

Exploring Creative Arts and Youth Sports Programming: A Qualitative Study

by

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ABSTRACT

Increasing demands of youth sport participation has resulted in a lack of time for youth to engage in non-sport activities associated with positive youth development (PYD; West & Strand, 2016; Witt & Dangi, 2018). Though sport participation has the potential to increase positive PYD in participants, it is evident that sport participation alone does not generate PYD (Coakley, 2011). A positive environment, space to build internal assets, and continuous intentional, evaluative programs are a few of the components that may facilitate PYD in sport (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). When an appropriate development context is lacking, sport participation may actually lead to negative outcomes including intrapersonal (e.g. anxiety due to excessive criticism), interpersonal (e.g. parental pressure or lack of time to participate in other age-appropriate activities), or structural outcomes (e.g. overuse/burnout, cost, or lack of free play) (Witt & Dangi, 2018; Reverdito, et al., 2020). These risks may be particularly pronounced for athletes whose sole activity is sport. One way to address this is to provide non-sport activities as part of a sport program. For example, creative arts activities can enhance self-awareness (Perryman, Moss, & Cochran, 2015), improve communication (Moon, 2007), and decrease psychological distress (Ansari & Lalani, 2014). Further, creative arts can be sport related and built into sport program. Given the value of creative activities in PYD, and the potential lack of creative opportunities for athletes, it is important to examine if such activities are associated with PYD outcomes for athletes. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the experience of participation in creative activities for youth athletes, with a specific focus on potential PYD associations. Fifteen current youth sport athletes engaged in an art-based activity, followed by a semi-structured

interview. Findings suggest indicators of active engagement in creative art activities are distraction, reflection, expression, and relaxation. Further, when participants were actively engaged in creative arts, they perceived the following three benefits: 1) connection with teammates, 2) empowerment, and 3) positive identity. These findings provide practical implication for youth sport administrators as well as contribute to the limited body of literature on creative arts and youth sport programing.

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CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE

Participation in youth sports has been associated with a number of positive developmental outcomes including, but not limited to, increased positive self-identity, self-worth, and social skills (Smoll, et al., 2003; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Martin, et al., 2018). One challenge within sport, however, is that athletes may be consumed by the time commitment of sport participation. Indeed, recent studies indicate that athletes spend substantial amounts of time in sport including competition, training, and travel time (West & Strand, 2016; Witt & Dangi, 2018). As a result, athletes may not have adequate time to engage in non-sport activities that are associated with PYD outcomes. In a similar manner, excessive time spent in sport may decrease an athlete's enjoyment in playing, leading to heightened pressure or burnout (Montesano, Tafuri, & Mazzeo, 2016). Thus, it is imperative to explore how to enhance a youth athlete's participation experience to reduce dropout.

Research has also shown that sport participation alone does not generate developmental outcomes (Coakley, 2011). Rather, the context of the sport experience is central to positive developmental outcomes. For example, a positive environment, space to build internal assets, and continuous intentional, evaluative programs are some of the components that may be necessary to facilitate PYD in sport (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Conversely, research has shown youth sport participants may experience negative outcomes including intrapersonal (e.g., anxiety due to excessive criticism), interpersonal (e.g., parental pressure or lack of time to participate in other age-appropriate activities), or structural outcomes (e.g., overuse/burnout, cost, or lack of free

play) (Witt & Dangi, 2018; Reverdito, et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to explore how a positive environment can be developed to enhance PYD in youth sport athletes.

One possible programmatic element which may enhance PYD is the use of creative arts in sport programs. Creative arts are commonly used in youth programs and include visual arts, music, dance, drama, and writing/storytelling to express individuals' experiences without the traditional conversational narrative (Rogers, 1993; Levine & Levine, 1999; Malchiodi, 2015). This approach offers an alternative method to expression, presenting a different component to deepen the understanding of an individual's emotional and reflective experiences (Atkins & Williams, 2007). Potential PYD outcomes of creative arts include increased self-awareness (Perryman, Moss, & Cochran, 2015), improved communication (Moon, 2007), and decreased psychological distress (Ansari & Lalani, 2014). Existing research demonstrates the value of integrating creative arts into existing programs (Rogers, 2001; Cameron et al., 2013; Malchiodi, 2013). However, little research exists which explores the use of creative arts in youth sports programs. This study seeks to address that gap.

Creative arts can generate the inherent imaginative energy of individuals by providing enjoyable activities for them to engage in (Alfred, 2018). This type of engagement can help individuals portray feelings and beliefs that are not otherwise easily revealed (Bowers & Darewych, 2019). When individuals are given the opportunity to participate in artistic expression, they may develop self-analysis and self-insight (Levine & Levine, 1999; American Art Therapy Association (AATA), 2017). In sum, creative arts may encourage positive change, growth, health (Pifalo, 2002; Alfred, 2018), and

positive youth development (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). The existing evidence therefore warrants continued examination of the use of creative arts for youth.

Given the value of creative activities in PYD, and the potential lack of creative opportunities for athletes, it is important to explore if such activities are associated with PYD outcomes for athletes. This study uses PYD as a sensitizing concept to explore the use of creative arts in youth sport athletes. A sensitizing concept provides a guiding framework for the analysis of qualitative data, while remaining open to other interpretations. (Bowen, 2006). Determining if such a link exists, may provide justification for ensuring athletes engage in a variety of activities. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to assess the experience of youth sport athletes who engage in a creative arts activity and assess potential relations between participation in creative activities and PYD.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to The Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, approximately 58% of youth in the U.S. between the ages 6 and 17 years old participate in organized youth sport activities in 2017. Participation in youth sport is associated with a number of positive youth development outcomes, including, but not limited to increased positive self-identity, self-worth, and social skills (Smoll, et al., 2003; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Martin, et al., 2018). Youth sport participation, however, does not automatically lead to PYD. In fact, youth sport participation may also have negative impacts. For example, youth athletes may experience negative exposure to intrapersonal (e.g. anxiety due to excessive criticism), interpersonal (e.g. parental pressure or lack of time to participate in other age-appropriate activities), or structural (e.g. overuse/burnout, cost, or lack of free play) outcomes (Witt & Dangi, 2018; Reverdito, et al., 2020).

Creative arts may be one way to both mitigate the potential negative developmental outcomes of youth sport and facilitate PYD. This potential impact makes this population especially worthy of study to examine the additional benefits youth participants may receive from a creative arts program. To establish the context of this research, the following sections will provide relevant background information in three key areas.

These areas include: (a) youth sport, (b) positive youth development (PYD) framework, and (c) creative arts and PYD outcomes.

Youth Sport

Given the large number of youth participating in sport, the sports context is a valuable setting for development (NSCH, 2017). Participation in youth sport may generate a

multitude of benefits, including physical, psychological/emotional, social, and intellectual development (NRCIM, 2002). When youth are physically active through sport, they are less likely to develop detrimental health problems later in life. Additionally, sport fosters psychological and emotional well-being by offering a fun, structured activities outside of the classroom. The environment that is created through sport offers a space to build social skills, including cooperation, empathy, and self-control. Further, through physical activity, youth are exposed to cognitive development. Fraser-Thomas, Cote and Deakin (2005) proposed that youth sport administrators create appropriate program designs to support an athlete through positive development.

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a theoretical framework that suggests that youth hold the potential to develop positive social, psychological, and behavioral skills (Benson, 1997). Originally, youth development was viewed through a deficit approach where youth were viewed as problems practitioners had to solve, suggesting youth inherently possess high-risk behaviors (Dennis, 1946). Roth et al. (1998) began to shift this perspective to what is now known as PYD and regards youth as a resource to be developed. Unlike a deficit-based approach, PYD promotes sustainable, healthy child development (Benson, et al., 2007). Further, PYD has been conceptualized as a way to engage youth in prosocial behaviors and avoid high-risk actions. Implementation of PYD has been deemed relatively successful because of its individualized system approach, utilization of a set of planned practices, and activities to engage youth (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004).

