. They were bad news bears. They were terrible. All the kids that didn't make the teams – they were on that team. Uuuuu. When I first started, I couldn't get kids to play. When we first started all my kids were crying because they didn't want to play for us. They knew they were gonna lose. The little league football is bigger than our city. It's real big. It's a feeder for the High school teams. Right here, that's where they start off with it. CYA kids are usually a little aggressive. They are relentless. The east side kids play like their heart knows football. They just gonna pown this thing through. They are just gonna keep hitting you and keep hitting you. They put the ball in the air, do little trick plays so you know when you get into High school and you see them all playing together – that's beautiful.

This means that other teams in town that were better could charge higher participatory fees and since the Eagles were cheaper, they attracted the kids who lacked skills and/or resources.

Jasmine spoke about the activities her daughter was involved in and that attending the academy waives the fees for all other VM activities:

Thankfully since Jill goes to VA she can do all of the VM things for free which really helps. We are fortunate that even before she started attending VA we were able to get some scholarships for things – financial based scholarships. She was already doing piano at the school of music or at their community school at the school of music and we get the maximum scholarship there and at the local parks and rec (we were able to get a scholarship there) but free is even better!

In summary, the main barriers to sport participation as described by the parents were transportation, venues, playing time, and cost. Financially, most of the parents faced difficulties whether it was the cost of a car, the means to fix a vehicle, or paying for participation fees and athletic equipment. Therefore, VM was able to provide avenues for change in all four areas and bring families who otherwise would have not been able to participate in mainstream and already offered sport programming in the city.

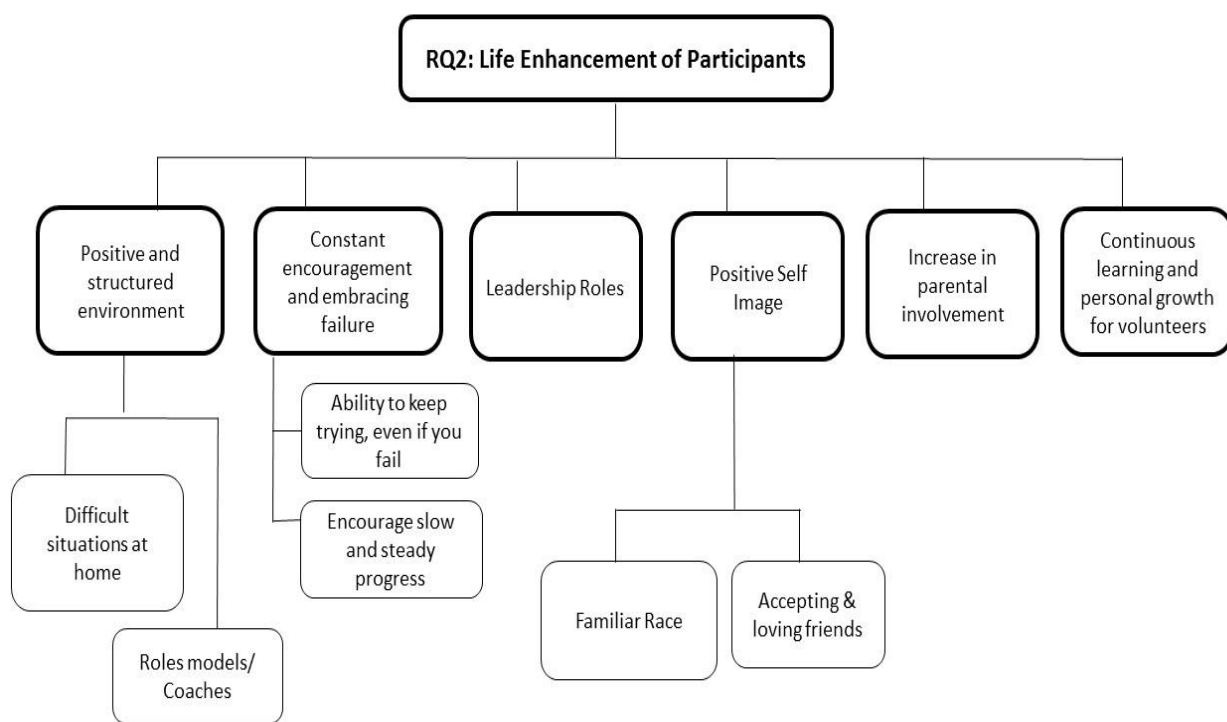


Figure 2: Life Enhancement of Participants

**RQ 2: In what ways has the program enhanced the lives of its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?**

The results point that the program enhanced the lives of its participants in several ways: provided positive and structured environment, constantly encouraged the kids and taught them to embrace failure, provided spaces for the children to step in leadership roles, contributed to the children having a more positive self-image, parental involvement grew with time spent with the organization, and the coaches and volunteers exhibited continuous learning and personal growth.

**Positive and Structured Environment**

Children involved with the organization benefited from the positive structured environment they were exposed to and may have been lacking in their lives.

For example, Patricia talked about bringing a boy from the neighborhood to football practice and his difficult situation at home:

I have this kid who I take to practice. He really is in a hard position. When I look at him, I see a child who is lost. He wants to be a good kid. I like him. But right now I think all of the odds are against him. Only because he doesn't have the support that children are looking for. His mother passed, I'm not sure when but he lives with an aunt who has older children herself. I've never met her. I pick him up three days a week and I've never met her. I only had two conversations with her on the phone and one was because she hadn't seen him after a football game.

I asked her whether she thinks the program is benefitting him in any way and she responded:

Yes, ma'am. I do. Because if he's not in some kind of program where he's not just hanging out or nothing. You know what boys normally do, they just hang out probably in somebody else's business. You know the negative side of it. If he was just at home, that's what he'd probably do. But since he is involved with football and the coaches are on him, you know bring me your progress reports, go into the school to see him, just checking on him to see how things are going, then he'd probably be worse off than he is.

Another parent mentioned her child's constant involvement in sports and how she was really thankful for the male role models that the coaches provided for him as he does not know his father:

He loves sports. Any type of sports. Because we do football, and we do basketball, and then there's tennis and after that we do soccer or baseball. So we're always in something. And then we do swimming. So we're always in something all year long, you know. It keeps him grounded. Cause I want to make sure he stays grounded because he doesn't have a father, you know. And that kind of bothers him sometimes that he doesn't have a father so I try to keep him around positive man so he can always have a positive role model.

I asked her if she thinks he can find that in the coaches and she responded:

Yeah, the coaches are really good with him. Cause last year when he acted up and did somethings wrong I wouldn't let him go to practice or I wouldn't let him go to the games and the coaches told me this year – don't let him miss any games, you know. If he acts up, come and tell us, and we'll deal with it. And so this year, I haven't had that problem with him. But I've seen them deal with the other boys,

you know, making them do more sit ups and stuff. So you wanna act up in school, you wanna clown in school – do 100 pushups you are not practicing today and you are gonna write letter to your mother and your teacher and apologize so they are really good role models you know so I like that about them because he really needs that. He really does need that. And it's difficult for me because I grew up with both of my parents, you know, and my kids grew up with both of their parents so for me it's kinda heartbreaking to see him not having an actual father. I tell my daughter if you went serious with two guys and then she gets very attached to those guys and then when you're getting ready to break it off he's heartbroken and like this guy she was supposed to marry. He'll say "can you call my dad so I can talk to my dad and I can go see him?" and really it's not his dad and so since they're not together anymore he doesn't want to play that role as his dad so I told her you can go ahead and date whoever you want to but no more men in the house because he gets too attached and then you ready to break it off and it just leaves him in a quandary which is not fair to him, you know so.

