Research Article

Exploring the Impact of Soccer Camp on Social Identity for Youth with Cerebral Palsy

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ABSTRACT

Background: The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an exclusive, residential cerebral palsy (CP) soccer camp on social identity for youth with CP. Using a basic qualitative methods approach, the aim of this study was to explain the six-day CP soccer camp experience from the campers' perspective, guided by the three processes of Social Identity Theory (SIT), to determine if a CP soccer camp setting impacted the development of the participants' social identity. **Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were collected online through video software from 13 participants who were purposefully sampled between the ages of 10-18. Qualitative data was initially analyzed through a deductive coding lens, then further analyzed through an inductive coding process. **Results:** Findings suggest that participation in an intentionally designed, exclusive, residential CP soccer camp supported two of the three processes in SIT and provided opportunities for youth with CP to feel connected and similar to others with disabilities. Participants enjoyed being around other individuals with CP in a supportive sport environment. **Conclusion:** This study indicated that CP soccer camp assisted in the campers' social identity development in two of the three processes of SIT. Future research implications are discussed.

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCCER CAMP ON SOCIAL IDENTITY FOR YOUTH WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Cerebral palsy (CP) has been diagnosed in approximately 17 million individuals worldwide and is identified as the most common motor disability in youth (Cerebral Palsy Alliance, n.d.). Medically, CP influences an individual's ability to control motor functioning due to delayed or damaged development of the brain (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). Consequently, although one in three persons with CP are unable to walk due to their level of delayed motor function (Cerebral Palsy Alliance, n.d.), there are individuals with this diagnosis who walk with an assistive device or have the ability to ambulate independently.

For individuals with primarily neurological or visual impairments, or physical disabilities such as CP or amputations, adaptive sports are often referred to as Para sports meaning parallel to Olympic style sports. In Para sports, the rules of the sport itself may slightly change depending on individuals' functional abilities, such as sight, balance, range of motion, and strength. Modifications are also often made to best accommodate the ability level of a person with a disability (PWD). Examples of Para sports would be activities like 7-a-side CP soccer, wheelchair basketball, or goalball.

Keywords: cerebral palsy; Para sports; camp; social identity theory; disability

Researchers have found that individuals' involvement in Para sports has provided competence in skill development (Groff & Kleiber, 2001), a sense of normalcy (Lundberg et al., 2011), and a sense of connectedness (Shapiro & Martin, 2010). Blinde and McClung (1997) also indicate that Para sports have the ability to impact PWD by increasing confidence to try new activities, redefining physical capabilities, and assisting with the initiation of social interactions, often leading to a greater sense of overall ability. In so doing, such beneficial growth opportunities can lead to positive identity and self-image.

Identity development occurs by having personal perceptions of the self, then engaging in social interactions to determine if the perceptions of others validate that self-identity (Zabriskie et al., 2005). Social identity theory (SIT) helps us understand this further because as individuals view themselves as a member of a specific group, they place their value and emotional significance within that group. In doing so, these individuals believe that they belong to a social category through this identification. Since there is limited research on SIT specific to youth with disabilities, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an exclusive, residential CP soccer camp on social identity for youth with CP.

Cerebral Palsy (CP)

CP is a life-long, non-progressive condition that is considered to be the most common physical disability in youth (Cerebral Palsy Alliance, n.d.). It occurs before, during, or shortly after birth and is caused by delayed development of the brain or damage to the outer layer of the brain that controls posture and muscle movements throughout the body (Cerebral Palsy Foundation, n.d.; Cerebral Palsy Alliance, n.d.). Overall, CP limits range of motion and results in muscle weakness, which often affects fine and gross motor functioning. Beckung and Hagberg (2002) identify that impaired motor functioning is a precursor for restrictive participation in societal activities for individuals with CP because programs often do not make adequate accommodations to allow participation. While there may be a lack of research that identifies barriers specific to individuals with CP, researchers have found that intentional attitudinal or social barriers have prevented individuals with physical disabilities, including those with CP, from participating in recreational programs (Úbeda-Colomer et al., 2019).

Barriers

In order to create positive recreation environments and effective exercise opportunities for youth with disabilities, it is important for parents, health professionals, and teachers to recognize why there is limited participation in physical activity, and if possible, how to decrease the controllable barrier(s). Shields et al. (2012) completed a systematic review with 14 articles that identified four main barriers to physical activity for youth with disabilities: (a) personal, (b) environmental, (c) social, and (d) program. Personal barriers include but are not limited to PWD's lack of physical and social skills, fear, and lack of knowledge or awareness about the exercise. Environmental barriers encompass inadequate facilities (e.g., geographic location of facility, inaccessible facility, lack of adaptive equipment), and lack of transportation. Barriers that involve parental actions, unsupportive peers or lack of friends, or negative societal attitudes are considered social barriers. Program barriers can also prevent PWD from participating in physical activity or recreation. These include the scarcity of appropriate physical activity programs, lack of staff capacity, negative staff attitudes, and participation cost (Shields et al., 2012). Wingo et al. (2020) also identified barriers largely related to a lack of resources or opportunities that might exist for sport and recreation. One such example might be when the built environment is not adequately modified to allow for maximum participation (Wingo et al., 2020).