Scholars have conceptualized PYD in several ways including as a general concept (e.g., Lerner's (2005) 5 Cs), or by focusing on specific components such as positive behaviors (Warner, et al., 2019), character (Legg, 2020), and life skills (Newman, 2020). One common way PYD is conceptualized is through developmental assets. Developmental assets consist of 40 supports and strengths (20 external and 20 internal) youth may have that enhance successful development. External assets highlight the support, opportunities, and relationships youth may have (e.g. feelings of safety while at school), and comprise four categories: support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. Internal assets include personal skills, commitments, and values (e.g. ability to cope with new situations), and include four categories: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Benson, Scales, & Roehlkepartain, 2011). External and internal assets consist of the dynamic benefits of a youth's experience, resources and opportunities, and personal characteristics on healthy development (Soares, Pais-Ribeiro, & Silva, 2019). The extant research indicates that the more developmental assets a youth has, the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors (Scales, et al., 2000; Roehlkepartain & Scales, 2007). An extensive body of research suggests that sport may be one venue that can facilitate the growth of, specifically with positive self-identity, increased self-worth, and higher social competencies (Smoll, et al., 2003; Coatsworth & Conroy 2009; Martin, et al., 2018).

PYD in sport. Within sport, research supports the link between developmental assets and PYD outcomes such as self-concept (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & MacDonald, 2010) and connectedness (DeBate, 2016). For example, Newland, et al. (2019) examined the relation between transformational leadership and PYD in youth basketball and Legg,

et al., (2018) assessed coaching behaviors and PYD. In addition, researchers have begun to explore the impact of coach education on PYD outcomes (MacDonald, et al., 2020). In particular, the connection between development assets of empowerment, positive self-identity and social competencies is strongly supported in youth sports research. Fitch, et al. (2017) reported that sport participation increases individuals' sense of empowerment, resulting in stronger feelings of safety, respect, and personal value. Additional research supports youth sport programs develop positive identity in participants, leading to increased perseverance, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Fitch, et al., 2017; Mendes, et al., 2019). For example, Girls on the Run, a physical activity PYD program aimed at teaching life skills and promoting healthy behaviors, found participants to have a higher ability to manage emotions and be intentional about making important decisions (Weiss, et al., 2020). Further, by implementing an intentional PYD program, participants increase their abilities to make friends, maintain relationships, and appreciate diversity (Weiss, et al., 2016; Weiss, et al., 2019). Weiss, et al. (2016) demonstrated an increase in social competencies through an evaluation of an intentional golf curriculum that emphasized character building, instilling life skills, and promoting healthy choices.

Developmental outcomes are not built solely by sports participation (Coakley, 2011). One way sport may have a positive impact on participants PYD outcomes includes the use of motivational climates. Motivational climates influence an individual's motivational process and can link to goal-orientations (Nicholls, 1989; Ames, 1992). For instance, Roberts (2001) implies that structuring a motivational climate for athletes can affect achievement behaviors, cognition, and communication skills. Structuring a climate that provides instructional feedback to motivate an athlete may reduce the likeness of

anxiety, burnout, or dropout (Lemyre, Treasure & Roberts, 2006). This emphasizes the importance on attending to an athlete context to produce positive developmental outcomes (Benson, et al., 2007).

The developmental assets framework indicates that constructive use of time, including participation in creative activities as an external asset, may be associated with the development of additional internal assets. Previous research within recreation provides evidence that participation in creative activities is associated with additional positive outcomes (Ramsing & Sibthorp, 2008; Shek, 2009). Though, this research was not in a sport setting, the recreational context offers numerous similarities and provides evidence for the potential value of creative arts in sport. However, with sport participation requiring an increased time commitment, athletes may have limited time to engage in creative activities, leading to a potentially detrimental athlete's development as sport can be an overly structured, and offer a competitive environment (Coakley, 2017).

While these studies offer support linking developmental assets to sport participation, further research is needed to determine the specific elements of sport programming that leads to the development of PYD (Weiss, et al., 2016). One potential programmatic element which may enhance PYD is the use of creative arts in sport programs.

Creative Arts

Creative arts are defined as forms of arts, including visual arts, music, dance, drama, and writing/storytelling, commonly used to explore and express one's feelings and experiences using a creative approach (Rogers, 1993; Levine & Levine, 1999).

Creative arts can enhance an individual's capability to express their life experiences and

life skills learned from the process. The extant research within creative arts has primarily examined the benefits for vulnerable communities, such as youth offenders (Smeijsters, et al., 2011), youth in low-income neighborhoods (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016; Ho, et al., 2011), and military families. Several studies have shown similar positive benefits for existing resilient communities, including 4-H groups (Conklin-Ginop, Junge, & Pulley, 2012), public health initiatives (Cameron, et al., 2013; Clift, 2012), and intergenerational offerings (Milner, 2008).

Creative arts have been used since ancient times (McNiff, 1981). Despite the longstanding use of creative arts and wealth of evidence about the effectiveness of EA, limited research exists within sport. One reason creative arts may lack exploration in sport is because of its structure and competitive nature, leaving a lack of time to explore a new form of youth development (Coakley, 2017). However, further research is needed to better understand why youth sport athletes may not be engaging in creative arts activities. 2013).

PYD in creative arts. Creative arts is an encompassing approach that uses visual arts, music, dance, drama, and writing/storytelling to express individuals' experiences without the traditional conversational narrative (Rogers, 1993; Levine & Levine, 1999; Malchiodi, 2015). Creative approaches to expression may offer a different structure to deepening the understanding of an individual's emotional and reflective experiences (Atkins & Williams, 2007). Potential outcomes of creative arts include increased self-awareness (Perryman, Moss, & Cochran, 2015), improved communication (Moon, 2007), and decreased psychological distress (Ansari & Lalani, 2014).

According to Roger (1993), all individuals hold creative skills. Creative art uses enjoyable activities to activate the creative ability in individuals (Alfred, 2018). Creative expression can help activate the unconscious mind and reveal unresolved feelings and vulnerabilities (Bowers & Darewych, 2019). When individuals are open to this type of artistic expression, they may experience self-analysis and self-insight (Levine & Levine, 1999; American Art Therapy Association (AATA), 2017). Therefore, creative arts results may be positive change, growth, health (Pifalo, 2002; Alfred, 2018), and positive youth development (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016). For example, research in a creative arts program offered to youth in low-income neighborhoods found a correlation between an arts intervention and positive self-perceptions and social abilities, such as their perceived ability to make friends (Forrest-Bank, et al., 2016).

The literature suggests that creative arts can be implemented as a PYD activity to uncover youth's experiences and emotions to promote positive developmental outcomes. Limited research, however, has investigated the potential for enhancing creative arts within the sports context.

Forms of Creative Arts. There are several possible forms of arts in creative arts. A brief description of options is provided below.

Visual arts. Visual arts develop a concrete form of expression, including painting, sketches, sculptures, or media (e.g. video or photography). A variety of materials can be used to activate the sensory brain to articulate a nonverbal form of thoughts and feelings on conflict or distress an individual may be experiencing (Gantt & Tripp, 2016; AATA, 2017). For example, individuals may be asked to create a collage of what their best self looks like (Guzman, 2020). The process of using visual art techniques converts words into

an alternative language, potentially resulting in improved cognitive functions, cultivating self-esteem, and promoting self-identity (Malchiodi, 2013; AATA, 2017). Moreover, visual arts expression can help provide an external symbolic representation of an individual's experience (Steele, 2009), offering an outlet to empower a positive future for themselves (Leggett, 2009).

Music. Music techniques include listening, playing, composing, improvising to music, or singing along to known songs. Effective music techniques may provide a medium to create and intensify moods that bring people together through memories or communicated feelings (Bowman, 1987; Davis, 2010). This technique is a simple form of communication that can resonate with youth who lack the words to express complex feelings or experiences, offering outcomes related to reflection, respect for others, and communicating inner experiences or emotions (Tyson, 2002; Davis, 2010). For example, individuals may be asked to create a playlist of songs that they perceive as motivational (Elvers, 2017). In sum, music can impact cognitive attitudes and behaviors towards others, allowing youth to explore their psychosocial needs (Elvers, 2017).