### **Constant Encouragement and Embracing Failure: "Your ability to just try"**

While observing a football practice I saw the coaches encourage some of the youngest kids (5-7 year olds):

*I look over to the Midgets again and they are playing different formations or running plays. One of the coaches was demonstrating after a failed play – "Steve, try this, next time (and he proceeded to show with the player in front of him) put your hands up and push him. Just give it a try, because you didn't even try this time. It doesn't matter if you fail, I just want you to try".*

Coach Tammy attested to encouraging the girls at gymnastics to just try and attributing it to seeing a change in them:

One of the biggest changes I see in the girls is their ability to try, just try. It's like well, I'm not gonna be good at it. So you either gonna do zero seconds putting your chin on the bar or you are gonna do two. Yeah, you may not do 10. But is two better than zero? This ability to say, yeah I can do for two seconds even if I can't do it for ten like this other girl did.

She also spoke about hoping that change will happen but not knowing whether it always works that way:

I can't control your change but that's what we hope for - that it happens. It's encouraging when it happens. That's what I see in the girls. I see a change in the way that they approach failure. This is powerful. When you can change the way you see and approach failure, it's not a fixed thing, but it's a growth thing. It's that thinking when I fail I'm a failure, it's fixed, which means you don't move as a person. Make it a growth thing. OK, when I fail - I learn. That kind of thinking is completely different.

I also had similar experiences with the ministry while teaching tennis. In the summer, I usually worked with the youngest kids (5-7 years old) and praised and high fived them every time they made contact with the ball. Or if they did not, I told them their swing was great and that they will make it on the next try. In one of the fieldnotes from tennis I wrote about Coach Ben encouraging a little girl and telling her to keep trying her best: I observed Coach John at the end of a tennis practice talk to a girl who looked very unhappy. Before practice, she and a couple of other boys and girls had hopped out of

coach John's truck and helped him bring the equipment to the courts. Now, at the end of practice when everyone else was headed back to the truck with the rackets, nets, and balls she was looking down.

*-Why are you so unhappy? - he asked.*

She didn't respond. Just kept her frown on and picking up her things from the ground.

*-Hey, look at me. Look me in the eye. You did really well today.*

She looked up and focused her eyes on him.

*-You didn't put every ball in the court but you did really well. I saw you making those couple of amazing shots. Oh, I was looking. And you know what? I'm really proud of you. Do you hear me? I'm so proud of you! And next time, you will do even better.*

I was looking at her. Her eyes opened wide and that cute innocent smile crept slowly onto her face but when she finally smiled, she smiled really big and he embraced her with a huge hug. His 6 foot at least 5 massive ex-football player body held that little girl in his arms for a few seconds and my eyes got teary.

*- Now, go on, help the boys load that stuff in the truck!*

It was a learning moment yet again for me - encourage the kids and instill pride in their abilities to succeed that would transfer outside the tennis court and hopefully stay with them when they are older adults.

### **Leadership Roles**

The consistent encouragement and mentoring the girls at gymnastics has resulted in some of them taking leadership roles and helping out the coaches and volunteers. Coach

Tammy noted:

We've had a couple of girls take leadership roles because they didn't want to be involved anymore. And so they are like *I don't want to do routines* or they start slowing down, right? So as a coach I say, ok what's the strength here, what's the real issue? Is this resistance here because there's failure? Is she resisting because she doesn't want to fail at something? Or she feels left out so it's rejection. Once you identify the real issue, real issue is it's not going toward her strengths. It's like this lack of desire, she's losing motivation. So in that we just put her in a position like – this is your strength, this is what you are good at, why don't you do this? And eyes just light up! It's like *Yeah, yeah, I'm really good at this*. And they just go off with it. They want to take clipboard notes and they want to name the teams for you, they want to track, they do amazing! I've never had an issue once I put them in. But it's just identifying their strengths. It's like what is she good at? So it takes a lot of work as a coach but once you identify it the girls are doing great. So we just move them based on if we are feeling resistance that's not from a cause that's amendable, when it's from a good place, we usually bring them to another role.

Coach Lael also highlighted a powerful story of a girl who despite her circumstances rose to a leadership role at gymnastics:

I loved watching (a set of three sisters) and the oldest one started coming as a coach, even though she was only a year or two older than the oldest girls at practice, and I loved to watch her not only participate in the program but to lead. And things that she didn't know anything about prior to being involved with VM. To watch this girl that lives in dismal situation at home with 5 siblings and

sharing bedrooms with 4 other people her whole life, and never having clean clothes and seeing her mom cuss at her all the time, and seeing her siblings making really poor choices and listening to the things that her mom communicates to her about what it means to be a woman and how she needs to have a baby when she's a teenager because that's how she'll get a boy to stay with her and telling her that she needs to use her body to get things that she wants and to see her siblings and her parents have no value for discipline or for hard work, and to see her come and not only participate in the program but to be like a leader with the younger kids, instead of being on a team, she'd help with the younger kids, to watch her lead and teaching others about patience, and persistence, and telling them to complement each other and to be proud of one another, and to use your words to build one another up is just a really excellent example of a kid that has been involved since she was really little but seeing how the ministry has impacted her and how she is so different than the rest of her family is really powerful. She's not only participating but she's leading. She's getting practice on how to lead others. So that was a really awesome story.

Coaches Tammy and Lael both expressed that a great idea for the organization in the future is to provide a more structured way for their participants to grow and serve as coaches. For example, kids can be aware that if they do well and "graduate" at a certain age (around high school), they can become coaches and earn a small stipend for serving the organization. I describe this suggested system in more detail in chapter five.

**Positive self-image**

When I asked Patricia about the change she has seen in Steve since they became involved with VM, she spoke about him developing a more positive self-image:

He has more positive self-image, he has friends, where he really didn't have friends before. You know, he's learning he doesn't have to be friends with kids that pick on him. I think it's all been a positive experience all the way around because, you know now he's getting to the point where I say, Joshua, you don't have to put up with those kids over there who mess with you, you know. He says, yeah, that's right! I can wait till tomorrow when I go to school. I have friends at school and I got friends that love me. I say, that's right. You don't let people use you because I'm that kind of person, I buy a lot of snacks and the kids in the neighborhood know it and they say, Joshua, go get us all a popsicle from your grandmother and he'll get 10 popsicles and after the popsicle's gone. Go home, we don't want to play with you. So I say, It's nice to be nice but don't let people use you. Don't let them eat all of your popsicles and then they don't want to play with you afterwards. So you make sure your friends are your friends for real and then if they want popsicles or chips or something, then you can get it but not just for them to play with you, you know. You don't buy friends. Friends come for real. When you don't have things they are your friends. He said "like at school?" I say "like a school". Those are your friends regardless. They love you, they care about you, you care about them, you know he's getting that lesson.

From a different perspective, Jasmine talked about the importance of her daughter being around kids that looked like her as it helped her have a more positive image of her own skin color:

I think it's good for her to be around ... Well, I wouldn't say it's a diverse group because it's almost the flip side of being I guess where she was before because she probably would've been, one of may be just a handful of minorities and most of the activities she was doing before too (her dance class she was probably the only one) and so I think it's helping her to also see and be around people who are more like her as far as that's concerned. Not that there's anything wrong. I don't want to sound racist but I think she was around other people so much that she was starting to think that like her own skin color was not good, it was not ideal. I've even heard her say before that she wanted to be the other thing.