Para Sport

Groff and Kleiber (2001) found that Para sports play an important role for youth with disabilities. Specifically, they found sport is used as a tool for self-perception development, group identity facilitation, an expression outlet, and a decrease in awareness of disability.

For the purpose of this paper, the authors have chosen to use the term Para sport versus adaptive sport for two reasons. First, there are some cases, such as goalball, where there is no non-disabled equivalent sport and thus adaptive sport does not adequately describe the activity as it would not have been adapted from anything else. Second, the authors felt that Para sport more closely aligns all sport for PWD by providing parallel activities that can encourage ownership of their sport rather than the notion that a sport for a PWD is a modification of a sport that is not their own. For example, 7-a-side soccer, or CP soccer, is one of the Para sport opportunities for individuals with CP who can walk independently. CP soccer has minor adjustments to accommodate PWD who qualify for the game such as being able to take a throw-in by rolling the ball into play (International Federation of Cerebral Palsy Football, n.d.).

Although athletes who have experienced a traumatic brain injury, stroke, or other neurological impairments qualify to

play CP soccer at all sport levels, sport participation with individuals who have similar experiences provides non-sport related benefits also. For example, participation in sport allows athletes an opportunity to develop their personal identity, unite and experience acceptance by peers (Cass, 1984), as well as develop relationships (Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002; International Federation of Cerebral Palsy Football, 2019). Participants who engage in Para sports with others who have a similar disability have an opportunity to experience connectedness in a social context such as camp (Shapiro & Martin, 2010).

Camp

Camp opportunities span a variety of categories, and may focus on outdoor adventure, health or fitness, or sports skills. Depending on the design of the camp, youth have options to attend a day camp for a few hours over several days, or they can participate in a residential camp with involvement during all hours of the day for a week or more (Garst et al., 2011). Residential camps tend to be readily accessible, and the camp experience is known to promote independence, self-esteem, and new skill development (Klee et al., 1997). The residential setting creates opportunities for campers to increase their independence and confidence by separating themselves from their parents for an extended amount of time (Garst et al., 2016; Richmond et al., 2019). While being surrounded by individuals like themselves in a program setting for multiple days (e.g., residential camp), participants have the ability to explore how they perceive themselves belonging to a group (e.g., PWD) in a social context (Hall et al., 2018).

While there are several camp opportunities for typically developing youth, there are fewer opportunities for those with disabilities (Devine & Dawson, 2010). Camps for PWD can be classified into various structural types, such as exclusive or inclusive camps (D'Eloia & Price, 2018). Inclusive camps provide programming for individuals with and without disabilities together. These camps are similar to integrated school classrooms, seeking to provide an environment where everyone feels welcomed and incorporated into society in a least-restrictive environment (D'Eloia & Price, 2018). However, researchers have found that PWD who attended inclusive camps have experienced rejection from peers without disabilities, which can lead to feelings of isolation, restricted socialization, and exclusion (Blinde & McCallister, 1998; Taub & Greer, 2000). Furthermore, when inclusive camp activities are competitive and focus on skill (i.e., sport camps), negative attitudes and perceptions can be produced towards PWD (Devine & Wilhite, 1999). Thus, it is important that PWD have an opportunity to attend camps with others who are experiencing equivalent life situations such as the camp identified in this study.

Garst et al. (2011) noted that one of the important elements of camp is experiencing various aspects of life together or group living (i.e., eating, playing, and sleeping). During residential camps, time is allotted for rest or relaxation in between activity sessions or in the evenings. The downtime, or unstructured time together, provides a unique opportunity for campers to interact socially, with conversation about personal experiences and common interests between peers (D'Eloia & Price, 2018). For youth with disabilities attending exclusive camps, these conversations have the potential to steer toward topics about similarities in lifestyles or past experiences and identity.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is defined as "that part of the individual's self-concept which is derived from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 255). In reference to the previous definition, researchers describe a social group as a membership where individuals feel a belonging to and perceive themselves as a part of a group, and those individuals are acknowledged by others as a member of that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte, 2006).