Drama. Drama techniques use objects such as dolls, puppets and toys to communicate stories through improv, theater games, or enactment (Butler, Guterman, & Rudes, 2009; National Drama Therapy Association [NADTA], 2018). In this technique, individuals use imagination to tell their story through performance, allowing a separation from their internal problems as they step into a fictional character. Emotions are released in an appropriate and natural manner where individuals can learn to recognize and control the range of emotions that might be felt (Smeijsters, et al., 2011). An example of a drama technique would be to create three physical poses or "statues" that portray a story. Drama

expression activities may also impact abilities in emotional and physical integration, positive relationship development, and convey feelings (NADTA, 2018).

Writing. Writing practices are used as a form of expression to develop poetry, stories, or personal journals. Individuals are encouraged to externalize their experiences and emotions through words written at their own pace (Kress, et al., 2008). This technique can provide a concrete means for self-reflection, allowing an individual to connect their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Warner, et al., 2006; Edgar-Bailey & Kress, 2010). An example of expressive writing would be to write a letter to yourself from the future (Kress, et al., 2008). Furthermore, expressive writing activities can impact abilities in emotional awareness (Green, 2008), self-exploration (Kress, et al., 2008), and self-development (Hudson & Day, 2012).

In sum, logic suggests that youth who are given chances to express themselves in a variety of outlets are more likely to feel empowered, connected with thoughts and feelings to develop positive self-identity and able to engage in social situations to build positive relationships. Of particular interest to this study, in sport is exploring the potential benefits of creative arts to impact the developmental assets of empowerment, positive self-identity, and social competencies. Youth sports offer a space where programming can impact the quality of participant enjoyment and development (Theokas, et al., 2008; Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2011). Proper implementation of creative arts into sports programming may be instrumental in building developmental assets by aiming the program at teaching life skills and promoting healthy behaviors (Weiss, et al., 2020).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the potential benefits of creative arts for youth sport athletes. The following research questions address the primary purpose of this study:

1. What is the experience of youth sport athletes who engage in a creative arts exercise?
2. What do youth athletes perceive from engaging in a creative arts exercise?

In addition, this study addresses a secondary research question:

3. What are the perceived sport related benefits to engaging in a creative arts exercise?

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative design to address the research questions. Qualitative research allows for the researcher to become completely immersed in the study. Further, qualitative research utilizes the researcher as the primary point of data collection, making this approach exceptional for exploratory topics to observe a social phenomenon within the natural settings of occurrence (Orcher, 2016). For instance, insider and outsider observations may be used to collect research through close interpersonal interactions in a community (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach chosen for this study utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the feelings and experiences of participants immediately after experiencing the phenomenon of interest.

The philosophical lens that best fits the purposes of this study is a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist lens operates under the assumption that participants develop

their own understanding and knowledge of a situation based on previous experiences (Creswell, 2014). Thus, a researcher must inductively interpret the subjective perceptions of a participant's experience. This approach often results in addressing the process participants endure while researchers acknowledge how personal backgrounds affect interpretations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a constructivist lens fits best to establish meaning of the phenomena through the lens of participants.

A phenomenology framework informed the potential benefits of youth sport athletes participating in creative arts activities in this study. Phenomenological studies explore the meaning behind a specified phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The phenomena of interest in this study are the lived experiences of youth sport athletes when involved in create arts activities.

Participants

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Specifically, the primary researcher recruited four personal contacts who met the criteria of being a current youth sport athletes between the ages of 14 and 17. Two personal connections who are current youth sport coaches were also contacted and asked to forward the recruitment script to youth athletes within their network who also fit the criteria. Five participants responded from that strategy. In addition, the primary researcher asked participants to forward the recruitment script to other teammates or friends. A participant's parents created a Facebook post to gain further interest. Interviews continued until data saturation was achieved.

A total of 15 participants agreed to be involved in this study. Participants included 14 female athletes and one male athlete. Three participants were in 8th grade, five were in 9th grade, three were in 10th grade, one was in 11th grade, and three were in 12th grade. Sports include soccer (9), track and field (4), cross country (6), tennis (1), gymnastics (1), biking (1), basketball (1), and swimming (1). The numbers do not add up to 15 because six participants were multi-sport athletes. As an incentive for participation, each individual received a \$10 Amazon gift card after the completion of the session.

Procedures

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Arizona State University prior to data collection. Given all participants were under the age of 18, parents received an electronic consent form via email and were asked to sign and return the form before youth participated. Youth participants were also provided an assent form to sign and return, which was verbally reviewed at the start of the session.

Participants engaged in an art-based activity prior to a semi-structured interview. Conducting an activity before the interview was used to give participants a current experience with creative arts. This approach is similar to photo elicitation where participants take photographs which empowers active involvement, giving stronger context to the research (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Given semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool, it was important to utilize an approach that provided participants a recent connection to the research context (e.g., engaging in an art activity). Activity instructions were electronically delivered 24 hours before the scheduled interview time. The activity instructions detailed four activity options to

choose from and participants were required to have any necessary supplies accessible to them before the start of the session. A summary of the activity details are as follows:

Activity 1: Create a collage of what your best self looks like.

Activity 2: Create a playlist of songs that motivate you.

Activity 3: Create three physical poses or “statues” that tell a story.

Activity 4: Write about your role model. What qualities do you think make them a good role model for you?

A semi-structured interview approach immediately followed the completion of the activity. This approach enabled an in-depth analysis of the experiences of youth sport athletes when involved in a creative arts activity. Participants were encouraged to share their experience through open-ended questions that inspired a conversation. Semi-structured interviews offer a standardization in the questions across participants while allowing for additional probing to ensure adequate data collection. By keeping questions broad and general, participants were better able to construct their own meaning of the process, generating a more comprehensive story of the research purpose (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

All participants were interviewed over a Zoom video call with the full audio recorded for analysis. First, both the researcher and participant turned off the camera and audio of their zoom profile for fifteen minutes to complete the chosen activity without being interrupted. A semi-structured interview was conducted immediately following the completion of the activity where participants were asked questions regarding their experience while participating in the art activity. Each interview lasted between 25 and

35 minutes, which allowed the participants to engage in an in-depth conversation about their experience.

Interview Guide

Interview questions were developed to provoke the participants to share their story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Questions were based on previous PYD research that suggests youth's participation in creative activities can enhance positive outcomes, including empowerment, self-identity, and social competencies (Ramsing & Sibthorp, 2008; Shek, 2009). Open-ended questions encouraged participants to share a broad narrative of their experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sample questions include: Tell me about your art activity. Tell me how you felt about doing the activity. What was hard/easy about doing the activity? Before completing the activity, in general, how well do you feel you can express yourself? How well do you feel you can express yourself now that you have completed the activity? In addition, interview questions prompted sport related benefits (See the complete interview guide in Appendix A). This approach was implemented to encourage participants to feel comfortable and inspire an honest conversation. The goal of the interviews was to gain insight of the potential impact creative arts may have on youth sport athletes.

Data analysis

Interview were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcription data were stored on ASU secure server and password protected computers. All participant data was kept confidential and deidentified by replacing the participants name with a pseudonym on transcriptions and audio recordings.

Transcriptions were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) five step method of thematic analysis. This approach suggests that the researcher first become familiar with the data including interview transcripts, reflexive journaling notes, or other materials collected. The second step is to generate an initial order of codes. The third step includes organizing initial codes into salient themes and patterns to explain the story. The fourth step allows for a review of the data, capturing the codes in a chart representing the larger theme of the data (see Appendix B). Finally, the codes are defined and connected to a coding chart (see Appendix C). The following details these steps as it relates to the present study.

Each interview was originally transcribed using an auto-generated transcript. I (the primary researcher) reviewed each transcription by listening to the recording and ensuring accuracy between the audio and text version. I then read through all 75 pages of transcriptions along with my reflexive journal notes without coding to become immersed in the data.

During the second phase of analysis, I generated ten initial codes and nine sub-codes deemed as meaningful by highlighting statements using Nvivo 11 software (see Table 1). The focus during this phase was to identify basic terms or phrases that are significant to the phenomenon. I used a combination of theory-driven and data-driven codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Specifically, I was searching for terms or phrases related to the Developmental Assets Profile (Benson, Scales, & Roehlkepartain, 2011), however, I stayed open to generating new codes that would enhance the understanding of the data.