So it was a struggle because she has always thought that the long hair, the light skin was ideal. And I don't think that we were the ones that introduced her to race and that there was any difference, I think she must've learned it at day care one day from somebody. So we don't even talk about it a whole lot but if she says that... Lately, what I've been trying to tell her is that God made everybody exactly how He wanted them to be so for you to say, *Do you think it makes God happy for you to say that you want to be another way?* So she says *No*. We are still working on it because I still think that she favors and prefers... And even within the race – light skin vs. dark skin. Like her dad is fair skin and her sister is actually lighter than she is but in her mind she's the same complexion as her dad

and her sister and I always try to tell her *No, no, you are closer to my complexion.*

*You are as dark as I am.*

### **Growth of parental involvement**

Through observations I saw many parents involved and helping out with the different sports. In one of my fieldnotes I wrote:

*We chatted about parental involvement and I was telling Coach John that I struggle with my neighbors' uninvolvement with their daughter. We live two minutes away, driving distance, from the gymnastics facility and if I don't take her or pick her up, there's no one to do it even if they are home. I even shared with the father, as he works for our landlord and was sealing up gaps where ants have come in my home, that they should take her as I don't go to gymnastics every day and it's just down the street. He told me she loves going but that he can't always take her because the big project they are working on is 30 min out of town and he doesn't always come home on time. I said that she has two older brothers and they can easily walk her there (as the gym is right in front of their school and they walk to school every day) and then one of the parents can pick her up later in the evening. He said yes, but teenagers these days, they don't want to do anything. I shrugged my shoulders. That following Monday, when it was time for gymnastics both him and his wife were home but no one was taking her and drove her to and back from practice. She is also quite big for her age and could use the physical activity to stay healthy, apart from the fun and social aspect of gymnastics.*

*It's really hard to know what might be going on in a home so it's not fair to make judgements but it's so hard when I see the value of her participation both on the physical and emotional levels. For example, I see her wanting to go to tennis and gymnastics and*

*always asking me when I'll pick her up but when we go she often stops and complains about something which results in one on one attention from a volunteer. At first, I thought that she isn't interested in the sport, but then I realized that she wants the attention. On one hand, this is great because it provides a space for a volunteer to talk to her one on one but when it lasts most of practice, it robs other children from attention and she isn't getting much of physical activity.*

*So John said that in the beginning with football, they had no parental involvement at all. Parents slowly began to get engaged. He gave me an example of a mom, whose son he drove for about two years and sometimes had to make two trips to the same neighborhood to make sure her son was at practice too. He noticed that she could drive her son so one day he told her that it would really help if she drove her child and she did. Next thing you know, she was driving another kid from the neighborhood and then a full car of kids. Just as we were talking, his cell rang and he said. "Ha, speaking of her, she's calling me". She was saying they were running late for practice as they had a prior engagement and John told her that practice will wrap up in about 30 min because this side of the park and this field does not have lights. She would've driven for no reason if she didn't have that close relationship with John.*

*Another interesting story John told me was about one of the little kids playing in front of us. He said his mom had gotten out of jail and was keeping a steady job but his father was still in prison. Previously, his grandma had been taking care of him.*

*Then we talked about some of the coaches and he gave me an idea to interview two of them who have been with the ministry for many years and also coached basketball. We talked about the football coaches and he told me that a lot of the fathers that coach don't*

*have their sons play Quarterback (QB) or Running Back (RB) and some play defensive positions. He said that most other teams if the fathers are coaching theirs sons are playing QB and RB. He said, "That's not what we are about and we make it pretty clear. Though some of the coaches' kids play QB it's not all of them and it's only if that kid is really for that position". He also said that kids pay \$25 and then the organization provides all the equipment for them. He said if they played on other teams the fee is \$75 and then they have to buy the equipment and it could go up to \$400 - \$500 per child. A lot of the kids on the team are siblings as well which is consistent with what other parents said in their interviews.*

During my interview with Coach Fred, I asked him to talk about how the parents are involved with football and he responded:

Everybody has a kid. All the assistant coaches. All the cheerleading coaches.

Everybody has a kid right now out there. Before, it was just volunteer work.

University projects, university kids that needed community service hours or something like that. Some who went to the church. They would come. And they were the coaches. That was good then because people cared to do something like that. Now the program we are in, John has to worry about fundraisers and stuff.

All the other programs the parents have to worry about that, here we don't have to worry about that.

Patricia also spoke about her experience with the program and how her involvement grew over time:

When I first started, I said I was just gonna be a parent, I'll bring my child to practice and watch. You know I'm not one who will leave him unless there's

really something I have to do and I'm, hey Pat, I'll be right back. I gotta do something. But it's never a time where I try to do that. I'm always there cause you know most kids tend to stray away or pay attention to other stuff instead of being focused on what they are working on. So I'm one who, if I pay my money, you gonna pay attention and you gonna get it. You're not gonna slack off or be looking in the sky pulling the grass. You gonna pay attention because I put my money and I'm putting my time out here so you gonna put the work yourself. And so Fred already had his team mom, his wife, Keana. She was doing all the legwork, paperwork and all that kind of stuff so unfortunately she got into a car accident and she had some other issues, she may have been pregnant and complications with that and so Fred was like, I gotta have somebody to come in. And I said, whatever you need me to do, I'd do it. And that's how I took on the role of team mom for the midgets my first year. And I had a lady, Sage, she was one who'd always say *Hey, I'd get the water* and when it was time for him to do badges, I said, Hey Pat, I don't mind doing the legwork as far as the paperwork or keeping the kids in line but Sage is one who will go the extra mile. So let her do it as well. So we both got badges and she was doing the banners for the kids to run through and the banners would have a scripture on there or something positive on there. Being that Downtown Eagles is a Christian based organization so she would do majority of that and I would do keeping the kids in line and making sure that a lot of the kids got to practice if I can get them there. I would make sure that every week we would have snacks so I had to get parents to volunteer and buy snacks weather it's game day or something that we were having. So once Dorian

moved onto the pee wee league it just kinda rolled over to the team mom role for the Pee Wees and that's where it's been. And sometimes I say, look just to give somebody else the chance, I'll fall back and I'll be a parent but the coaches are like - No, you already know what we need and what we do and you just stick in here. So they won't let me. Coach Pat knew that I was moving up and was like *Hey, I need you back down here with me.* I said but my son is moving up and I have to follow him. He said, I need you down here with me. But I told him, I said, anyway I can help, I'll help. Like he has little wrist bands where he draws the plays, I'll do those. He gives me the playbook, I'll draw it up and put it in the wrist bands for them and something like that. But I can't just be over here with my team and run over there and handle their team but if they bring me the water bottles, I'll fill out the water bottles. I'll send them back, that kinda of thing but that's a lot. I have my 30 kids may be less, depending on how the season is going and his 30 kids – that's just a lot (whispering).

During my interview with Lael she spoke about her desire for older volunteers to come and engage with the parents which happened to some extent but not as much as she was hoping. She saw some parents come consistently to gymnastics practice and said:

Every week there will be at least a couple of parents that will consistently come watch their girls and I thought that was such an opportunity to connect with the parents, to connect with the whole family. I really enjoyed seeing some of the parents take ownership and take pride in their kids. Again, some of the parents I know don't take pride in very many things. It was really cool to kind of see this

avenue for the parents to be proud of the kids and for the kids to experience their parents being proud.

Jasmine also mentioned about her growth of parental involvement and her desire to volunteer:

I'm involved with a character breakfast. I was asking at school if there's anything I could do and know my schedule so I think they were reluctant to tell me anything that I can do but I do want to help so they told me about this committee and they are planning a character breakfast where they will have all these actors dressed up like different fairy tale characters and so they are going to do this as a fundraiser and invite people to come to that breakfast.

