

Ball Is Life: How Black, Community-Based, Youth Sports Leaders Broker Opportunities for
Historically Marginalized Communities

By

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Dedication

Before all things, I give all glory to God! My guide, my strength, and the head of my life!

Annice, my superhero. There are no amount of words that can express my sincerest appreciation and gratitude for your love, resilience, and constant encouragement. I love you, Mama! This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Lenny, thank you for walking with me every single step of each and every day. Your spiritual presence flows around and through me. I love you, Dad! This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Little Paris, thank you for always walking by faith. You believed in yourself when the world seemed to count you out. No matter what life throws your way, keep moving onward and upward like the warrior and King you are. Stay Born Gift3d! The world needs you. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Irreplaceable Godparents, O.M.G.! Look at how far we have come. I thank God daily for the profound role you have played in my life. I am who I am today because of your love, support, and push. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Siblings, in spite of all of our trials, tribulations, struggles, and losses, I pray this dissertation serves as a reminder to you and your families that we can also accomplish anything we put our minds to. Never stop soaring to unimaginable heights. Uncle "P" loves you! This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Leaders of this generation and the next, I pray this dissertation inspires you to chase your wildest dreams. Anything is possible. Don't let anyone, or any circumstance, dictate your futures. Keep fighting for the change our world desperately needs and deserves. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Impactful youth sports coaches along my journey, thank you for using ball to teach me the game of life. Your influence and the wisdom you shared will never be forgotten. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Family and friends, thank you for always encouraging me and seeing my greatness when I was blind to its presence. Your prayers, love, and acceptance over the years has helped me make it this far. It is only up from here. I love you! This dissertation is dedicated to you.

Each and every ancestor in my circus tent, thank you fighting, dreaming, resisting, and persevering. You paved the way for this accomplishment and I humbly thank you. Your cheers and affirmations will never go unheard. This dissertation is dedicated to you.

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I would like to sincerely thank each participant in my study. Your openness, authenticity, and passion made this study possible. I pray for your strength as you continue to do impactful work in our communities across the country. It was an absolute honor to get to know you as I deepened my understanding about the ways you use your gifts to critically impact marginalized communities through adolescent sports.

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Thank you to all of my committee members. I am truly blessed to have your guidance and support. The valuable time and feedback you provided me with throughout the various phases of this journey will be eternally cherished. I pray you continue to inspire leaders across the world through your work and commitment to the field of education and beyond.

Shari Smith, thank you for keeping me inspired over the years. We met nearly 20 years ago and you never displayed any ounce of doubt pertaining to me accomplishing any of the academic goals I vowed to achieve. Thank you for believing in me and for all of the prayers and check-ins along the way. You are appreciated.

Lastly, I would like to thank my village for playing various roles along my quest to become, “PhD, P!” All of the wellness checks, workouts, quiet spaces, phone calls, text messages, walks, apple pays for lunch, and vibe sessions to the soundtrack of this dissertation (see Appendix A) made this feat possible. Salute to each of you for showing up for me when I needed you the most. Let’s Goooooooo!!!

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Abstract

Within our rapidly changing and growing global society, adolescent development into adulthood remains a pervasive issue that youth serving institutions and youth engagement practitioners across the world must address. While literature shows that there are numerous factors that contribute to the physical, mental, and social-emotional development of our next generation, little research exists related to the impact community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations/programs have on the health and well-being of historically marginalized communities. This research investigated how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders leverage themselves as critical brokers for marginalized communities.

The purpose of this interview study, guided by a critical brokerage perspective, was to learn how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations create brokering orientations and utilize their social and/or cultural capital to serve and uplift marginalized communities. This study focused on Black youth sports leaders who engage in critical brokering orientations to positively impact historically marginalized communities. These leaders engaged in this work to support adolescent development into adulthood and to eliminate inequities that exist within marginalized communities.