Table 1: Initial Codes & Sub-Codes

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Accessibility | 8. Positive Identity |
| 2. Constructive Use of Time | <i>8a. Personal Power</i> |
| <i>2a. Similarities</i> | <i>8b. Positive View of Future</i> |
| <i>2b. Differences</i> | <i>8c. Self Esteem</i> |
| 3. Decreased Psychological Distress | 9. Positive Peer Influence |
| 4. Empowerment | 10. Social Competencies |
| 5. Family Support | <i>10a. Interpersonal Competencies</i> |
| 6. Positive Association | <i>10b. Planning & Decision Making</i> |
| 7. Positive Values | <i>10c. Resistance Skills</i> |
| <i>7a. Integrity</i> | |

Phases three and four refined initial codes into themes. At this stage, the attention was on connecting recurring ideas or language generated in phase two to a broader category that addressed the research questions (Sparks & Smith, 2014). Initial codes were condensed into two themes and seven subthemes (see Table 2). The main themes that surfaced were active engagement and outcomes. Initial codes of decreased psychological distress and positive association were renamed into three subthemes: distraction, reflection, and relaxation. Those categories were then collapsed into the theme of active engagement. Further, a new subtheme of expression was created to better explain the process youth undergo when engaged in a creative arts activity. Next, empowerment and positive identity codes were moved as subthemes under the theme of outcomes. The initial subcode positive values and planning and decision making was condensed into positive identity to strengthen the subtheme's meaning. Lastly, interpersonal competencies and positive peer influence was collapsed under the new subtheme, connection to teammates which fell under the theme of outcomes. Accessibility and family support were discarded because it was not relevant to the study. Resistance skills and personal power codes were also removed due to vagueness. Appendix B displays the

initial coding diagram. The intent of this phase was to better understand the relationship between codes and themes and how they relate to the purpose of the study.

Table 2: Themes & Subthemes

| |
|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Active Engagement |
| <i>1a. Distraction</i> |
| <i>1b. Reflection</i> |
| <i>1c. Expression</i> |
| <i>1d. Relaxation</i> |
| 2. Outcomes |
| <i>2a. Connection with teammates</i> |
| <i>2b. Empowerment</i> |
| <i>2c. Positive Identity</i> |

The data was reviewed through a thematic coding chart to better understand how the codes connected to the larger theme of the data (see Appendix C). To assist in developing a clear narrative of the chart, a brief definition of each code was created to capture the principle meaning as it relates to the data (see Table 3).

Table 3: Codebook

| Name | Definition |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Active Engagement | Athlete’s process of developing a deeper interest and knowledge of themselves. |
| <i>Distraction</i> | Engaging in creative arts offered athletes to shift their focus away from a negative thought or potential stress-inducing activity. |
| <i>Reflection</i> | A memory or a specific emotion of happy, sad, neutral, or angry resonated as athletes engaged in creative arts. |
| <i>Expression</i> | An alternative method for youth sport athletes to communicate without having a face-to-face conversation. |
| <i>Relaxation</i> | Athletes felt relaxed and calm after engaging in creative arts. |
| Outcomes | An openness towards acquiring developmental skills that may extend past the active engagement of creative arts. |
| <i>Connection with teammates</i> | Athletes perceived creative arts as a way to build relationships, bond, and idea share with teammates. |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Empowerment</i> | Individual's confidence in acting on personal interests. |
| <i>Positive Identity</i> | Athlete's perceived awareness of personal qualities or beliefs. |

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of credibility in the research. Credibility of the study ensures a researcher's confidence in the accuracy of the findings. To enhance trustworthiness I used positionality, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing. This process ensures that the data, interpretations, and methods are prepared with rigor and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Positionality. As a former competitive athlete, I acknowledge my positionality and how it might have influenced data interpretations. I spent 18 years participating in sport and believe my commitment to sport took time away to engage in creative activities. Thus, my personal experiences with sport and creative arts made me passionate about the research purpose and increased my optimism for positive results. Additionally, with the use of a snowball sample, I was subject to having a personal relationship with some participants. This type of sample may have reinforced social circles and chance for participants to share similar traits or standards. Though my involvement in sport influenced data collection and analysis, acknowledgment of personal subjective positionalities was identified throughout the research process. However, my experience as an athlete allowed me to better connect with participants and understand the jargon used. Since I was the primary research instrument, thoughtful insight of participants experience may have been enhanced.

Reflexive Journaling. I completed a reflexive journal immediately following each interview to capture my own subjectivities through personal reflections and

observations (Etherington, 2004). Reflexive journaling adds trustworthiness to the study by attending to my experiences as it relates to the interpretations (Etherington, 2004). I made notes on external factors that may have influenced participant responses, assumptions I made about the participant, and how my background could have influenced those assumptions. For example, reflecting on my values, beliefs, life story, and status after each interview helped me attend to similarities and difference from my own experience, prompting insights which informed my analysis. While I was a previous athlete that trained under the same coach as a handful of the participants, I did not attend the same sport organizations or play the same sport as a majority of the participants. Additionally, I had a prior belief that creative arts is an enjoyable activity, whereas participants might not have shared that same belief.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing was used to increase trustworthiness. Peer debriefing is a process of allowing another qualified researcher access to the study so interpretation can be explored by another person (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this case, the data, interpretations, and methods used were reviewed by the committee chair member who was familiar with the topic and methodology used. Adding a second person to engage with the research assisted in demonstrating rigor and trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This study explored the experience of participation in creative activities for youth athletes, with a specific focus on potential PYD associations. More specifically, the study focused on understanding how engaging in creative arts may influence PYD and youth's perceived benefits from involvement. Findings suggest four indicators of active engagement: 1) distraction; 2) reflection; 3) expression; and 4) relaxation. Further, when participants were actively engaged in creative arts, they perceived the following three benefits: 1) connection with teammates, 2) empowerment, and 3) positive identity. Though previous literature has offered support linking sport participation to positive self-identity, self-worth, and social skills through intentional, evaluative programs, this study addressed the lack of information surrounding youth sport athlete's participation in creative arts. The following will describe the findings in two sections corresponding to the research questions. The first section reviews a youth sport athlete's active engagement process while participating in a creative art activity. The second section focuses on the perceived outcomes youth sport athletes gain from participating in creative art activities.

Active Engagement

By participating in a creative art activity, participants reported developing a deeper interest and knowledge of themselves. Youth sport athletes reported that engaging in creative arts allowed them to experience distraction, reflection, expression, and relaxation.

Distraction. Athletes described that engaging in creative arts provided them a way to shift their focus away from a negative thought or potential stress-inducing activity. In other words, being actively involved in an art activity served as a diversion from other areas of an athlete's life. For example, Amelia, a senior cross-country runner, commented, "I'll put on music and like that, it just distracts it [anxiety] in a way because I am so focused on singing along or putting my energy into the song and all of that." Abby, a freshman track athlete, described her experience after participating in a visual art activity. Abby states, "It feels kind of good to just not focus on studying for school, not focusing on doing sports, it feels good to just focus on doing that." A sophomore cross country runner, Mary, linked distraction to a reason why she liked participating in the visual art activity:

I really liked making the board, that it's something sort of creative to do just to focus on one thing and not everything else going on in the world, just to put all my attention and creativity onto this. And it definitely helped me just to think of things that I really enjoyed, about the bigger things in life than just social media and all the craziness going on right now.

Further, Tammy, sophomore soccer player, discusses the importance of distraction as it relates to sports,

Sports are a lot more than just what you do on the fields. There's a ton to contribute into the mental aspects. And arguably, that's the most important part. I think that getting that small break and just focusing on the little things, and not just the physical, like I said.

It is clear that positive interference with daily occurrences can be achieved through the engagement of creative arts activities.

It is worth noting that distraction could appear as a positive or negative process. Ella, senior cross-country runner, conveyed music as a break from schoolwork, “I won’t want to do my homework, so I’ll go and I’ll play something on the piano because I feel like if I don’t have a structured lesson, it’s sort of more fun in a way”. Additionally, she expressed, “I really like that they’re songs that I know all the lyrics to...I feel like when I’m running, it’s good to have something going on in my head besides, ow my foot hurts.” Ella’s statements indicate that distraction does not always lead to positive effects on development. Avoiding homework or ignoring injury could lead to detrimental outcomes.