Within a social group, individuals have shared prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and values (Arthur-Banning et al., 2007; Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). A person goes through three important processes in order to form their social identity. The first process is called social categorization where an individual classifies or categorizes himself/herself in relation to social categories (Stets & Burke, 2000). These social categorizations are cognitive tools used to "segment, classify, and order the social environment," (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40) that indicate a person's place in society. The second process is social identity, which is a self-evaluation component where the individual differentiates himself/herself from members of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This process consists of an individual's self-image, which could be positive or negative, that results from the social category in which he/she identifies himself/herself belonging. When an individual feels that they are similar to other group members, they believe they are part of the in-group. The in-group members will then compare themselves to the out-group, which is the process of social comparison, the third identified process (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The acceptance of others who are already part of the in-group is the strongest way to confirm that an individual is a member of

the group (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In order to further understand the context of SIT for the purpose of this study, it is important to understand the multiple elements that the influence of intergroup differentiation has as it relates to social settings. As part of the individual's self-concept, he/she must identify with the in-group and internalize that group's membership. Second, there must be a social situation for the group to compare and evaluate themselves, and third the out-group comparability, such as similarity and proximity, is a relevant comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Identity and People with Disabilities

Identity formation occurs when the individual can freely explore and choose alternate identities. However, some youth with disabilities already have their identity assigned because of the label of their disability based on aspects of themselves that cannot be disregarded or modified (Groff & Kleiber, 2001). Jeffress and Brown (2017) suggest that this label or stereotype is often a challenge, as individuals tend to treat them differently; however, this alternate identity is often an opportunity to remove some of the stereotypes and create bonding moments with friends. This opportunity to demonstrate athletic talent and prowess allows identity formation to perhaps differ from that of a PWD alone, as athleticism is an avenue for social capital to be built and a sense of normalcy to develop, particularly for youth engaged in sport trying to highlight their ability (Jeffress & Brown, 2017). For this reason, when similar sport interests are explored through activity participation, it provides an opportunity for an individual to relate and discover similarities between themselves and other participants. The more engagement one has with an activity, the more the person may incorporate that sense of identity (Groff & Kleiber, 2001). This provides opportunities for verification and acceptance from others who are already in the desired in-group (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017).

By working together and feeling connected to other youth with disabilities (Goodwin & Staples, 2005), researchers found that individuals were able to understand themselves better and identify with a group by using their performance from sport participation (Goodwin & Staples, 2005; Groff & Kleiber, 2001). This is perhaps why sport is documented as a context of recreation that is seen to facilitate and impact the development of personal and social identity, often positively (Groff & Kleiber, 2001; Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991; Shaw et al., 1995). Pica (2003) found that PWD who develop a sense of identity through sport at a young age are more likely to participate in physical activity as adults. SIT may help explain how youth achieve their identity based on the belonging and acceptance through social interactions the participant might experience in a Para sport setting. In particular, exclusive residential camps have demonstrated opportunity for positive identity development due to the unique interaction and bonding opportunities they provide (Fenton, 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an exclusive, residential CP soccer camp on social identity for youth with CP.

METHODS

This study was qualitative in nature, exploring participants' summer camp experience from their own perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research team sought to describe the commonalities between the participants who shared the same lived experiences (i.e., summer camp for individuals with CP), and in so doing, allowing the researchers to develop a collective description of that experience compiled from the individual perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected through interviews to better understand their experiences, with a particular focus on the impact of the exclusive, residential soccer camp on their social identity.

Program Description

A not-for-profit entity located in the Northeastern United States hosted its inaugural, six-day residential soccer camp in the summer of 2018 for youth with CP. Per suggestions from Shields et al. (2012), this camp sought to intentionally plan the physical, social, and programmatic elements of camp in order to achieve the intentional SIT outcomes desired. For example, as part of a program partnership, the camp was located at a university campus in Southeastern United States, which provided on-campus housing and dining for the participants, coaches, and volunteers. This allowed for the campers to interact with one another both socially and within the camp setting in a more intimate environment. It also encourages participants to socially surround themselves with kids just like them as few of them had even met others with similar disabilities, and certainly not been in camp with them for an extended period of time. The coaches provided supervision, instructional programming, and overall support for the participants. All coaches and camp volunteers had experience working with youth with CP prior to camp. The campers' soccer experience ranged from being new to the sport to already playing competitively. Although soccer was the focus, the camp provided structured and unstructured time where the campers were able to participate in a variety of other activities: watching FIFA World Cup soccer matches, hiking in a nearby forest, visiting a local dessert shop, reading a book, and socializing with peers in the dorms. In

addition to these other activities, some camp time was devoted to identity development and disability awareness such as a session in which participants discussed having CP and the similarities or different experiences each one faced. Furthermore, during this time the intentionality behind the different elements of the physical on-field sessions was also discussed. They were specifically designed to work on skills an athlete with CP may need to train differently due to their physical abilities, such as balance or limb spasticity.