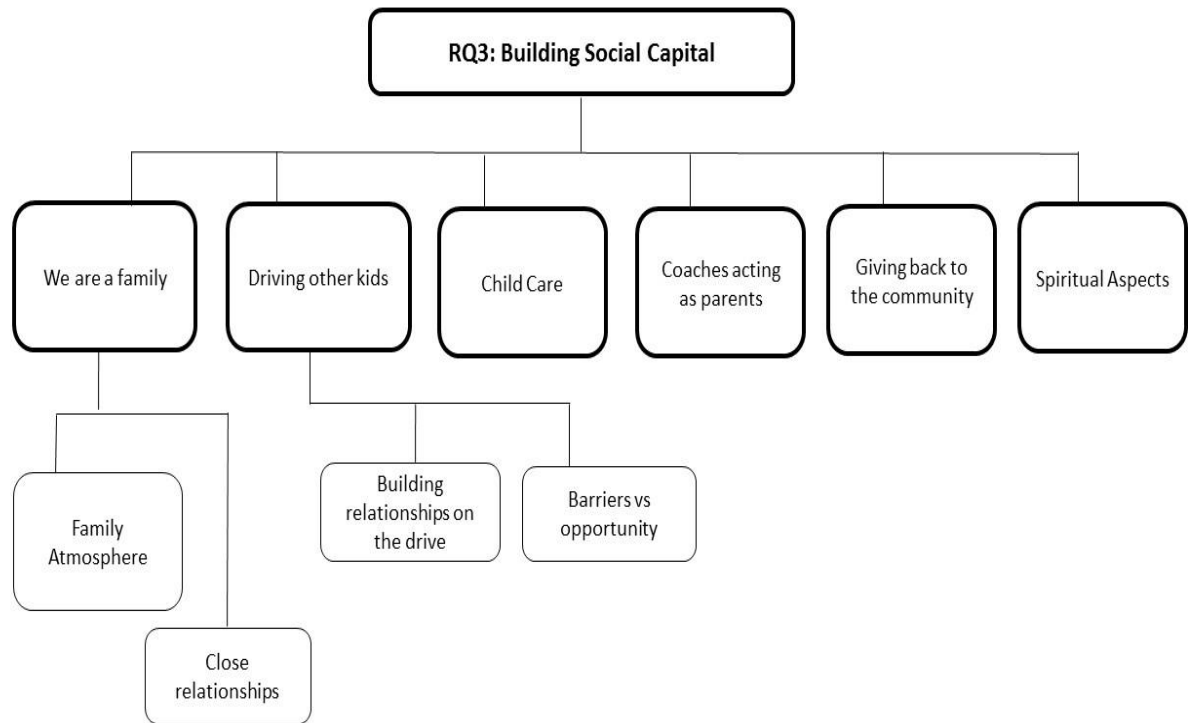
### **Continuous Learning and Personal Growth**

Participating in the organization's activities provided continuous learning and personal growth to the participating coaches and volunteers. On numerous accounts coaches recalled that they learn and grow through everyday challenges and interacting with the children in and outside of the sporting context.

Coach Fred spoke about how he and other adults in the program benefit from it and grow to be examples for the children. Also, the ministry gives chances to people who may not have made the best choices in the past:

The Eagles do give people chances because it's a ministry program. They also minister to you as a coach. You know you gotta show it and then the kids follow it. Like I said, it's better for that too because you actually help the older person and they can feed it back. You know they all people, all teams should be like that.

You know some teams, they won't let you play, they won't let you coach with that background and stuff.



*Figure 3: Building Social Capital*

**RQ3: In what ways has the program achieved building social capital among its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?**

The results show that the nonprofit organization succeeded in building social capital among its members by fostering a family environment, building relationships while driving children to and from practices, members offering child care, coaches acting as parents, giving back to the local community, and by using spirituality to guide those relationships.

**We Are a Family**

When describing the organization, many participants used the phrase “we are a family”. The nonprofit managed to implement its mission to build a community by ensuring the participants feel like they are a part of one big family. During my interview with Jasmine, she attested to the close family environment she experienced as part of the culture at VM:

The environment is just different with Vision Ministries because prayer is a part of it and it's just more like a family atmosphere since that's a goal that they are trying to provide that kind of support system for the children that do participate. So that's really nice to be around friendly people and people who care. Not saying that people don't care in the other things but it's just a little bit different. Like you don't see people hugging or kissing on the cheek and people taking that time I don't think you normally see that at the average extracurricular activity. I don't think I've ever seen that really at an extracurricular activity other than may be like band but that's kinda a similar atmosphere usually as marching band are together all the time so it ends up being like a big family and so that's what I think makes VM different than joining other places.

I asked her if she felt that coming from the coaches or volunteers or the other families and she responded:

Coaches and the coaches are volunteers too so and the families are friendly too but more so I'm speaking about the coaches and the volunteers who are working directly with the children are being that way.

Later in the interview she talked about one of the teachers driving a kid to and from basketball practice and also spending extra time with the children in her class:

Even in the beginning of the year, she took the three girls from the class to see *Beauty and the Beast* at the theatre. It was girls' night out. And I think she did that with the boys too for something else. So it's a nice family, a nice group. And Coach John is really friendly and he knows both of my daughter's names even though my younger one doesn't play sports. He would give her a great "To Go" hug just like he will to the other students too. I think it's nice.

Octavia also talked about helping with cheerleading and the girls calling her grandma Octavia. She even noted that one of the girls who did not have a grandmother was happy she got one now:

Girls come to me *Hi Grandma Octavia! Hi Grandma Octavia.* And one of the little girls she told her mom one day, she said *I got a grandma now!* You know, it just makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

Coach Fred spoke about how close everyone was and that everyone would pay their respects if a relative to anyone in the program passed away:

We have a death in the family, we all go to the funeral. You had everybody go to the funerals and pay their respects. A 100 kids and parents come. And then the

kids know, this is my family, this is what I'm supposed to do. We will rock together. We will rock you (like the Queen song). That's what we say. When we say we rock with somebody – that's my friend, that's my partner, that's my associate, my comrade, we are gonna go down together in war, we soldiers. We are red and black, yeah. This is the Eagles territory here.

Patricia mentioned about the coaches organizing gatherings with the kids:

So, Coach Fred had pizza night where the parents could join and they watched football flicks, something like *Remember the Titans*, I don't remember, something dealing with football. Tonight they're gonna have pizza night at CiCi's. The midgets and pee wees are invited to Cici's, you know fellowship, get together and hang out. Last year, pretty much every week, coach Sheldon would have, I guess a night where we get together and eat, talk about football, we watched films of games that we've played, games that they could do better. We just try to keep them focused on what our goals are when it comes to football but the fellowship part as well. Now parents, we try to get them involved as much as possible and we understand that some parents do work and can't be there all the time. Do we get a lot of parent participation? No. Would we like more? Yes. You know, it takes everybody, it just can't be a select few. You gotta be able to get in and show your kids, *Hey I come here and support, Hey you need me to do something, I can do that*. But a lot of them just come to watch their kids and then they take them home.

An example of how the program has created networks of relationships or social capital that extends beyond the sports programming is highlighted in this quote from Patricia:

We had one child who lost his grandmother. We took for collection for her burial and when I sent out the text messages, I let the parents know he was one of our kids. You know, he's going through a situation and just if you can afford it, give it, and if you can't then that's fine too and I'm not sure how much money we came up with but we were able to help his family do whatever they needed to do when they needed it. And his family after a game, his father got up and just gave a good Thank You which is really nice and just to know that hey, we come together regardless of this is the situation, he is one of our kids, we can do something for you.

In this instance, the Eagles had come together to support a family in need both emotionally and financially and it came from other parents involved in the program and not necessarily leadership in the organization.