Keywords: youth sports, adolescent sports, benefits, achievement, community-based adolescent development, academic success, barriers, Black coaches, role models, organizational brokerage, critical brokerage, adulthood, marginalized communities, Black sports leaders

Dear Basketball...or God: A Diary

Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

Well, everything I expected God to be. What else would have the power to take my mind off of the murder of my father throughout my life. I was just 3 years old. He was only 23. Shot 5 times and left in the streets of Rockford to die for hours. I guess numbers have always been a thing. I know You understand.

Figure 1: *My father's tombstone*



Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

Now that I think about it, You never left me. Even when I was watching Nisha and Duke some of those nights alone, You were right there. In ways that some people would have the nerve

to call “ghetto.” But to me, it was just another way to keep You around. Like when Duke and I played on our version of an indoor court. Taking wire hangers, hanging them on top of the doors, closing them, and boom! Now we had a full court. Mama’s room door and ours. No nerf ball like my homies, though. I guess it was a blessing that we had that shared basket of socks afterall. We’d grab a couple of them out, not the good ones though, and be sure to roll them up in a way that was not too tight. Let’s go. Game time! I still wish we had an outdoor rim, though, like Ester and Bubba, our neighbors on Porter. But I knew we couldn’t afford that. Hell, I was just happy to get that *Love and Basketball* DVD that one year for Christmas. Nonetheless, their mom let us play on it, so I am grateful for that.

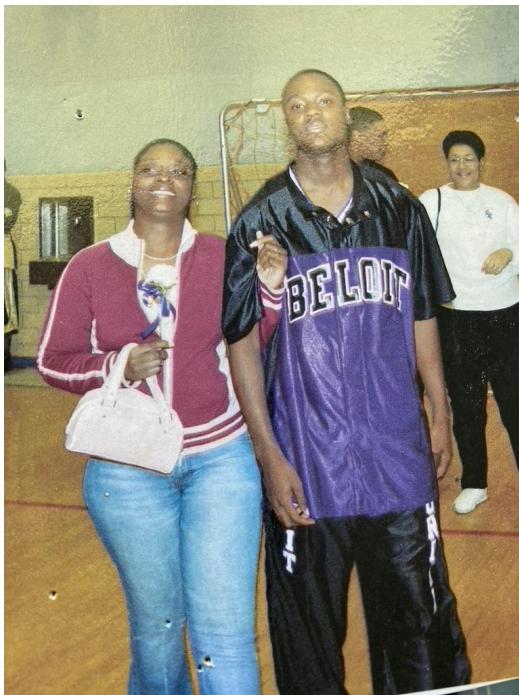
Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

You were there when I needed You the most. Even when Mama couldn’t be. Making sure I never felt alone. Always providing me with hope for better days. Better days when Mama wouldn’t have to handle everything on her own as a single mom raising three kids. I guess it was a blessing in disguise when she prayed to God for help when I was 9. When I took on that supporting role, You and I would eventually forge an inseparable bond that would last forever. I still cherish the times when she could join us! Like all of the parent nights she was able to make it to. The opportunities they provided for me to show off my superhero. The first reason I was willing to dedicate so much blood, sweat, and tears to You. Yep, those tears. Every game I played with You felt like life or death. I hated to lose. And she knew it. But I wonder if she understood the amount of pressure I put on each game, each shot, every bounce. “I have to get to the NBA.” That message played over and over in my head. On repeat. I truly believed that I

had found in You the answer to solving all of our money problems. You were my escape plan from poverty and the never-ending hold it had on my life. I thought You were my only way out. OUR only way out. Damn, I really hated those food stamps.

Figure 2: *Mama and I during parent night senior year*



It wasn't all bad, though! Do You remember when she came to Merrill that night while I shot around in the dark? I was so happy to have that one-on-one time with her. The two things I loved the most together in one spot. Mama and You, Basketball. On one court. With me. What about that time when I played Burdge Elementary and made that game winning shot? 5...4...3...2...1...Swish! I was in 5th grade. I remember her joy. How happy she was for me at that moment. The smile on her face. I remember that feeling of making her proud for what You and I accomplished in that moment. You always found ways to help me do that. Make her happy. Thank You for that!

Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

We grew up together. Traveling through each and every phase of my adolescence. I can't remember a time in my life when my fascination with all aspects of Your name didn't motivate and push me. Things like basketball cards, NBA Jam, NBA posters, headbands, and jerseys. Movies like *Hoop Dreams*, *Blue Chips*, *He Got Game*, *The Sixth Man*, *Sunset Park*, *Coach Carter*, *Like Mike*, *Above the Rim*, and *Space Jam*. I can still hear that Nike Basketball Freestyle commercial. I loved them all because they were connected to You. But nothing compared to the love I had for You and the ways you showed up in hip hop culture. Especially the shoes and the fashion associated with You, Basketball. Two things I loved...music and ball, now connected. Imagine being in elementary school and the other kids around you are wearing Air Jordans. The shoes of your idol. And not the retro kind. I am talking about the "Mikes" Jordan was playing in at that very moment in time. I used to get so mad when classmates left school to go cop them on release dates and come back to school wearing them. I hated that. Not because I hated the people wearing them. I just hated knowing that I loved you as much as I did, and there was no chance in hell of my mom buying those for me. I knew better than to ask. But she always tried her best. Shout out to my OG for letting me get those Allen Iversons. The Reebok Answer 1 DMXs. The red and white ones. I wore those with everything.

Figure 3: *The Reebok Answer 1 DMXs*



Figure 4: *The Reebok Answer 1 DMXs*

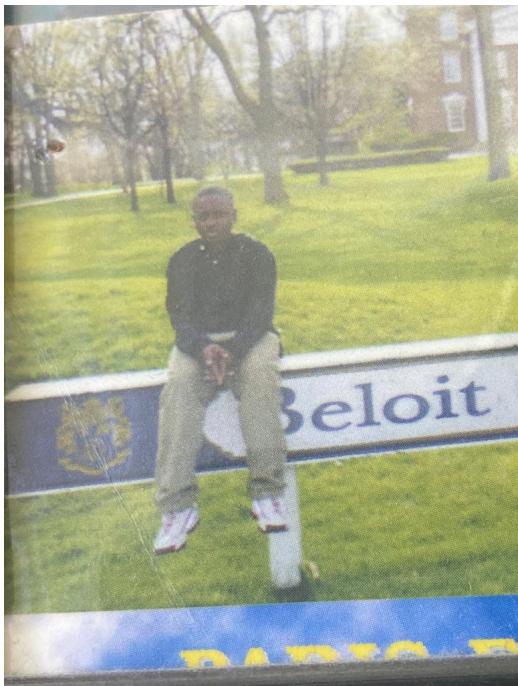


Figure 5: *Wearing my Bulls teammate's Air Jordan 14s in 6th grade*

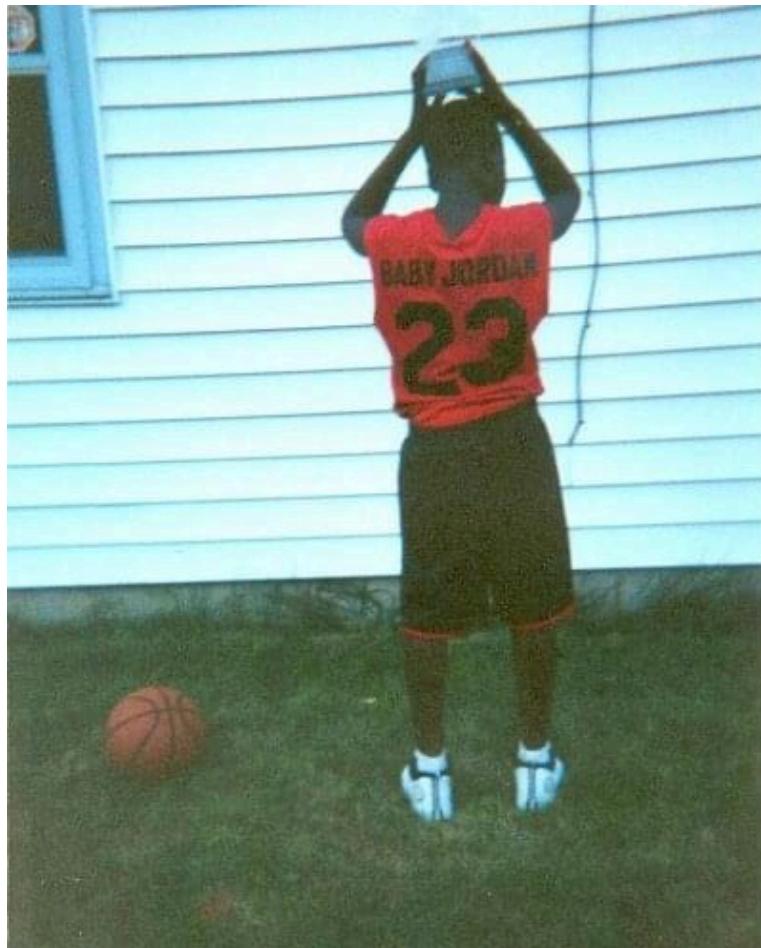


Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

Thank You for Michael Jordan. The first person I knew that loved You like I loved You. A man I never met, but someone who fathered me because I aspired to be just like him. In all ways. He taught me how to be great. He taught me how to win by any means necessary and not apologize for it. He taught me how to chase my dreams, even when others don't believe them or