Participants

Using a purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007) participants were invited to participate in this study if they met the following criteria: (a) were at least 10 years of age or older at the start of camp and (b) attended the entire six days of camp. Out of the 16 participants who attended camp, one did not meet the age requirement and two did not attend each day of camp, leaving 13 eligible participants who were contacted and agreed to participant in this study. Participants ranged in age from 10-18 with a mean age of 13.54 years old, 12 were male, and 1 was female.

Following Institutional Review Board approval, the primary researcher sent campers' parents an electronic letter via email that invited their child to voluntarily participate in the study. The letter described the purpose of the study, why their child was identified as a possible study participant, the expected interview process (i.e., length of interview, request to audio and video record interviews), and included the parent consent and child assent forms for the youth under 18 years old. All communication for participation in the study was done through the primary researcher and the parents. Those who were under 18 required a parental signature on the consent form in addition to assent, and the 18-year-old was required to verbally consent prior to participation in the study. For those parents who did not respond to the first point of contact, a follow-up email was sent after two weeks. A phone call was made by the researcher to initiate the last contact for the remaining two parents who did not respond to either email.

Positionality

The following statement is provided given the importance of understanding the social significant dimensions of the researcher in this study. The researcher was a female graduate student who has not lived with any of the disabilities identified in the participant population. She has a bachelor's degree in recreational therapy and has played soccer for over 20 years, thus understands the nature of both the population and the recreational context of the camp. Additionally, the researcher was a volunteer staff member of the camp supporting all elements of the management team and worked with the study participants daily throughout their camp experience. Thus, it was important that the data collection process reflected the participants' lived experiences and not that of the researcher. However, the relationship that was already established likely helped the study participants be more forthcoming about their experiences.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews took place eight months after camp. Although Erikson (1959) does not give a specific timeframe on the age when individuals' identity becomes the focus of development, individuals use information gathered from the self and the environment to evaluate their identity, then use that evaluation to determine if that label is appropriate (Anderson, 2004). Once identity alternatives have fully been explored, individuals can make a commitment towards their options to achieve their truest identity (Shaw et al., 1995). In the case of this study, the participants had an opportunity to partake in a diverse set of social and physical experiences with peers with disabilities, then return home to a setting that potentially challenged them to choose how they perceived themselves and how they presented themselves to others. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to provide eight months for the participants to evaluate themselves in a separate environment to determine if the soccer camp had lasting effects.

After the researcher obtained verbal or written consent and assent from the youth participants, a semi-structured interview was scheduled via Zoom, an online video software, between the researcher and the participant. Ten participants discussed their responses individually in a separate room away from their parents. Upon request, one parent from three separate participants sat in on their children's interview. Interviews lasted between 15-50 minutes and were recorded through a digital recording device. The Zoom software was used as a secondary device for audio and video recording. There were 31 semi-structured questions, with identity-related questions developed based on the SIT (i.e., social categorization, social identity, social comparison) to allow the campers to discuss their soccer and camp experience. Probing questions were used when necessary, in an effort to obtain further explanation from participants regarding their thoughts and ideas (Creswell, 2016).

Data Analysis Plan and Methodological Rigor

Prior to analysis, interviews were transcribed verbatim, and deidentified by the primary researcher. Pseudonyms were

used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. A second member of the research team, a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018) who was not part of the data collection or camp was then introduced to assist with data analysis.

To begin analysis, the researchers sought to follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis. Prior to coding, the primary researchers thoroughly read through interview transcriptions twice to familiarize themselves with the data. The researchers initially used deductive analysis to code interview content related to one of the three processes of SIT: social categorization, evaluation of social identity, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). After deductive coding, the researchers reviewed the transcripts for a third time to identify possible emerging themes that were not related to SIT through an inductive coding process. The researchers then reviewed all transcripts to identify the common themes across all interview data that resulted from deductive and inductive analysis. A research committee was also consistently involved to act as a sounding board in the critique, reflection, interpretation, and assumptions of the data and themes with the researcher. This provided opportunities for reflection on how the data had been understood and challenged, as well as how themes were developed. In an effort to reduce bias, two researchers analyzed the interviews independent of one another. After completing the analysis, the researchers met to determine levels of agreement regarding qualitative themes and findings. After discussing the definitions of the predetermined SIT categories used for deductive analysis and subsequent codes and themes from deductive and inductive analysis, the researchers deliberated initial thoughts, discussed, and subsequently reached 100% agreement regarding the final qualitative themes. Although Smith and McGannon (2018) suggested that inter-rater agreement is a problematic element of rigor partly due to a lack of threshold of agreement, the research team was able to come to complete agreement on final themes after discussion.