### **Driving Other Kids**

At the beginning of this chapter I wrote about transportation being one of the main barriers to sport participation for families involved with the organization. On the other hand, transporting kids to and from various activities has given volunteers an opportunity to interact with and mentor the kids. On one hand, it was a barrier to participation, but on the other it served as a great opportunity to bond with the kids through conversations.

For example, Octavia, who takes care of her grandson, was without a vehicle for a few months because she lost hers in an accident. I remember calling her to check on her grandson Steve and see if he wanted to come to tennis practice, when she told me about her car situation and then she added:

“You know, Steve was supposed to get picked up by Thomas [a family friend] to go to school but he didn’t show up. Do you think you can take him to school?”

*I was free that morning but it was past 9 a.m. so I asked her if she meant that day as school had already started. She assured me it was today and I quickly put on my driving glasses, grabbed my car keys, and rushed out the door. They only lived a block away from me so it was easy for me to take him. He had already been dressed and ready to go so we didn’t waste any time. On the way there he was telling me that his grandma’s car was broken and that this family friend has been taking him to school and they didn’t know what happened to him today. We had a great time in the car listening to music on the radio and talking about sports. I also asked him about school and what he was learning. It was a great bonding time for us and I always enjoy the car rides with the kids I take to tennis practice.*

Coach Tammy also attested to the difficulty parents have with transportation but talked more about what volunteers do to fill that need:

For some of the parents it’s because they don’t see an importance and some of them it’s because they are busy. They legitimately can’t or they are at work or that kind of stuff. I know we’ve had a couple of things with house moving or losing a house and being in like a shelter for a couple of days. That’s one of the issues when they get taken out of school. There’s not a lot of solidity in their lives so I think that makes it difficult. I think the main thing that helps bringing them is the volunteers go out and meet them and meet them wherever they are at. It’s not you bringing them to the gym and we’ll coach them, it’s like we are willing to go the full way. We’ll go out and get them and we’ll bring them back in.

This dedication and consistency that she described helped show the children that the volunteers cared about them. She also spoke about the relationships that are built on the rides and that coaches hang out with the kids outside of practice:

I know a couple of the girls hang out with the girls outside of the gym. I know the coaches a lot of times make it a point to hang out with the girls outside of the gym. I think it's just relationships there and they are special because they are goal oriented outside of the gym with one thing - you have to build out this special kind of relationship and there are specific roles that are played out in there. And then once it's constant and there's that trust built in there and there's this deep liking and there's this investment and you can only have input into someone's life if you already have an investment there and gymnastics gives them this ability to have an investment and all of a sudden this relationship is built like it's wanted outside the gym. Yeah, I get pictures all the time. Actually, a lot of the girls and they are hanging out at the park. I think it's really done well with bridging that gap between the community and sport and it's not two completely different worlds. It's really cool.

### **Child Care**

Apart from transporting other kids, many parents have benefitted from child care by others involved with the organization. After the birth of my son, I have taken him with me to tennis practice and on a few occasions I have left him with Octavia. If he fell asleep in the car seat, I would just put him in her car and she would watch him. The first time coach John noticed she was watching him, he said: "Oh, Miss Octavia is great. She's watched my daughter plenty of times!"

Jasmine also spoke about a grandma, whom she knew from the ministry (I assumed this was Octavia), offering to watch her kids:

Well, I think that we were at VM for the football and cheerleading banquet and I sat with one of Cameron's classmates and Mr. Jones came and sat down with us too. And we just happened to be talking and Mr. Jones knows that next year I will probably be a single mom here in Athens because my husband is moving in the summer to go start his doctorate somewhere so next year will be challenging – doing my dissertation and having the 2 of them. But were talking about it a little bit and the boy from her class, his grandmother, she told me if I ever needed help then or even now to let her know because she doesn't work and we exchanged numbers and every time she sees me, she remind me that she was serious about offering the help and so she didn't have to do that.

### **Coaches Acting as Parents**

Many of the coaches take on parental roles by asking for progress reports, calling kids' teachers at school, and taking a deeper interest in participating children.

On the topic Patricia said:

This is something that the teams implemented this year.

Bringing in progress reports so we can say, hey what's the problem here? And listening to a lot of the coaches, they think that grades are more important than playing football. It's an extracurricular activity for you to do but if your grades are not there, do you think you should be able to play? Even when you get to the middle school or high school age group, you have to have the grades to play. So if

you don't have them, then you don't play. And this is something that they need to do.

The organization itself has become a safe haven for children whose parents may have failed or cannot provide the needed guidance and structure. Coach Fred talked about how the organization was sought after by police officer who knew that if they get the kids involved, it would help get them back on track:

When I first got there, that's the biggest change. He grew up in the system. I can see the change overall. It's a big change overall from when I first got there to you know there now. When I first got there, there were probation officers at the game. That's how the kids would get to the game. For real! Now you've got the same thing. You know, now the probation officer trying to put them in the program, trying to straighten them off. Before, the probation officer is taking you to the game because he doesn't believe you are actually going to the game. I'ma see if you are lying or you are actually there playing. Now, it's about we need to get you in this organization. And then get your life straight.

This also relates to the big change in the organization where it has gotten a reputation for being able to intervene and help children where other programs and efforts have failed.

**Giving back to the Community: "If you got your fingers curled up, you can't give anybody anything and you can't receive anything."**

Patricia attested to the desire to teach the kids to support their local community by doing various outreach activities. She said that every year is different and some years there is more involvement than others depending on the parents. This year in particular, it rained

quite often and the football schedule was all over the place with practice and making up official games. She described it this way:

We do community outreach. We even do community clean ups in some of the neighborhoods. Whoever was willing to show up. We put it out there for all age groups so whoever showed up, that's what we did. We actually had some stuff schedules that we weren't able to do because of the rain so we want to do going into a nursing home and doing a play date kind of thing with the senior citizens but it kinda got pushed off. We try to kinda keep them understanding that you gotta give back for you to receive. If you got your fingers curled up, you can't give anybody anything and you can't receive anything. So we try to get them to understand – it's not about you all the times. Sometimes you have to have somebody else especially our elders because you gotta be there one day and you don't want some smart mouth kid Get your old self out of the way! You know, you don't want that kind of thing. You want to be respectful to anybody, not just necessarily your elders but anybody.

### **Spiritual Aspect**

As pointed in the introduction and already mentioned in several accounts by participants, the organization is faith-based and incorporates Christian teachings and Christ-likeness in its programming. Many of the participants were attracted to the organization because of this part of its mission and specifically pointed to scenarios where this aspect was played out through and during sports activities.

Miss Octavia spoke about the Christian influence of the academy and sports on her grandson Steve:

The foundation of going to a Christian school is just no better thing for him to do. Something I could've never afforded on my own. Now, almost every night he says the blessing at the table, you know. If somebody's sick "can I pray for you?" So it's a lot of positive in there that I think will make him a better man. Like coach John says. We want to be here now but we want the boys to know that even when they're older and they're teens and stuff they can always come back to us and stuff. And when they need mentoring that was here for them, we're not just a school, we're not just a football team, but we are a FAMILY. So that's what I like because they really do brace the fact that they are a family. School – get to know all the parents. If they don't know you – that's your fault because they know all the parents. Know what your needs are. Praying for you like last year, this year, when I really didn't have transportation to get Steve back and forth Ms. Octavia we appreciate you bringing him on the bus because we don't live close enough for him to catch the school bus so I have to make sure I get a ride, I get a ride to pick him up. But since now we got blessed with the truck, I don't have that worry no more but they've always been there. Ms. Ostavia, you're the best grandma because you bring him on the bus when you don't have to if he goes to the neighborhood school. So they make me feel good about myself too that I'm sacrificing. My sacrifice is not for nothing. Cause everyone needs a pad on the back sometimes, you know. The school is good about that, they are really good about that. It's an excellent school. I tell people all the time about the programs. I met a lady on the bus, matter of fact early this year, but I don't know if she got in touch cause it might have been too late. She said "my son want to get on the

basketball team” and I said you got your boys cause she had the boys then on the bus and you know what’s the name, I gave her the name and I gave her coach John’s number and stuff and told her to get in touch with them – they are a good ministry to get involved with. I think about her a lot cause I didn’t get her number. I asked Coach Tammy to talk about the ministry aspect and the prayer that is incorporated in gymnastics and how she sees it work. She responded:

So the majority of our girls are African American and we have one Caucasian girl. All it means that especially in impoverished African American cultures, there can be a lot of resilience and I guess the main characteristic that is needed is to survive that lifestyle kind of thing and it’s almost whoever develops it can be successful and whoever doesn’t does not. They are already fighting so many odds and influencing factors in their lives so one of the influencing factors of resilience is religion. And so religious based basically, you never want to press that onto the girls but you want to make sure they have the space where they can watch that example. And again, prayer to us means that 1) we truly believe that we are praying to a God who is bigger than our circumstances and a God that no matter what life throws at them, He will never leave them or forsake them so having us right now, maybe we are the vehicle for that relationship. We are using gymnastics as the vehicle to build a relationship with the most Holy God. Like that’s crazy! That’s an awesome experience to do that. So we show prayer in there to definitely pray for them and intercede on their behalf but we also flip it around. So at the beginning of practice we have them pray for us as coaches. We decided to do that this year and may have done it in the past but it’s really more of a

tradition this year. For that empowerment piece that you can do it too. We are examples of it but you can do it too. We want to pass it on to you. It's like this verse in Timothy, don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Their voice is powerful and they need to know that. And their relationship with God is their own and it's not through adults. So we both pray for them and want to intercede on their behalf to show how much the Lord loves them and how much their life now has this redemptive value. And also to say that you are the Lord's and your relationship with the Lord is not contingent on anyone or anyone doing something for you.

On the football field, coach Fred also talked about God's hand in him joining the organization and later applying the Christian Gospel to sport:

Cause see when God opened a door, he opened it all the way up for you to be able to go in and be right where you need to be when you need to be there. And I felt like I needed to be there. Like I said being with the Eagles taught me being a Christian and everything more than just going to church cause with the Eagles you have to apply the Gospel. It's every day. It's not just going to church, now you have to apply the message. And then that's the difference between real and fake, life and death. You know it just the application of the message. Over there with the Eagles you have to apply it... I've been there so long that it's home now.

He also added another story later in the interview:

I like coaching these kids. It's something from God. It's actually a blessing. The best thing is giving me the coach of the year. That was really good. That was better than winning the real one. I wish I won the real one but that's better. That's

like I said, your family gave that. I felt good about that. It's like your job giving you a birthday party, most people came to get some of the birthday cake but they don't really care about you. But you know when go home and your baby has a little birthday hat on and you might start tearing a little, this is how I feel, This is my partners, you know, they got all the little kids give me a hand clap. Oh, that's great! I didn't cry... Yes, I did. I'm like a maple tree. I'm leaking.

Coach Lael attested to how the ministry impacts the children involved:

I loved seeing how excited the girls got about using their bodies and becoming much stronger. I loved seeing how the challenge of the sport motivated them in areas beyond just the sport. They were learning discipline. Man, so many different things! One of the things that was kind of a simple focus but I think had a huge impact on the girls was understanding the value of their bodies. And the value of how God made them to grow stronger and he made them beautiful and He made them to dance during our dance portions. So it was just entirely different view of themselves than someone has ever projected onto them before. It wasn't sexual and I think seeing that with the older girls and the coaches was really powerful with them. I loved gymnastics.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the document analysis, described my field site, introduced the participants, included observations, and listed the emergent themes by research question. I concluded with the overarching theme of spiritual aspect of the organization; showed how it appears multiple times in the data, and how it was intertwined with the rest of the highlighted themes. In the following chapter I explain

why this organization continues to make an impact in the community it serves and is successful in building relationships among the people involved in its programs.

## CHAPTER 5

### DICUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the main barriers low-income African American families face to sport participation and to understand how the organization being studied succeeds in fostering communities within and outside the sports field. I used ethnographic methods of interviews, observations, and document analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of families, coaches, and volunteers in the programs offered by the nonprofit organization.

#### **Discussion**

There were three research questions that guided this study: 1) What are the main barriers for sport participation of low-income African American parents taking part in this program? 2) In what ways has the program enhanced the lives of its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers? 3) In what ways has the program achieved building social capital among its participants, their families, coaches, and volunteers?

#### **Barriers to Participation**

The first research question aimed to understand the main barriers low-income, African American parents face in terms of their children participating in sport. Data showed that there are four main themes that comprise barriers to participation – transportation, venues, competitiveness, and financial barriers.

For many of the families, getting to and from practices was one of the major barriers to participation (Project Play, 2015). Hoefer et al. (2001) suggested that parents

providing transportation to physical activity locations impacts Black children's participation in sports teams and physical activity classes and that boys were transported more to sports locations than were girls suggesting that girls were participating even less. The organization provided a bus that transported some of the children to football practice and the rest of the kids were picked up by neighboring parents, volunteers, or coaches, who very often drove out of their way to make sure every kid had a ride. This is congruent with the research that shows nonprofit organizations step in to act as agents of change in communities where local businesses and government have failed to provide opportunities for the local public (Bryce, 2005; Felkins & Croteau-Chonka, 2014; Frumkin, 2002). The organization also received a local grant through a car dealership and will be able to transport more children in the upcoming years, therefore it continues to strive to serve the local population that needs aid in this form.

Access to venues was another major obstacle when it came to finding spaces for the sport programs (Project Play, 2015). The ministry depended on the goodwill of organizations in the city that provided facilities in kind. One of the programs, which received a grant, was denied access to some of the nicer facilities in town by local parks and rec and was given an outdated location with limited space to play that particular sport. This points to the larger structural barriers these families face in society and that they are part of a system that often excludes them and automatically denies access to resources others can take advantage of (Coakley, 2009). This nonprofit organization has filled in a gap where state and private institutions have failed to provide adequate programming for inclusion of families when it comes to sport participation.

Competitiveness was another barrier that some of the families pointed to as an obstacle. There is an increase in elite level teams and academies that not only have high costs, but also do not give opportunities for all children to play as winning and competition are more important in elite training (Dyck, 2012; Project Play, 2015). Thus competitiveness creates a structure that is based on power and performance and the focus on pleasure and participation is lost (Coakley, 2009). This barrier mainly impacted football, as this is the only sport where children competed against other teams in the city. The organization and the coaches worked hard to ensure that all kids get a chance to compete and receive playing time.

Overall, financial barriers were the biggest obstacles to taking part in sport programming (Messner & Musto, 2014; Project Play, 2015). It was difficult for parents of children playing football to afford the cost and then pay for equipment at many of the other programs in the city. Vision provided a very low-cost opportunity, that participating families appreciated. Other programs like tennis were free because of a grant the organization secured, which provided for the very expensive equipment of this elite sport. In addition, children who were already enrolled in CA were able to take part in all the sports for free.

### **Life Enhancement**

The second research question targeted understanding of how the organization has enhanced the lives of its participants and volunteers. For the children, positive and structured environment, “your ability to just try”, positive self-image, and leadership roles were all results of taking part in the sports. Parents experienced increase in involvement and volunteers reported continuous learning and personal growth.