believe in You. He taught me how to walk proudly as a Black man, despite what any critic may say. He taught me how to be, "fly." On and off of the court. We even chew gum alike. Most importantly, he helped me process my father's murder and associate my father's death with our dream of making it to the league and winning the NBA Finals. I remember my sadness as I watched him cry as he held the 1996 NBA Finals' trophy on Father's Day. It was the first title Jordan won after his father was murdered. Murdered like my father. I watched that Black man be vulnerable and cry about his father. A first. It was then when I no longer felt like no one understood my pain and sorrow. I had a renewed sense of hope and a spiritual connection to You, or God, and my Dad. From that moment on, the number 23 became a symbol of hope and healing, instead of a constant reminder that I was the kid that lost his father, who was 23, due to trauma, drugs, gangs, and violence. That was the day "Baby Jordan" was born. Out of pain, despair, and hope. I was 8 years old.

Figure 6: Baby Jordan & 23 on a custom jersey for a Gus Macker tournament



Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

I also want to thank You for introducing me to Kobe Bryant. He loved You, too. “A love so deep I gave you my all – from my mind & body, to my spirit and soul (Bryant, 2021). I remembered how he and I were distant friends when we lost him. As I shed tears for him when he passed away, I recalled the deep bond You and I shared. Kobe and I felt connected because he loved You, too. He also began guiding me from afar when Mike said goodbye to You for good. Kobe had swag, musical talents, flair, Brandy, and a winning attitude. To this day, I can still hear his voice saying, “mamba mentality” and “job not finished!” For some reason, Kobe was just

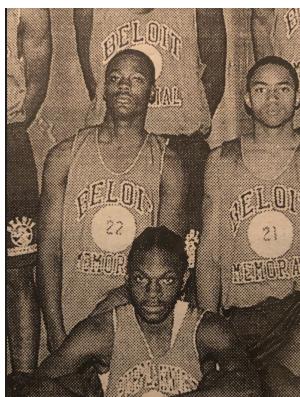
like them to me... my Dad and Michael Jordan. I never knew either one, but the stories I created about who they were, to me and my life, painted them as giants and Gods. I felt a piece of me leave this earth when Kobe joined my father. Kobe, if you can hear me, please tell my Dad I said, "what up."

Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

I wish my Dad would have been there with us when we spent time together in high school. The Purple Knights. It was during that time when our relationship changed forever. When I no longer felt in control of the love I had for You. When the circumstances of my life seemed to catch up to me and I made the one mistake that would take me away from You. Sophomore year. Expelled from school at 15. No access to You like I needed. I was even banned from stepping a foot on school grounds. Banned from experiencing You in action. Banned from feeling You in person. No one knew what You truly meant to me. No one knew the suicidal thoughts I had because of our distance. You did, though. I expressed them to You when I made the decision to keep fighting for You. Another chance to be close to You and my dreams.

Figure 7: Purple Knights basketball picture from the 2003–04 season



Unfortunately, I didn't know I'd come back to school during the 2003-04 basketball season and encounter coaches who did not give players a fair shot to earn a role vs. just assigning you one. Coaches who made me feel like You were cheating on me, and our love affair, with other players. Coaches who didn't express having shared experiences and complex childhood backgrounds like people from my side of the tracks. The side of the tracks that made me who I am. With white coaches, the style of play had to change. The cultural aspects You represented to me didn't seem respected or cared about. At least not respected like the Black coaches I played for at the Boys Club or with the Little Knights. Coaches who pushed all players to be good enough for the "green light." Coaches who pushed you to be great and told me to, "Go out there and do you, P! Ball like you're at Summit!" Instead, I was exposed to a culture of, "Do what I say, or you will sit next to me." Maybe I needed more practice. Or to get more time in the gyms that I could never afford a membership to. Maybe I should have begged for more time in the school gyms that never seemed to get opened up for "us." Or maybe all I needed was the chance to be me. To be the version of Paris that my Dad, Jordan, or Kobe could have maybe helped me develop into if they were near. These things could have helped me love You in a different way during that time in my life. But D.P. and I are not that crazy. Either way, you live and you learn. You gotta respect the repercussions for your decisions and actions. No matter how much they hurt.

Figure 8: *Purple Knights* newspaper article from the 2004–05 season



Dear Basketball...or God,

You were always one in the same to me.

It felt really good to be close to You again when I taught and co-coached at my alma mater for that one year. The same place I lost You when I was expelled at 15. My love for You never faded, even though the way You were being played changed. Just like when I was an athlete on the same exact court. One thing is for certain, those young kings didn't love You like I did, though. Still, I strived to be the Black coaches I had the honor of playing for growing up. The coaches who helped me fall in love with You as early as 6 years old. Maybe even before. I set out to be all the things I wished I had when I was their age. However, they didn't see the possibilities I knew You possessed. They didn't see how far I knew You could take me when I was their age. I always thought about getting my mom out of the hood through You. I knew you would help me get her that big house without being on Section 8. The house no landlord could come in and tell us we had to move out of. Mama deserved that and so much more. Looking

back on those coaching days, I'm sure some of them probably loved You like I did. However, it definitely looked different. But of course it did. We have been developing our relationship as early as the age of six and we had a bond that words couldn't express. I just hope and pray they took from me some of the life lessons and skills that You taught me along the way.

Dear Basketball...or God,

You are one in the same to me.

Two invisible forces personified by my inner child. An inner child that needed something to believe in that was greater than self. An inner child that was facing unimaginable doubts and pressures that seemed as strong as I perceived both of You to be. Two mighty and empowering forces that molded me into the man I am today. I have nothing but sincere gratitude for all You've ever done for me.

Above all, one of the most precious gifts that You gave me were the Black coaches and role models I've met along our journey together. Through You, I was given a taste of something that I always wanted You and I to grow with and share together. That gift was a father-figure to love me, pour into me, and stay by my side, no matter what, like You do.

You have given me so much hope, guidance, and protection. You've given me air when I couldn't breathe. You've been a best friend when I felt alone. You've given me vision when I couldn't dream or see. I still chase You. I still love You. I still need You in my life. I'll never let You go because I still crave You. Let's own a team.