RESULTS

All of the camp participants had CP, were ambulatory, and represented 10 different states throughout the United States. As one of the many goals of camp was to gain independence, additional goals such as building self-esteem and making new friends with other kids while CP identity formation and development were built into the many of the elements of camp. Findings from the deductive analysis supported two of the three processes of SIT: social categorization and self-evaluation through social identity. Social comparison was not well represented within the data. There were three subthemes that emerged under social categorization: (a) disability, (b) sport generalized, and (c) soccer specific. Self-evaluation through social identity was supported with two subthemes: (a) individuals without disabilities and (b) in-group comparison. Inductive analysis revealed two additional themes separate from SIT: personal identity and group cohesion.

Deductive Results

Disability

Each of the 13 campers demonstrated their awareness of having a disability and understood that it was an element that qualified them to attend this specific camp. By setting aside specific times within the sport camp and allowing for down time where campers could be social, there was intentionality in encouraging discussion about their disabilities and their common differences. Although all camp participants had CP and were ambulatory, there were three campers who reported they had never been around a group of individuals who all had a disability before. Even the participants who had experience interacting with other individuals with a disability prior to camp discussed the disconnect in society, where there are not enough opportunities provided for groups of PWD to come together continue to develop their identities. This is one of the main reasons why the camp, in its program design and development, had opportunities such as team building or social conversations around disability built into the camp itinerary. For example, Liam expressed his fear about how individuals in society may treat him differently because of his disability, saying: "I [was] scared if some people said some bad things to me like 'Hey what's wrong with your hand?' or 'What's wrong with your speech?'." However, Logan expressed that "camp helped me identify people with disabilities and you can like 'Oh, he has a disability, but he still might be able to play soccer' and that helps."

Similarly, campers at CP soccer camp had different types of CP, which was clearly recognized by a number of campers who expressed the value of simply interacting with or having conversations about CP in camp with others who have CP to gain greater understanding with those like you. For example, Oliver mentioned he was aware of the range in severity and the location of limbs that are impacted. He stated: "We obviously all had disabilities, but some of us had one side. Like William has both legs and some people have both arms, but some of us have just one side, like I do." Campers indicated feeling more at ease with their disability because they could relate to their peers at camp and had the opportunity, both on the field or in other social events, to engage with other campers and talk about their

experiences. For example, James shared: "It made me feel happy to not be the only one struggling with this process and have other people that I can talk to about different things and go through with them; not just you having to go by yourself." It also allowed for Elijah to understand and accept his disability by being around and talking with others with CP through the formal discussion in the dorm or informally (social categorization): "It made me feel more at ease with CP, and I got to understand it a little more in depth." Finally, Ethan explained his camp experience with this example: "…you didn't feel any different, you felt included, you were no different from anyone else…you felt you belonged in the group because everyone had their own difficulties, and everyone shared their experiences."

Sport Generalized. Nine out of the 13 participants acknowledged their participation in sport, their love for sports, or their struggle with having a disability and participating in sports. Prior to camp, Noah was already involved in a sport club through his school. He gave this example: "I'm part of the ski club at school, so we go up every Friday to the mountain, snowboard for four hours." Another participant, James, discussed how he participates in various sports at the recreation level: "I just play soccer, but also play basketball in my back yard, and I also play lacrosse with my friends." Liam discussed he had participated in track before camp: "I run the 100 and 200 meters, and I broke two junior national record." Oliver had experience in a few other sports, "I play lots of sports. I play basketball, soccer, and skiing." However, Emma described her struggle with her disability and sport participation but also how the camp sport programming was able to help her see others like her and understand herself more fully:

I think what's been hard about sports and having a stroke and CP is they're two different worlds. The really hard thing, which I think CP Soccer really helped me with, was trying to find that bridge if you want to call it that. So that it can really be "These are kids that have CP that really enjoy sports and are passionate about that" because that's what I was. Before CP Soccer there was no bridge, and that's the thing that was lacking. I just didn't feel complete in the world of playing sports and being with a disability. (Emma)

These generalized sport elements lay the groundwork for the beginning of the social identity of the young participants, moving from a PWD to an athlete and allowing the sport camp program to shape their self-identities in positive ways by making comparisons to others around them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Soccer Specific. Ten participants expressed their love for soccer, whether it was their favorite sport or their reason for coming to camp. As there was a definite passion for the sport amongst the participants, Alexander highlighted his reasoning on why he continued to play after camp, stating: "Why do I still play? Ah because I love soccer. It's my favorite past time, it's what I love doing the most. I love playing soccer." Benjamin acknowledged how he currently categorizes his involvement in the sport itself, sharing: "…I do soccer more than a sport, more than for fun, I do it competitively."