Positive and structured environment was highlighted as an important feature that the organization created for participating children (Lavoi, 2015b). When parents sign up their kids for sports, staying out of trouble and away from the wrong crowds and drugs are some of the main reasons why they want them to participate (Dyck, 2012). Many of them lacked structure at home and the ministry provided role models, organized schedules, checked their progress at school, and used various ways to discipline them when acting out on the field or in school. The organization was able to do these things because the people involved established deeper, meaningful relationships with the participating children who respected them and listened when they spoke.

Constant encouragement and embracing failure or “Your ability to just try” was another major theme identified in the data. For many of the coaches and volunteers, it was important to see the children try and fail in order to understand that in life it is important to keep trying and not give up. One of the coaches, Tammy, described it as embracing failure and attributing it to growth as she said:

I can't control your change but that's what we hope for - that it happens. It's encouraging when it happens. That's what I see in the girls. I see a change in the way that they approach failure. This is powerful. When you can change the way you see and approach failure, it's not a fixed thing, but it's a growth thing. It's that thinking when I fail I'm a failure, it's fixed, which means you don't move as a person. Make it a growth thing. OK, when I fail - I learn. That kind of thinking is completely different.

Thus, the coaches were able to even transform failure into a tool to build resilience and build a growth experience. This was something that the children can take home and hopefully use in fighting the large number of everyday challenges they face in their lives.

Many of the children participating exhibited leadership roles and assisted coaches and volunteers in leading the programs. This was encouraging to see and led to the implementation of more kids being encouraged to take those roles, especially after they reach a certain age and no longer seem to be having fun with the younger kids. The girls in gymnastics were taking pride in assisting the coaches and implemented their given tasks without hesitation. Here, the younger children were learning from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1978) who was also a peer and looked like them. As Vygotsky (1978) wrote, development occurs in a social setting where speech and practical activity are combined and VM provides just that for the participating children. And they learn not only from adults but also from peers that look and act like them which is valuable and also leads to a more positive self-image as described in the following paragraph.

Positive self-image was linked with the ability to make friends as the ministry strives to ensure all children involved get along and are respectful to each other. Also, being around other children from the same race aided in the formation of positive image about their own skin color.

Parental involvement grew for many of the parents who initially only joined as spectators and supporters of the teams their children were playing on. With time, some became more invested in the sport programs and one even converted to the main team mom and a liaison between the head coach and all parents. Even in the organization as a

whole, parental involvement grew. When the organization was first founded, volunteers from the local university were the only ones coaching and driving the participating children. Today, most of the coaches have a kid in the program and are involved with the organization of practices and taking the kids to and from practices.

### **Building of Social Capital**

The mission of the organization is:

*“Vision Ministries is an organization that builds consistent relationships with youth and their families in the inner-city through programs that demonstrate Christ-centered hope and encouragement. It is a non-profit organization that engages youth and their families in this inner-city through sports programs, after-school programs, Vision Academy, and other community projects. Our programs and activities promote personal and spiritual renewal as well as community restoration.”*

Therefore, their main goal is to intentionally build relationships with community members, which ultimately builds social capital (Putnam, 2001). The various sport opportunities have provided parents and community members with a common ground to meet, interact, and create bonds (Coalter, 2013). The results of this study show that there are five main avenues where the organization is succeeding in building social capital: community, which identifies as a family; relationships built during car rides; child care support; giving back to the community, and spiritual growth and support.

Over time, the ministry assisted in building a community whose members identify as a family. Participants described the environment at VM events as very friendly and resembling that of a family:

“It’s just more like a family atmosphere since that’s a goal that they are trying to provide that kind of support system for the children that do participate. So that’s really nice to be around friendly people and people who care. Not saying that people don’t care in the other things but it’s just a little bit different. Like you don’t see people hugging or kissing on the cheek and people taking that time I don’t think you normally see that at the average extracurricular activity. I don’t think I’ve ever seen that really at an extracurricular activity.”

One of the areas where this sense of family plays out is when coaches and volunteers take time outside of practice to spend time with the children and sometimes their parents. Also, being supportive at specific times such as when there is a death in the family or through raising funds to help with the expenses in dire situations, manifests the mission of the organization being lived out in day-to-day activities. These are both examples of the ministry creating bonding (family like) social capital and bridging (people of different backgrounds form close-nit relationships) by fostering a family environment between children, coaches, volunteers, and parents (Putnam, 2001). These kind of close relationships allow for the easy exchange of favors and filling of gaps when a family or a participant is struggling in life and other have been able to step in financially or give their time to aid with whatever resources they may have such as providing child care.

One of the major barriers for children to participate in the sport programs was transportation. However, when volunteers and other parents gave rides to kids in need, this provided an opportunity for them to connect, have meaningful conversations, and establish relationships with them. Families, part of the organization, also supported each

other by offering to watch or help out with each other's kids. Many of the parents benefited from others' offering to step in when a child was sick, a spouse was out of town, or simply helped out during practices with some of the younger kids of coaches.

### **Spirituality**

The spiritual aspect of the ministry was what held it all together and helped all programming and the mission of the organization succeed (Hoffman, 2010). Many of the participants identified the importance of participating in a Christian-based organization and the benefits it provides for them and the participating children:

Cause see, when God opened a door, he opened it all the way up for you to be able to go in and be right where you need to be when you need to be there. And I felt like I needed to be there. Like I said being with the Eagles taught me being a Christian and everything more than just going to church, cause with the Eagles you have to apply the Gospel. It's every day. It's not just going to church, now you have to apply the message. And then that's the difference between real and fake, life and death. You know it just the application of the message. Over there with the Eagles you have to apply it... I've been there so long that its home now.

The organization started as an outreach branch of a local church and grew as its own organization with a separate mission and vision, which represents the experiences of other churches and organizations in the United States (Hoffman, 2010). The organizations' foundation on Christian principles is what attracted many of the families involved and those principals contributed the close-knit relationships as one of the participating parents noted:

The environment is just different with Vision Ministries because prayer is a part of it and it's just more like a family atmosphere since that's a goal that they are trying to provide that kind of support system for the children that do participate. As a coach, parent, and an observer, I had the opportunity to experience the way Christ-likeness was exhibited, and it varied through the different sport activities. For example, football incorporated the Christian Gospel during practice and games, using bible verses on the banner players ran through at the beginning of official games; tennis participants formed prayer circles at the end of each practice and prayed for one another and the coaches; gymnastics also had prayer circles and talked about the Bible and the worth of the girls in God's eyes.

### **Conclusion**

This research study builds on previous literature published on sport for social change and looked at how a sport organization is bringing change and influencing its participants, their families, and their surrounding communities. Using critical theory, social capital theory, social learning theories and ethnographic methods of observations, interviews, and document analysis, this research was able to determine the main barriers families face to sport participation; the way the program was able to enhance the lives of people involved with the organization; and how a community was fostered within and outside of the sporting events and programming provided by the organization.

There were several barriers that families faced that prevented them from participating in the sports the organization offered: transportation, venues, competitiveness, and financial. The organization was able to step in and fill the needs of most families and attract others who were in similar circumstances. Volunteers and other

parents were able to step in and assist through providing rides, applying for grants to provide equipment or more vehicles, and spread the word about the ministry and the non-competitive nature of most sports.

The organization was able to enhance or better the lives of its participants through positive and structured environment, constant encouragement and embracing failure, leadership roles, positive self-image, growth of parental involvement, and continuous learning and personal growth. Some of the practices which contributed to the organization's success in these areas were providing role models, embracing failure and encouraging small and slow progress, and having an accepting and loving environment and friends.