Thank You, Ball!

Thank You, GOD.

Ball Is Life!!

Chapter 1: Introduction

All children, regardless of their race, ability, gender, and/or socioeconomic background, have the capacity and potential to grow into thriving adults (Benson, 1997; Damon, 2004). In a rapidly changing global society plagued by the COVID-19 health pandemic, and racial oppression impacting communities of color across the United States (U.S.), our collective investment into the well-being and success of all young people is a high priority. Now, more than ever, it is critical for youth engagement practitioners and researchers to exert time and energy into the physical, mental, and social-emotional development of our next generation (Arnold, 2020). As we continue to research and explore the lasting impacts of COVID-19 on all Americans, it is imperative that we uplift and guide all of our nation's youth from diverse environments in order to ensure our nation continues to thrive (Arnold, 2020).

Today, it remains clear that youth across America are continuing to recover from the trauma and stress they are facing caused by historic school closures, social distancing from loved ones, the loss of extracurricular activities, and the lasting effects of COVID-19 in their day to day lives (Arnold, 2020). With numerous factors contributing to the physical, social, and psychological health and well-being of all youth, young people must have opportunities to engage in positive youth development within supportive and asset-centered environments and institutions (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Damon, 2004; Lerner et al., 2005). Although an adolescent's journey towards self-exploration and lifelong success is fundamentally a personal endeavor, the holistic growth and development of all youth is influenced by their local communities, institutions, families, peers, adult relationships, and/or engagement in youth-serving organizations, programs and extracurricular activities (Busching & Krahé, 2020; Dubas & Gerris, 2002; Eccles et al., 1993; Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Smetana & Daddis,

2002). When youth are detached from, or do not have access to, asset-based environments and institutions, their opportunities for positive development are problematically diminished and they become isolated. Mario Small (2010) notes that, “In a society increasingly structured around formal organizations, the organizational isolate is a person increasingly guaranteed to be left out” (p. 197). By being isolated from churches, schools, sports teams, and other youth-serving entities, youth, distinctly youth impacted by poverty, lack opportunities for positive adult and peer relationships and face significant obstacles along their development journeys (Wilson, 2012).

As youth progress through vulnerable stages of adolescence across multiple environments, access to trusted adults and other positive role models within these environments play a major role in their development and life success (Pringle et al., 2018). These trusted adults give young people practical support and motivate them to make positive social and educational decisions as they transition through adolescence (Meltzer et al., 2016). While access to trusted adults and role models is essential for the development and success of all youth, research surrounding inequities related to academic achievement and the social-emotional well-being of children of color, particularly Black youth, suggests that youth of color urgently need our collective support across institutions (Frattura & Capper, 2007). Young people of color face many challenges due to the socio-political community contexts they live in. One challenge for youth in urban communities is gaining the social capital they need for their personal growth and development. These resilient adolescents rely on youth-serving institutions, organizations, and adults to help them navigate their harsh realities (Dill et al., 2019).

Even though our educational institutions provide access to trusting adults and role models for some youth, many families, community leaders, and coaches, notably youth sports coaches,

play tremendous roles in adolescent growth, development, and success (Camiré et al., 2012; Richardson, 2012). Throughout 2021, only 37% of children ages 6-12 participated in team sports on a consistent basis (State of Play 2022, 2022). With team participation rates remaining lower than pre-pandemic levels, and increased awareness related to the benefits youth sports provide adolescents across communities, it is vital that we continue to encourage and support families in providing avenues to youth sports participation for adolescents. By engaging in youth sports, and having structured interactions with positive, loving, and caring role models and coaches, youth, particularly youth of color, have access to resources and positive experiences that shape who they are (Dill et al., 2019; Horn, 2008).