Self-Evaluation through Social Identity

People without Disabilities. There was a strong representation of the participants defining themselves as different from people without disabilities. Amongst the group that participated in the study, the majority of them perceived themselves as being a member of a group with disabilities (self-identity). This group membership was acknowledged within the camp setting; however, campers' comparisons between themselves and people without disabilities were not within the camp context. With relation to the soccer experience where participants felt similar to their group membership of PWD, camp provided an opportunity for Mason to feel like the physical playing environment was more equal at camp as compared to his playing environment at home with friends:

I just like playing soccer. It is more matched because my other friends were faster than me because of my disability. I can't really run as well with my left foot, so I was matched up with speed I guess, so it is a lot fairer. (Mason)

Two separate participants commented on their soccer experience outside of camp: Benjamin said, "I train with regular kids," and Oliver shared, "we all have that experience if you're on another team, of kids not passing to you because they want to win, and they call you bad because you have a disability."

In-Group Age Difference. All participants classified themselves as having a disability through the social categorization process. Although they identified as being a member of that group, the majority of the participants also acknowledged the age difference when discussing their camp experience. Some individuals enjoyed the different age group structure of the camp, and the ages of other participants did not impact their experience. Noah for example, was more excited to be surrounded by a group of similar individuals rather than being impacted by the age difference. "It felt good to help kids and talk to some of the younger ones who are similar to me because I really haven't met anyone else with cerebral palsy before. So that was

pretty cool." Alexander followed in suit when elaborating on what they wanted to get out of camp without worrying about the age difference:

I went to camp with that mindset as well, where you know it doesn't matter if a kid's 9 or if he's 8 or just someone that's 18. You know the goal is to just have fun. It doesn't matter what age, it's just to enjoy yourself, help others have fun, and be comfortable with themselves. (Alexander)

In contrast, however, Lucas mentioned why the age difference negatively impacted his camp experience: "Just about the age difference, just with the little kids. Because they don't really like get it. This seemed like a game for them, but it really wasn't, it was serious."

In-Group Soccer Ability Level. The group of participants that attended camp ranged in soccer ability levels. One camper had never played soccer prior to coming to camp, while other campers were familiar with the sport based on past experience from recreational and travel teams. Of the participants that commented on ability levels, none of them mentioned that it negatively impacted camp. In fact, Logan enjoyed the varying abilities when talking about the difference in soccer experience between the campers: "…it was good because you could adapt to their skill level. It teaches you to play with different people." Elijah did not care about the difference in the campers' soccer experience: "It didn't really feel any different really. It was normal." Four out of the 10 individuals who discussed the ability levels as a difference between their in-group members mentioned disability as being a factor contributing to skill levels. Liam said:

Of course, the kids did not have as good skill as me. They may have more challenges or stronger CP than me, or they have stronger soccer skills than me or less challenges or less disability than me. So, you know, I don't really care about that. (Liam)

Benjamin commented on how everyone's disability provided an equal playing field between teams throughout camp: "You can make competitions kind of even. I'm a very competitive person. Well we both have CP and we both have challenges."

Inductive Results

Personal Identity

Personal identity was evident amongst the majority of the campers when asked to describe themselves by use of character traits or hobbies. Each camper acknowledged his/her disability through their life struggles or as an identifier for attending this specific camp, recognizing thus having cerebral palsy and demonstrating their own social identity dimension. However, when asked to describe themselves, 12 out of 13 individuals did not mention their disability. Individuals described themselves using other identifiers. For example, Logan shared, "I try to have a little fun every now and then, so. Pretty outgoing I guess I could say." Alexander described himself as more reserved: "I'm a little bit shy when you first meet me but once I get to know you, I'm quite open." Noah expressed himself using a variety of personal characteristics, "I have kind of an odd sense of humor. I enjoy all types of music. I like action movies and romantic movies. I really like computer science." A few participants shared their interest in sports when describing themselves. For example, William said: "I'm a happy human being, I like sports… I want people to be treated the way that they should." Finally, Lucas shared: "I like to play soccer, I like other things. I work out."

Group Cohesion

As the camp was intentionally designed for individuals with CP to play soccer and be social, their CP camper experience was important to ascertain. Eight campers supported the group cohesion theme as a result of camp with phrases that contained the words unity, comradery, connected, and similar. For example, James indicated enjoyment in being around others with disabilities: "I really liked how you… could just talk and everyone… would get it. You could just talk about your struggles and everyone would connect to it. I just think that was a cool part of camp." Oliver described the group at camp as a family:

I think it was really cool to be around people that you could relate to. It was like having a bunch of brothers and sisters around you because they'd be like "Awe yeah, that happens to me too." (Oliver)

While the majority of the group mentioned the sense of community as it related to their disability, Emma specifically gave an example of how soccer was used to connect the group during the unstructured time at camp:

We were all watching the South Korea x Germany game for the World Cup. We were all huddled around Michael's phone. That really like summed up the camp for me. It showed the unity and the community but yet there was still a point of "oh my gosh, we're in the real world, and like soccer!" (Emma)

DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Individuals with CP who attended camp have be negotiating this disability their entire lives. It is difficult to suggest that one week at camp can alter their entire notion of what is disability. Still, the thought was the camp would give them a view of their own disability in a positive light by intentionally planning the social, physical, and programmatic elements of camp (e.g., discussion sessions about CP, organizing sport skills and drills on the field that specifically target CP development; Shields et al., 2012) and encouraging social interaction and discussion about their experiences as a person with CP. All but one camper described themselves by the things they liked to do or by their character traits instead of discussing their disability. Each individual acknowledged having a disability in some way, but it was not an identifier in the way they presented themselves. Similarly, Logeswaran et al. (2019) described that individuals with disabilities tend to distance themselves from the label of disability in an effort to feel a part of the world without disability. This was the case even though by virtue of their disability and the attendance of the camp, their disability was a necessary criterion. This may, in fact, support a social comparison process not within a disability context but rather as an athlete. It could be argued that it is positive that the participants do not use disability as a key identifier in how they present themselves and instead, as a result of attending this camp, they now feel more identified with being an athlete. Thus, their social comparison is not as an athlete with a disability but simply as an athlete.

Nonetheless, disability was a prominent theme within the social categorization process as a result of campers' participation at camp. This aligns with previous literature when discussing exclusive camps for PWD. Researchers have found that when youth with disabilities have the opportunity to interact with other youth with disabilities in the camp context, they are able to learn more about their disability and share common stories with others (Goodwin & Staples, 2005). Although the participants had not reached a point of what Darling (2003) terms "disability pride" where participants establish positive disability identity, it is important to note that neither did they see their disability alone as being a main negative element of their identity (Raver et al., 2018). This is encouraging, particularly for younger athletes such as Logan, Noah and Alexander who used personal characteristic identifiers to describe themselves rather than the physical traits that might be seen as part of their disability.

Over half of the participants in this study mentioned previously participating in sports prior to attending camp. However, these programs and activities were primarily in inclusive settings with people with and without disabilities. This contradicts past literature in reference to the multiple barriers (i.e., fewer opportunities, lack of skill, negative societal attitudes, and lack of transportation) that PWD experience when participating in physical activity (Shields et al., 2012). Perhaps PWD are finding more opportunities to be active and engaged in sport programs both within their communities and in travel programs such as this camp. It is also possible that individuals with mild forms of their disability are better able to integrate into the community programs as a result of the limited severity of their disability and needing fewer modifications (Farmer et al., 2019). One also might assume that the experience was positive, but this may not be the case. Participation by a PWD in a sporting event does not always imply a positive experience. Particularly for youth, the need to have an identity at least based partly in sport is strong and this connection to participation may have been relevant in this study (Shapiro & Martin, 2010). Practitioners should be aware of the barriers that past literature suggests, but it is clear with comments from a number of participants that these can be overcome with proper programming, opportunities for social interaction, and the prospect of demonstrating their ability as seen in this camp.

In a previous study of youth with physical disabilities participating in an adaptive sports program, Groff and Kleiber (2001) found that almost all of their participants felt connected to their peers with disabilities. In a similar way, campers involved in this study felt connected to and included by others because they were surrounded by other PWDs, a good demonstration of self-identity. It is clear in this study and further supported by Groff and Kleiber (2001) that programs internationally designed for individuals with similar disabilities to connect with one another and share similar experiences can have positive impacts on identity.

Campers highlighted their self-evaluation toward people without disabilities, who are different than those in their determined in-group (e.g., PWD) supporting thus the demonstration of self-identity. This is supported by Goodwin and Staples (2005) and Groff and Kleiber (2001), who found that the social interaction between similar participants provided opportunities for individuals to talk about their disability with others and socialize with other PWD during sports. This was the reason for an intentional, formal discussion about CP with the group while at camp and why specific sport training skills were put in place. This allowed all athletes to see each other being challenged whereas normally, the athlete with CP may be the only one struggling with a particular skill.

A sense of belonging and connectedness that was also discovered through group cohesion in this study has been present in past literature (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Groff & Kleiber, 2001). This group cohesion was likely as a result of stated intentional opportunities to train with other athletes who have CP or to engage in the discussions, both formally or informally, about having CP and the challenges that athletes with CP face. Exclusive residential camps provide PWD the potential to associate positively with other PWD connecting with and feeling a sense of belonging to their peers at camp. Individuals in this study discussed the challenges they faced growing up with CP or playing sports on mainstream teams with people without disabilities. These conversations took place during unstructured times, which is a benefit of residential camps that foster elements of shared understanding and provide youth with disabilities a chance to discover common interests (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Tiemens et al., 2007).