The concept of distraction is often perceived as negative in sports research. In particular, in an effort to enhance athletic performance, existing research has analyzed techniques to tried to reduce or eliminate suggested distractions. For example, a metaphor method was used to teach athletes how to prevent unproductive ideation or thoughts while participating in sport to improve performance (Efran, Lesser, & Spiller, 1994). In recent years, Sille, Turner, & Eubank (2020) found that implementing a distraction control plan to regain focus while under pressure strengthened resilience to perform at a higher level. Both studies suggest that distraction is disapproved in sports because of the potential to inhibit performance on the field.

Although distraction strategies may improve overall sports performance, it is plausible that the pressures to enhance mental toughness on the field may be contributing to the overuse or burnout athletes experience (Witt & Dangi, 2018; Reverdito, et al.,

2020). For instance, Martinent & Decret (2015) suggested a distraction-oriented coping (DtOC) strategy actually decreased a sense of accomplishment in athletes and contributed to sports devaluation. McCarthy, Allen, & Jones (2013) also speculated that addressing everyday stress youth athletes may experience rather than simply focusing on the on-field pressure is of importance. Further, the authors suggest introducing enjoyable intervention techniques to regulate disruptive emotional states (e.g., visualization or relaxation strategies) before proceeding to sport participation. Thus, it was not surprising that athletes in this study found a perceived benefit of distraction through engaging in creative arts. Moreover, the literature suggests that art has the capacity to distract individuals from a negative mood, providing an effective emotional regulation strategy (James, Drake, & Winner, 2017). Although sport programs seek out ways to mitigate distraction, these findings may present an opportunity to integrate an art-based intervention technique. This technique would present a coping strategy to distract a youth athlete from negative interferences as they prepare to perform in sports.

Reflection. Participants frequently mentioned a memory or referenced a specific emotion (e.g., happy, energized, or neutral) suggesting that reflection may occur while actively engaged in a creative arts activity. This concept will be presented in three forms. The first form portrays internal reflection that transpired in participants while engaging in the activity. For example, Brooke, freshman soccer player, reflected on a time spent dancing with a friend, stating, “Now, whenever I hear this song, it makes me want to actually get up and do something productive with my day, instead of just sitting there”. Ella also commented on a memory from a track meet after completing her playlist, “There was this group of boys and they had a speaker, and they were all running up the

hill together and singing ‘Let It Go’. And it was just great”. Maria, a tennis and gymnastics athlete in eighth grade, reflected on her thoughts prior to completing her visual art piece, “I thought about what makes me happy. And what someone would describe me as. And what someone first thinks of me and when I think of myself, what comes to mind?”. Many participants showcased positive internal moments of reflection. However, in one instance, Amelia spoke on how music can bring up negative memories:

Sometimes you just hold onto memories. It doesn’t even have to be with a specific person, it could just be with a circumstance or a memory or something like that. So sometimes it’s hard to let go of those memories and try new songs, but it’s kind of like the circle of life.

Internal reflection through creative arts may provide for further acknowledgement of why that moment was of importance. When athletes are given the time to engage in activities outside of sport, they are offered the opportunity to think deeper about those moments and build communication skills to explain its importance more effectively.

The second form of reflection occurred during the process of gathering materials needed to produce a visual art form (e.g., searching for pictures). For instance, Clara, a freshman soccer player, stated, “Having to find the pictures made me look through my camera roll and I laughed a lot looking at some of the old picture”. Holly, a sophomore cross-country runner, highlighted her emotion while reflecting by stating, “It made me happy to walk memory lane a little bit, look at those things I did and the fun times I’ve had and also figure out what five things are both most important to me out of them”. Taking time to look at past experiences through visual mediums can evoke deeper feelings of emotions or ideas.

Participants also used their creative arts products as artifacts, which they anticipated using in the future to reflect back upon past accomplishment or thoughts.

Cody explained this concept as it related to his journaling activity by stating,

Being able to see what I wrote down before, it also allows me to set a basis to kind of almost update my thoughts later, instead of having this mixed perception on what I previously thought.

Comparably, Ella described, “I like that I can have a playlist now that I can add to or change later on and I can use. I also liked that I could go back through my all my other playlists and find the songs I went back to”. Reflection in this format exemplifies athletes acknowledging their identity, leading to a stronger representation of themselves through the art activity.

The process of reflection in creative arts demonstrates an individual’s ability to externalize experiences. It is important to note that this process may present both positive and negative experiences. In this study, participants spoke largely about the positive experiences they have endured. However, a substantial body of literature describes reflection through creative arts as a means for conveying painful experiences to better understand feelings or thoughts. For example, Kress et al. (2008) found journaling a successful technique for youth who have been affected by traumatic experiences to externalize emotions individually. Similarly, physical education classes have been implemented to respond to youth trauma, utilizing critical self-reflection exercises and better understand a child’s situation (Sutherland & Park, 2020).

A more common approach to encouraging positive experiences with reflection was seen through music techniques. Tyson (2002) found rap music with themes of self-

identity, peace, and unity to present an opportunity for youth to share experiences or emotions in a group setting. Further, Davis (2010) claimed music can help youth process feelings and shared experiences. The study found that youth who participated in developing a musical composition with a group of individuals that endured a similar experience gained developmental outcomes in communication and connection with others through the shared experience.

The process of reflection through creative arts may encourage an athlete to think about significant moments in their life. This finding suggests that creative arts can help athletes create tangible products, much like a sticky note, that help them remember particularly meaningful experiences. Previous research also encourages a tangible style of reflection (e.g., writing, drawing) as a more sufficient way to process an experience and improve outcomes related to communication and expression (Goldberg, 2000; Hoffman & Kress, 2008; Steele, 2009). Although research exists surrounding an athlete's use of reflection as they transition out of athletics (Phoenix, Faulkner, & Sparkes, 2005), little is studied about the benefits current youth sport athletes may have when participate in a reflective exercise. Phoenix et al. (2005) suggests administrators may want to stimulate youth athletes reflective thinking to increase their perceived self-worth independently from their athletic identity before they age out of sports. Therefore, there is an opportunity to allow athletes time to reflect with the use of creative arts which may make players more empowered to envision a positive view of themselves (Leggett, 2009).

Expression. Engaging in creative arts offered an alternative method for youth sport athletes to communicate without having a face-to-face conversation. Many participants observed that creative arts were an outlet to illustrate their thoughts, feelings,

or personality. Allie, a freshman soccer player, explained this concept while discussing when she is able to express herself most, “I feel like [writing] is easiest because you’re not actually talking to someone face to face about everything. You’re kind of just writing it down either on a piece of paper or a computer.” Additionally, Karen, a senior soccer player, exemplified the importance of having an alternative method for expression,

I think that it’s [music] kind of more of a personal way to express yourself and then now it kind of changed where I’m showing you and I have to verbalize why I’m expressing myself this way. And I think that subconsciously you...I know I express myself through music, but now I had to put into words.

Further, participants noted their enjoyment of the alternative communication forms creative arts offers. Athletes recognized that creative arts as expression gives others the opportunity to learn about them without having to engage in a face-to-face conversation. Mary explained, “I like that if you look at it, you can tell that it’s about me, I’m obviously on it. But just everything that I like to do in my life. It sort of just represents me”. Creative art opportunities offer another option for athletes to present their ideas or personal characteristics they might not otherwise know how to express.

Most participants regarded expression as a way to communicate with other people, however Maria recognized expression as an important act to do for herself:

I think it’s important to express yourself around other people but sometimes you don’t even think about expressing yourself to yourself and really like understand things like that. So that was really helpful to be able to almost take a second and just express myself to myself and like really

think about myself and what really comes to mind when I think about myself and what I want to put on the collage.

When an athlete can portray their attributes through creative arts, authenticity may be a result. Authenticity refers to the representation of a participant's true beliefs, values, or desires. Amelia discussed this in greater detail,

I just think that if you are able to express yourself, you are able to attract more authentic things into your life and I think that's why it's so important to be honest with yourself and be honest with people around you. It's kind of like law of attraction or manifestation or whatever. It's like if you're continuously not being who you are, then you're not going to attract things that are authentic to you or that are very specific to you tailored needs.

Here, Amelia is displaying how communicating one's true self through creative arts may attract individuals with similar interests. In this manner, expression interacted with internal reflection to influence participant's ability to individualize their activity.