Participants in the sport programs were also able to form community relationships and build social capital. They were able to do so through a family atmosphere, close relationships, turning barriers like into opportunities to build relationships with the children, providing child-care to each other, encouraging coaches to take on parental attitudes, and giving back to the community through various initiatives. This overall sense and feeling of community led the participants to feel free to offer favors and a helping hand when needed. It was very much the communal atmosphere that contributed to the ability of volunteers, coaches and parents to influence, love, and support the children involved and built lasting relationships with them.

The organization being a Christian ministry is what aided in the building of the said communal atmosphere, and the ability to draw volunteers and coaches determined to provide constant encouragement and love the children involved. The ministry aspect of the organization contributed to the ability of the volunteers to embrace the children in

ways that a regular sport program cannot or is even prohibited to (hugging, picking kids up, etc.).

The organization is constantly changing based on the needs of the community they serve. Therefore, they are open to propositions for improvement and ways to better their programming. Suggestions for the organization follow in the implications listed below.

### **Implications**

The findings of this research point to the successful practices an organization has implemented to transcend barriers to sport participation, enhance the lives of its participants and their families, and have fostered community relationships outside of sports. These practices can be useful for other organizations that serve youth, and more specifically low-income groups, populations of color, and/or offer sport programming. Although these findings cannot be generalized to all nonprofit organizations that target similar groups, they provide useful information for other NPO's, policy makers, and funders who can learn from the recommendations discussed below.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that participants and their families benefited from their involvement in the ministry's programming. In order for programs to be successful, they need to be intentional and serve communities where there is a need. The organization saw a gap, which local recreational and for profit organizations failed to fill, and provided sports at low or no cost to participants. Once the organization began serving that particular population, they expanded the services they offered with one of the most current developments – starting a private Christian school for the children they initially began serving through sport.

Another reason for success was the play versus competition model. The children thrived in an environment where competition is important and celebrated but it was not the main goal of the sport programs. The main goal was to teach the children values and support them on and off the field. The spiritual aspect of the organization helped in this instance, as it provided an opportunity to explain love and compassion through a Christian lens. Teaching the children to embrace failure and find courage to continue even when they are not at their best is another example of a successful practice that other organizations can replicate or implement in their programming.

Giving the children leadership opportunities and ways to serve was another successful practice. Children that were in the program for a few seasons were given an opportunity to help the volunteers by taking attendance or notes during practice. A suggestion that came from three of the coaches (including myself as a coach) was to create a system where the children that have been in the program for a few years, or until they turn 14 and can no longer participate in most sports, can become coaches and receive a stipend for doing so. This can motivate them to be consistent in going to practices and doing well. The motivation of receiving a stipend can also help them stay on track.

Another important aspect of the children coming back to serve as coaches, is that they are from the same demographic group as the kids being served, and they understand the needs better than most volunteers. The demographic of most volunteers was white, middle or upper-middle class, college educated men and women for most sports. Football was the only sport where most of the coaches were black, as they were parents of the participating boys.

For many of the participating families cost of attendance and equipment were the main reasons their children were not involved in other sport programs in the city.

Therefore, other organizations serving similar populations might want to apply for grants and seek more funding from donors which would allow them to reach the families that need the programming the most. One strategy that Vision Ministries used, was to provide volunteering opportunities for parents who could not pay even the \$25 fee for the sport their child wanted to play. They could come and work concessions for two games to cover the cost. Even if the parents did not volunteer, the children still participated, but that was one way for the parents to feel like participation in the program was not a total hand out.

Volunteer training opportunities came up multiple times in the data. Some of the leading coaches spoke about how overwhelmed they were with all the responsibilities – keeping the children safe, talking to the parents, dealing with paperwork – which left very little time to help the volunteers feel equipped to handle the children and understand how to best help them when they misbehave. Some of the coaches spoke about the need for consistency in terms of how the children were being disciplined when they acted out. Like most nonprofit organizations, resources are always an issue when it comes to providing more help to volunteers. Perhaps the organization can recruit at least two people from the School of Social Work or Nonprofit Management degree seeking students to aid in facilitating volunteers and volunteer training in order to ensure consistency and aid the leading program coaches with at least handling one aspect of their duties.

Overall, this research shows that sports programs have the ability to enhance the lives of their participants, parents, and the volunteers involved. They provide a positive, structured environment, teach youth to embrace failure, encourage children to take on leadership roles, establish a positive self-image among participants, and foster growth of parental involvement. Other organizations can learn from the successes and failures provided in this in-depth study of a sport nonprofit and implement similar programming that would strengthen relationships in communities, which most need them.

### **Future Research**

With the growth of universities offering specialization in sport ministries, there is a need for more research on how these organizations succeed. More specifically, research on how various sports differ when integrated with spirituality should be conducted. For example, football was the most competitive program and their ability to foster a community environment looked different than girls' gymnastics where the kids did not compete.

There could be more research done to look at how spirituality aided in reaching this specific demographic and whether race is a factor in the success of such programs. This could be done with a comparative study between a program that serves similar socioeconomic demographic but serving Hispanic or white children. This could lead to suggestions for specifically or similarly designed programs for children representing various racial groups who use sport and spirituality to build sustainable communities.

There is also room to look at how programs of this kind influence participants of different genders. For example, are programs that target low income girls more successful when using a non-competitive model or is competitiveness an avenue to teach the girls

perseverance and confidence? The organization also offered a co-ed basketball team, which some of the parents really liked as it taught their children how to interact with both genders and that boys and girls are equal.

Also, looking at the intersection of race and gender – were race and gender factors in terms of how such programs are able to achieve their goals and how to better serve African American girls or boys? It is important to know if intersectionality is a factor in order to provide programming adequate to the needs of both minorities and different genders. Perhaps a comparative study or two separate in-depth studies that look at similar sports offered by organizations aiming to bring about social change.

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## APPENDICES

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
CONSENT FORM  
“SPORT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE CITY”**

**Researcher’s Statement**

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

**Principal Investigator:** *Billy Hawkins*  
*Kinesiology Department at the University of Georgia*  
[bhawk@uga.edu](mailto:bhawk@uga.edu)  
 (706) 542-4427

**Purpose of the Study**

This study will look at the sports the children play and the involvement of parents, coaches, volunteers and staff from the organization offering the sports. We are interested in learning more about the experiences of all participants and the building of community relationships.

You are asked to participate because you are either a coach, a volunteer, or a staff member of the organization.

**Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- If you are a volunteer, coach, or a staff member, you may be asked to participate in a semi-structured less than 1 hour-long interview and will be asked questions about your involvement and experience with the program. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

**Risks and discomforts**

- There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts that this research may lead to.

**Benefits**

- There are no direct benefits to any of the participants in this research.
- This research will help understand how non-profits sport programs serve local communities and how they help them in their everyday lives.

**Incentives for participation**

There are no incentives (gifts) to participation in this program.

### **Audio/Video Recording**

Only about 8-10 interviews with adults will be audio recorded and those participants will be specifically asked if they agree to be audio recorded prior to the interview. Those recordings will be deleted after transcription.

If this research is submitted for publication, all names of participants and identifying information will be removed from all writings. Participants will be assigned pseudonyms.

### **Privacy/Confidentiality**

Identifying information like the location and name of the program will not be included in the research and in following research reports and publications. Also, names of participants will be substituted for alternative names or pseudonyms so that participants' privacy is kept. Audio recordings will be deleted after transcription (which will take place right after collecting) and names of participants will be substituted for pseudonyms in the transcripts.

### **Taking part is voluntary**

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that the researcher can identify as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

### **If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is Billy Hawkins, a professor at the University of Georgia. His graduate student, Velina Brackebusch will be collecting data. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Billy Hawkins at [bhawk@uga.edu](mailto:bhawk@uga.edu) or at (706) 542-4427. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

### **Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

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Name of Researcher

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Signature

Date

---

Name of Participant

---

Signature

Date