It was mentioned that in previous camps some participants had more negative types of experiences where, for example, their teammates without disabilities would not pass them the ball. Wilhite et al. (1999) found that PWD refrained from participating in certain mainstream activities when they did not feel like they could participate successfully, limiting opportunities for this population. There is perhaps a balance in having PWD attend exclusive camps where they can build their confidence and skillsets with others who have similar disabilities and encouraging PWD to attend mainstream camps or activities so that they are then able to utilize their skills and be more confident in their self-identity as an athlete. As Liam discussed: "Like it doesn't really matter who's better or not, I'm just there to get better." This camp program allowed for each player to improve in a more comfortable environment with peers. Therefore, programming staff need to be aware and alert to the potential differences in ability, speed, mobility or desire for different equipment and to be ok with providing an alternative social environment for a number of athletes with similar disabilities to participate together and also compete in a more mainstream environment.

All the participants commented on the age component of camp. Although some did not care about the age gap, two of the older participants mentioned that it was an opportunity to be a role model. Due to the smaller nature of camp (less than 20 participants in total), it was easier to program for participant physical and social interactions in a way that encouraged SIT formation or reflection, leadership opportunities and skills expression, as well as development through on field sessions. Researchers acknowledge that these elements of camp could be beneficial for PWD to relate to each other and discuss similar experiences (D'Eloia & Price, 2018; Tiemens et al., 2007). However, this recognition of the age difference caused some identity confusion for a few of the participants as it created a challenge between feeling part of the CP in-group and recognizing that the participant may not be an ideal fit in this group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Sport can provide more opportunities than simply the physical activity element, yet programmers need to provide age-appropriate activities while still allowing for the potential for mentoring to take place.

LIMITATIONS

Although all the campers who met the criteria for voluntary participation agreed to be involved in the study, there were still several limitations that should be addressed. Primarily, interviews were completed online through video software due to all the participants being in separate locations during the time of data collection. The researcher was in a quiet office while the participants were in their home. Even though this possibly offered a comfortable environment for the interviewee, distractions were not able to be controlled or monitored. This also provided space for the parents to be included in the interview process. Three parents requested to sit in on the interview, and all three parents contributed to the interview conversation. When the researcher asked the participants a question, and they were slow to answer on an occasion, two of the parents interjected which provided the participants an answer to the question due to the prompting from their parents. Although it is clear the parent was simply trying to provide information and input to the study, this detracted from the lived experience of the camp participant and rather was a different perspective than given from the athlete. As such, these comments were not included in the data analysis.

There were times when participants did not fully remember elements of camp and the researcher needed to provide some prompting, or minimal contextual clues for the participant to give an honest answer as it related to the question. Since this was eight months post-camp, this was certainly understandable. Similarly, most questions corresponded to the SIT constructs which could have influenced the results of final themes due to this study being guided by the theory. Finally, the researcher was also a counselor at the camp, which could provide a closer connection to the campers but also must be recognized as potential response bias in the answers from participants. Still, as discussed, multiple additional researchers provided input on data analysis in an effort to mitigate any interpretation bias.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an exclusive, residential CP soccer camp on social identity of youth athletes. Using SIT, the participants clearly identified two of the three tenets, social categorization, and social identity in their lived experience of camp. Although mentions of social comparison were made, it was not clear how participants were consistently expressing that element. Given the exploratory nature of the study, using this camp-based experience to assist in continuing to shape a Para athlete's identity appeared to be an encouraging environment in which positive growth and development can occur.

Future research is suggested to further the understanding of social identity for PWD and more specifically individuals with CP. These findings provide foundational knowledge into the scope of an exclusive soccer camp for this population, which should be elaborated on utilizing SIT as a guide into how PWD perceive themselves in other exclusive camp environments. Although the third process of SIT (social comparison) was not well supported in these findings, it is suggested to provide a social setting where youth with CP can compare themselves to the out-group to fully understand SIT for this population. More specifically, the social situation must allow for intergroup comparisons and the out-group must be perceived as relevant by similarity and proximity for comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This study did not provide the perceived relevant out-group (i.e., people without disabilities) for comparison within this camp context. Due to the nature of the interview questions, participants primarily shared their perspectives towards the physical differences between themselves and peers with and without disabilities. Future research should focus on understanding how or in what ways youth with CP perceive themselves from a psychosocial perspective.

Finally, although this camp was a soccer-specific program, it is important to acknowledge the benefits of socialization, physical ability levels, and identity development were also witnessed as a result of participating in this camp exclusively for youth with CP. Exclusive camp settings have been shown to facilitate group cohesion, which is beneficial for a population who can be limited and left out of recreation and sport opportunities.

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