Consequently, creative arts may play a role in offering youth athletes a platform to amplify their voice. The literature defines youth voice as the level a youth feels they can express themselves (Ellis, 2001). The importance of youth voice as it relates to expression is consistent with previous research which suggest voice provides a parallel to PYD outcomes as it enables youth to articulating thoughts and ideas (e.g., positive identity) (Ellis & Caldwell, 2005). For example, youth that perceive their voice to be heard are more likely to communicate their experiences and gain a sense of belongingness (Mitra, 2004; Price & Bean, 2018). Thus, youth's feelings of empowerment to express their thoughts, feelings, or personality leads to higher levels of

engagement and increased PYD (Price & Bean, 2018). Nonetheless, the challenge in implementing expression opportunities for youth includes adults fear of engaging in potentially difficult conversations (Richards-Schuster, et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for youth to complete creative arts in a safe and secure place to experience the benefits of freedom of expression while developing an art piece.

Creative arts research supports the claims that youth voice can provide PYD outcomes. Rogers (1993) initially proposed creative arts as a common technique to express one's feelings and experiences. Further, youth may experience nervousness prior to engaging in a self-expression activity (Malchiodi, 2013), however, creative arts accentuate one's feelings in a nonverbal form that improves self-awareness and communication (Moon, 2007; Perry et al., 2015; Gantt & Tripp, 2016; AATA, 2017). This element corresponds to the findings in this study as youth sport athletes indicated the importance of artistic expression on their ability to increase self-insight (Levine & Levine, 1999). Thus, the findings lend support for the process of expression to be further explored in youth sport athletes.

Relaxation. Active engagement in creative arts activities frequently left participants feeling relaxed and calm. A freshman soccer player, Drew, mentioned, "I felt very concentrated, but I also felt very relaxed and not very anxious or nervous. Just very relaxed and calm". Similarly, junior soccer player, Eva, stated in response to a question about what she liked most about engaging in creative writing, "It helps me just... mentally calm down because I'm like very...I'm always stressed out about the smallest things". Athletes identified creative arts as an outlet to release stress.

Some respondents voiced that creative arts served as a relaxation technique to prepare for a sports practice or game. As Abby described this concept,

It would help release stress from the day, or stress you have about sports practices or something. And it kind of gets your mind on something other than sports, and maybe lets you focus more on the sports when you get to the sports...it makes me feel good and calm. Calmer, definitely.

Further, Cody linked this technique to potentially advancing his skills in sport. He states:

I feel like it could help with clearing your mind up. I maybe even say that because I know that I feel like I play better when my mind is clear and definitely doing things like this makes my mind more clear. I feel like it might even help with skill wise, a little bit.

It is important to highlight the relaxed feelings athletes received after taking a mental break from external pressures. This emphasizes the significance creative arts activities may have on athlete's capacity to perform. Additionally, athletes demonstrated creative arts as a channel to distress and direct their focus towards sports.

This theme might have become apparent due to structural constraints youth sport athletes may face (e.g., overuse/burnout) (Witt & Dangi, 2018). Although sport participation has the ability to generate PYD outcomes (Peptitpas, et al., 2005), athletes might be susceptible to performance-based pressure that could threaten their self-esteem or ability to cope with stress (Witt & Dangi, 2018). The findings compare to existing research, affirming creative arts can benefit individuals who

experience stress and anxiety by utilizing cognitive ways of coping (Martin, et al., 2017; Cao, Sullican, & Underhill-Blazey, 2021). Hudson & Day (2012) found a similar concept in sports, suggesting athletes can use writing as a way to confront stress, manage their emotions, and prepare for future emotional transitions. Although this study lacks scope on an athlete's stress and anxiety levels prior to completing the activity, relaxation through creative arts has the potential to decrease overuse and burnout in youth sport athletes.

Outcomes

Participants indicated a perceived ability to develop three outcomes following their active engagement in creative arts activities. These outcomes included connection to teammates, empowerment, and positive identity.

Connection to Teammates. Overwhelmingly, athletes in the sample discussed the connection to teammates that may occur when engaging in a creative arts activity. Although the activity was completed individually, participants mentioned the possibility creative arts could have in relationship building, idea sharing, and camaraderie. As Brooke described, "I think it would be good for my team because a lot of the time, it's just like soccer soccer soccer and we don't really talk about or do anything else for us". Similarly, Clara stated,

I think that doing activities, like making a board, would help the team get to know each other better, and eventually lead to better chemistry on the field and...because when you know someone I feel like you work better with them.

Here, both individual quotes exemplify the potential for relationship building when engaging in creative arts that may lead to better performance in sport. When talking about relationship building, it is significant to note the potential for team camaraderie. Clara highlights this claim, “I think it’s just the fun all around it. Learning it with your friends is fun and then while doing them, you’re going to mess up and stuff like that. So, you just laugh it off”. Additionally, Drew showcased how idea sharing through arts might further build team cohesion,

I feel like it [creative arts] would be beneficial because, besides being able to sit down and create with each other and share ideas, you also would be bonding as a team and laughing together if something doesn’t come out right and I feel like the more bonded your team is, the better you perform because you know each other more. You become almost like a family on your team versus just playing soccer together or playing a sport together.

Based on these statements, promoting a positive and fun environment for youth athletes through creative arts was of particular importance to the participants for building relationships and camaraderie with their teammates.

Beyond fostering relationships with teammates, participants stated the potential in growing relationships with coaches. As Brooke explained, “I think with sports or anything it’s good that you have a good relationship with the instructor with it. I think getting to know my coach better would definitely be good for my team.”

Tammy exhibited that a coach-athlete relationship goes beyond the sport itself,

I think that creativity is important. Personal relationships with your coaches or your friends are more than just on the fields. Getting that break and just sharing experiences outside of your support is really important. Participants perceived that building a sense of connection to teammates and coaches with the use of creative arts could enhance social skills, leading to improved performance.

A substantial body of research have identified an association between sport participation and increased social competencies (Weiss et al., 2016; Bruner et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2018). Therefore, it was not surprising that participants linked creative arts as an opportunity to enhance relationships with their teammates. Similar to Bruner et al.'s (2017) findings, participants demonstrated how engagement in team-building strategies can strengthen their ability to identify as part of the team and advance their social development with teammates. Studies have proved the effectiveness of utilizing team building strategies for sport teams (Martin, Carron, & Burke, 2008), however, limited studies have explored in-depth strategies to expose athletes to social development. Participants in this study perceived creative arts to be a potential strategy that impacts positive connections with teammates and coaches. It is interesting to note that athletes in this study associated building positive connections with teammates as a way to increase performance. Martin et al. (2018) exhibited a similar finding, suggesting the strength of social skills built between teammates can predict an athlete's level of effort during a competition or game. Participants strengthened this claim during their involvement in creative arts as a current youth sport athlete.

This concept also represents a parallel to the internal developmental asset of social competencies. Social competencies are defined as youth's ability to build, maintain, and adapt to social situations (Benson et al., 2011b). Forrest-Bank et al. (2016) suggests that this asset can be strengthened through creative arts. The study implies creative arts programming contributes to a youth's perceived ability to make friends. Although studies have supported the use of creative arts as a means to build social skills (Forrest-Bank et al., 2016; Elvers, 2017; Bowers & Darewych, 2019), a majority of the research surrounds the benefits for youth in high-risk communities (e.g., low-income neighborhood, military families). Although demographic background was not collected during this study, participants revealed similar PYD outcomes. Thus, the findings indicate existing resilient communities (i.e., community youth sports) may also achieve increased social competencies through creative arts.

Empowerment. Participants exposed increased feelings of empowerment while engaging in creative arts. Empowerment refers to an individual's confidence in acting on personal interests. As Maria described it, "it [art] gives me a confidence boost to do it again or to do something similar and move forward with things". Similarly, Brooke expressed, "My top five favorite songs I picked...because the songs were just songs that made me actually want to get up and do something again." For Drew, her feelings while engaging in an art activity has empowered her to regularly participate in creative arts. She stated, "The happy...like really happy, proud feeling you get when you finish a project or are able to put your thoughts together correctly and make something that you're trying to get at". It is clear that

creative arts gave participants an outlet to develop assurance in what personal interests hold value to them. Amelia highlights this theme further,

You emphasized on you personally. And I really like that because I think a lot of times we are so caught up in what other people like or what the top songs today are and just really trying to connect to yourself and listening... You just have to really find what makes you feel good... That's why I kind of like doing things like this because it really, it allows me to express myself in something that I am passionate about, which is music!

A number of participants revealed increased confidence in their ability to develop a creative art activity that represented their personal interests.

Further, when youth are offered unstructured time to participate in creative arts, they feel motivated to complete the activity. Drew discussed this concept, "I feel like even if it's not my best work or it didn't come out exactly the way I wanted it to, I'm still very proud and probably more motivated to do something again once it's done". Brooke also capitalized on this theme,

When I start to write and then I just feel more comfortable as I get more in depth with the writing part of it. That is what made me more comfortable with the assignment and when I started, I could just keep going.

Both participants expressed an ability to thoroughly create a project with the type of freedom creative arts offers. Therefore, participants enjoyment in creative art activities were seen to empower youth athletes to become self-motivated to complete the task.

Empowerment may have surfaced as an outcome from participation in creative arts because of youths' desire to feel appreciated. Opportunities that offer youth ownership can create feelings of responsibility and commitment (Lugetti et al., 2017). Participants in this study showed this concept through the ownership in choosing which activity resonated with them and what they perceived their final product might look like. Thus, participants felt empowered to take initiative on the prompt when they were given the chance to externalize top personal attributes (Fisette & Walton, 2014).

This concept is similar to the external developmental asset of empowerment that explains a youth's need to feel valued by their community and perceived to be contributing to the success of the community. Youth must feel safe and secure in their environment to exhibit this asset (Benson et al., 2011a). For instance, Price & Bean (2018) implies the impact a coach-athlete relationship may have on PYD, suggesting the need for adults to create positive interactions with youth so they feel empowered to voice their perspectives. Further, Weiss et al. (2020) validates the power of intentional program design by sports administrators that promotes life skills and healthy behaviors. A systematic program that empowers athletes can create a safe environment that ensures open communication and the development of life skills (Webb, 2016; Weiss et al., 2020). The process of engaging in creative arts offered participants an external outlet to express their thoughts and feelings, empowering them to be heard (Leggett, 2009). Therefore, creative arts may provide the possibility for athletes to be empowered towards envisioning a positive view of their future.

Positive Identity. Many participants displayed a positive awareness of their personal qualities or beliefs. Allie emphasized this outcome by demonstrating an ease in deciding which activity to complete, “I think the easiest part was choosing who my role model was. Once I read all the activities of what to do, I was like, ‘okay I’m going to do this one, and I know who I’m gona pick’”. Similarly, Abby expressed how completing the activity enhanced her positive identity and understanding of what she enjoys most,

I feel more confident and I know what I like, and I know what I don’t like. Before I wrote it down, typed out and stuff, I was kind of unsure I guess. It’s in my brain and I know what I like, but writing it down, doing this board made it more clear to me and if someone asked me, "oh, what do you like?" I can say running, nature, being with my friend...and be sure about it.

Both athletes showed how engaging in the activity reassured characteristics about themselves. Amelia also capitalized on her perception of how engaging in art could boost confidence in her identity,

There’s some weird coding translation that happens between this music that I play and my brain and it just makes me feel so much better about myself because as soon as I get out of my car or take my earbuds off, I’m just like...I’m there. I am in my element and I feel like...the only word I can really use is just feeling myself. I just...yes. I am Amelia. I am ready to rock whatever comes into my life right now.

Participants identified creative arts as an outlet to better enhance their personal attributes and feel confident in what those characteristics are.

Participants also felt a perceived sense of purpose while creating their art activity. Julia, a soccer player in 8th grade, states, “It felt good because you can make it personalized to yourself and you can make it about you, so you don’t have restrictions”. Further, Drew exhibited similar positive thinking about participating in creative arts,

I just really like the ability to start from scratch and make something totally your own, and the idea that everyone has...everyone can see something but make something completely different out of it, or see something different ways, and I find it really interesting about that.

Participants displayed enjoyment in being offered a choice in which activity they could complete. This allowed participants to choose which activity was of interest to them, further strengthening the athlete’s belief in their identity. Based on these statements, creative arts gave an alternative method to unveiling a positive version of themselves.

An extensive body of research suggests that sport can facilitate the growth of positive self-identity in youth sport participants (Smoll, et al., 2003; Coatsworth & Conroy 2009; Martin, et al., 2018). Benson et al. (2011a) defines positive identity as a youth’s sense of power, purpose, worth, and promise. Thus, it is imperative to implement a positive developmental context that encourage youth to explore their personal attributes that lead to stronger self-assurance and self-esteem (Benson et al., 2011a; Fitch, et al., 2017; Mendes, et al., 2019). When a proper developmental

environment is lacking, athletes may experience negative interpersonal outcomes (e.g., parental or coach pressure) that may be influencing burnout athletes experience (Witt & Dangi, 2018; Reverdito, et al., 2020). Therefore, Weiss et al. (2020), and others, suggest youth sport programs develop an athlete's positive identity with the use of intentional PYD program design (Webb, 2016; Weiss et al., 2020).

Implementation of creative arts in youth sport athletes may be one way to meet the need of an intentional PYD sports program.

The findings correspond to current research that presents positive identity as a result of creative arts engagement. Visual art techniques offer youth an alternative method to showcase their attributes, improving cognitive functions, cultivating self-esteem, and promoting self-identity (Malchiodi, 2013; AATA, 2017). For example, Mak & Fancourt (2019) found that regardless of a youth's ability in creative arts, engagement in an arts activity increased participant's self-esteem. The present study noted similarities in how creative arts can encourage participants to reflect on their beliefs and values to represent a stronger image of themselves. Thus, the participants perceived creative arts as an opportunity to feel empowered towards developing their positive identity and a sense of purpose.

In addition to the primary purpose, this study also explored potential sport-related benefits to engaging in creative arts. Though we did not identify a single theme specific to this question, we note several sport-related benefits nested within other themes. For example, participants exhibited relaxation as a theme while completing an art activity, specifically noting that arts may help release stress from sports specific pressures (Hudson & Day, 2012). Additionally, participants recognized sport performance is more

than on the field practice. Rather, connecting with teammates off the field may increase overall performance. Connection with teammates emerged as an outcome of engaging in creative arts that may lead to enhanced social skills between teammates. Higher social competencies can encourage a greater level of effort from athlete's during a competition or practice (Martin et al., 2018). The connection between creative arts and sport may be beneficial for additional PYD outcomes by linking an athlete to their sports performance through a different form of engagement.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the experience of participation in creative activities for youth athletes, with a specific focus on potential PYD associations. This study utilized a qualitative approach to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the feelings and experiences of participants immediately after experiencing participation in a creative art activity. Current youth sport athletes were asked to complete a fifteen-minute art-based activity, followed by questions regarding their experience while engaging in the activity. Findings suggest how creative arts can influence indicators of active engagement (distraction, reflection, expression, and relaxation) that led to outcomes in the perceived benefits of building connection with teammates, empowerment, and positive identity. Youth sports administrators may find this study particularly useful in how to promote PYD in athletes, although anyone who encourages PYD may find the suggestions helpful. The implications for practice, study limitations, and suggestions for future research is provided below.

Implications for Practice

This study contributes to further exploration of utilizing intentional PYD programs in youth sports. As noted by previous research, sport should not be the only activity youth are involved in to generate adequate PYD (Coakley, 2011). Consistent with previous evaluative studies on facilitating PYD through sport, this study supports the need for youth athletes to explore additional forms of youth development. Specifically, this study describes the possibility of introducing creative arts into youth sport programs to build added positive benefits in participants (Rogers, 2001; Cameron et al., 2013;

Malchiodi, 2013). Based off of the findings in this study, practical implications include the following:

- Respondents reported that through creative arts, distractions with daily occurrences were achieved, shifting their focus from a negative thought or potential stress-inducing activity. Sports administrators looking to implement an effective emotional regulation strategy are encouraged to integrate creative arts as a coping tactic to distract an athlete from negative thoughts as they prepare to perform.
- Reflecting on past experiences through creative arts emerged as an important factor influencing participants ability envision a positive view of themselves. Youth sport administrators should seek to ensure athletes are offered reflective thinking time to increase their perceived self-worth. For example, administrators could implement a journaling activity, advising an athlete to reflect on who their role model is.
- Individuals are more likely to improve self-insight when given the opportunity to express their thoughts, feelings, or personality through an alternative form of communication. Youth sport administrators who wish to better understand an athlete should implement alternative forms of expression (e.g., writing, visual arts, music) during regular practice times.
- Relaxation was an element of engaging in creative arts that participants found important as it relates to their ability to decrease stress and anxiety. Youth sport administrators should emphasize cognitive ways of coping with stress and anxiety through creative arts to maximize their performance on and off the field.
- Connecting with teammates emerged as a perceived benefit from participating in creative arts. Practical efforts to allow structured time for athletes to participate in

creative arts as a team should be implemented by youth sport administrators. For example, athletes may be given 15 minutes to complete an art activity as a team prior to the start of practice.

- When participants were offered ownership to create a personalized art piece, they perceived an increase in confidence for their personal interests. Creative arts should be utilized in sports programs for youth sport administrators who wish to empower athletes to develop assurance in what personal interests hold value to them.
- Respondents perceived a positive self-identity when able to engage with a creative art activity. This suggests youth sport administrators apply an intentional PYD approach to encourage youth to explore their personal attributes. This may include supporting athletes in completing a collage of what their best self looks like to build stronger self-assurance and self-esteem.

Previous research promotes the power of intentional program design in youth sport (Price & Bean, 2018; Weiss et al., 2020). As previously noted, sport has the potential to produce a safe place where youth feel valued and respected, encouraging them to envision a positive future for themselves (Luguett et al.,2017). The use of an arts-based approach may be integrated into this existing environment in sports to aid in the design of intentional programming (Rogers, 2001; Cameron et al., 2013; Malchiodi, 2013). Sports administrators are encouraged to evaluate their programs to determine how the current strengths and resources can be utilized to implement further positive development through creative arts. By doing so, this may represent advancement towards developing program models with youth rather than for youth to further build life skills and healthy behaviors through sport (Luguett et al.,2017).

Limitations

It is important to address certain limitations of the study. First, qualitative design is not intended to develop causal relationships. In other words, the findings in this research could not make a conclusion that engaging in creative arts as a youth sport athlete caused participants to have a positive experience. Rather, youth who already possess characteristics of PYD may get more out of creative arts experiences. Therefore, conclusions of this research were derived from making inferences based on perceptions rather than a direct relationship. Additionally, the convenience sample yielded a gender imbalance, resulting in one male and 14 female participants. Lastly, data collection was limited to virtual interviews via Zoom, subjecting data collection to technical difficulties and lack of ability to witness the participant actively produce their art activity. Nonetheless, the ability to communicate with participants over video call provided ease in coordinating session times and expanded the location participants could partake from. To expand on these limitations, future research is needed.

Future Research

Youth sports is an avenue to foster PYD in participants. The potential impact of sport participation makes this population especially worthy of study to explore additional outcomes of intentional, evaluative programs in sport (Petitpas et al., 2005; Webb, 2016; Anderson-Butcher, 2019; Weiss et al., 2020). Of particular interest is the intended integration of creative arts into a variety of youth sports to promote PYD. Further research and exploration of creative arts and youth sports programming is needed to better understand the experience and perceived benefits. To ensure consistency in the findings, future research should explore creative arts in a variety of different sports and

levels of competition. Additionally, this study should be replicated with more youth male athletes to address the gender imbalance presented in this study.

It is also recommended to replicate this study using different research designs. It may be beneficial to study this concept using in-person focus groups. This would offer deeper exploration in the promotion of social development within youth athletes that participate in creative arts (Anderson-Butcher, 2019). Additionally, a mixed method approach would be valuable in analyzing the strength of integrating creative arts in youth sports. Further, with the use of a mixed method approach, longitudinal findings may be explored. Lastly, previous studies have indicated that facilitators hesitate to initiate in art-based programs due to perceived lack of artistic ability and fear of engaging in difficult conversations with youth (Malchiodi, 2013; Richards-Schuster, et al., 2021). Thus, future research should be completed with facilitators to understand their perspectives on the uncertainties and perceived outcomes of implementing creative arts for youth sport athletes. These recommendations may provide additional aspects on the underexplored phenomena of the experiences youth sport athletes perceive when involved in create arts activities. In conclusion, participants in this study expressed an excitement about participating in creative arts in addition to their engagement in youth sports. Thus, efforts to implement this concept should be explored as a way to further advance PYD in youth sport athletes.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Athlete Interview Guide

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) How long have you been doing sports?
- 3) What is your level of competition in your sport?
- 4) Why did you decide to do your sport?

Activity – 4 choices

- 1) Create a collage of what your best self looks like.
- 2) Create a playlist of songs that motivate you.
- 3) Create three physical poses or “statues” that tell a story.
- 4) Write about your role model. What qualities do you think make them a good role model for you?

Product

- 1) Tell me about your [product]?
- 2) Tell me what you like your [product].
- 3) Is there anything you would like to change or anything you dislike about your [product]?

Activity

- 1) Tell me how you felt about doing the activity?
- 2) Tell me what you liked about the [activity].
- 3) Is there anything you would like to change or anything you dislike about the [activity]?
- 4) What was hard about doing the activity?
- 5) What was easy about doing the activity?

Outcomes

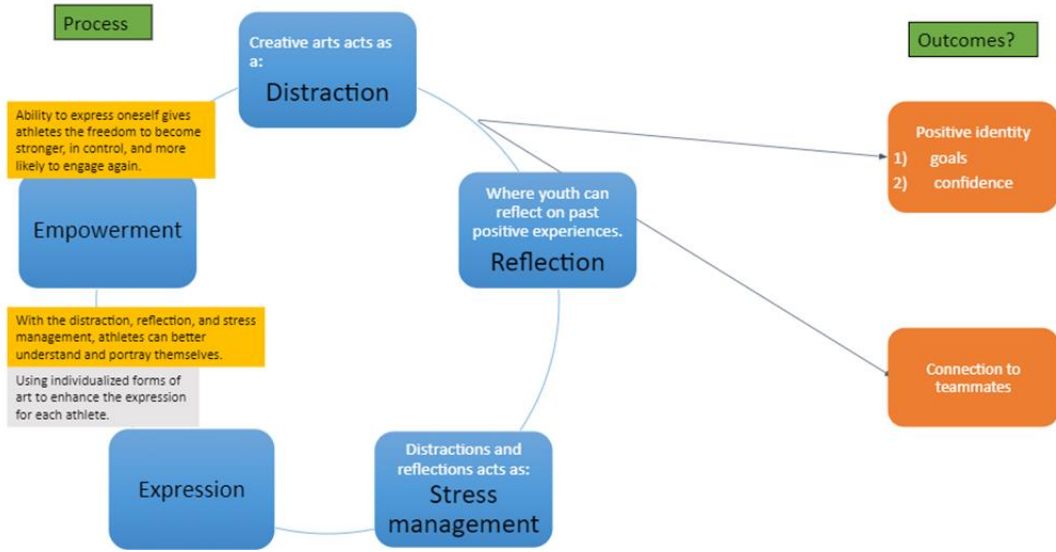
- 1) Before this activity, in general, how well do you feel can express yourself?
- 2) Now, how well do you feel you can express yourself?
- 3) In general, how confident were you feeling before you started the activity?
- 4) How confident are you feeling now?

Sports & Creativity

- 1) Sometimes sports and creativity are viewed as opposite....
 - a. Do you think that’s the case?
 - b. What do you think they have to do with each other?
 - c. What do you think makes them different?
- 2) Are you doing any other types of creative activities outside of sports?
 - a. Tell me about the activities you enjoy most?
 - i. If not, tell me why you aren’t you doing those activities?
 - ii. How often are you doing those activities?
- 3) How would you feel if activities like this were implemented into your sports schedule?

APPENDIX B
INITIAL CODING DIAGRAM

Creative Arts & Athletes
Positive Youth Development



APPENDIX C
THEMATIC CODING CHART