Despite compelling evidence that illustrates the impact communities, institutions, peers, and adult relationships have on the physical, mental, and emotional development of all adolescents, many youth, particularly adolescents from historically marginalized backgrounds, continue to remain detached from asset-based environments (Wilson, 2012). Research surrounding inequities related to the social-emotional well-being and academic achievement of adolescents of color reveals a vital need for all institutions to empower, uplift and support youth from underrepresented backgrounds (Frattura & Capper, 2007). However, there is little research that has examined how community-based youth sport leaders within organizations, who serve marginalized communities, support and respond to the needs of youth, families, and communities from underserved backgrounds. This study seeks to investigate how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders create brokering orientations that impact historically marginalized communities. The research question driving this study is: How do Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations utilize critical brokerage practices to positively impact historically marginalized communities?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To understand the impact youth sports have on the overall growth and development of adolescents, I researched and examined peer-reviewed, empirical articles and books/book chapters written primarily within the last three decades about the benefits of youth participation in organized sports, barriers that prevent and/or discourage youth engagement, and the role sports organizations and high quality coaches/role models play in youth success inside of schools and within their communities. To identify relevant articles, I utilized the University of Wisconsin-Madison online search platform, which provided me access to EBSCO, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Journal Storage (JSTOR). I also relied on Google Scholar. Initially, I began my search using the key terms *youth, adolescent, development, and sports*. However, this search produced a vast amount of articles that were not directly correlated to this study. I later narrowed my search to focus on the benefits of youth sports/activity participation and the valuable role coaches and adults play in adolescent development. For this search, I included search terms/phrases such as *youth, sports, adolescents, benefits, achievement, adolescent development, academic success, education, barriers, coaches, role models, organizational brokerage, and adulthood*. After reading the identified article and book results, I also examined their reference lists for additional journal articles that were relevant to my research. All selected literature titles from the search results aligned explicitly with research related to high quality organized youth sports organizations/programs and the impact these organizations/programs have on adolescent development and success.

Given the vastness of the topics of adolescent development and youth sports/activities, I acknowledge that my review of literature does not exhaust all of the scholarly literature on these topics. However, I believe this literature review on the relationship between adolescents'

participation in youth sports and their overall growth and development as they transition into adulthood is extensive. I explored and analyzed this complex body of scholarly literature on the benefits of organized youth sports to gain a comprehensive understanding of youth sports organizations/programs that positively contribute to adolescent success. I also aimed to understand the practical ways organizations, coaches, and other adult leaders effectively serve youth and families who are navigating barriers that inhibit sports participation and success.

Throughout the United States, Black and Brown youth of color from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds consistently face inequitable educational experiences in comparison to their white counterparts (APA, 2012; Quintana & Mahgoub, 2016). Despite endless educational reform agendas to eradicate racial and social inequities within our k-12 institutions, achievement gaps continue to persist and disproportionately impact youth of color (Bower, 2011; Anderson & Ritter, 2017). When we explore public and private k-12 disaggregated educational outcome data related to student achievement, engagement, and discipline, we often discover levels of predictability related to race, class, and their correlation to student outcomes (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). For example, in 2018-19, the average Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) was 86 percent across the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Yet, only two racial groups, White and Asian/Pacific Islanders, achieved an average graduation rate at or above the national average (see Table 1).

Table 1
2018-19 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR) for Public High School Students by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2018-19 ACGR by Percentage
American Indian/Alaska Native	74%
Asian/Pacific Islander	93%
Black	80%

Hispanic	82%
White	89%

Note. Adapted from <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=805>.

We continue to see similar data trends related to disciplinary consequences and the number of public school students across the U.S. who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. For instance, in 2013-14, the NCES reports that 2.6 million public school students (5.3 percent) received one or more out-of-school suspensions. Yet, Black students received a higher percentage of one or more out-of-school suspensions in comparison to any other racial/ethnic group (see Table 2).

Table 2
2013-14 Percentage of Public School Students Who Received One or More Out-of-School Suspension by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Out-of-School Suspensions by Percentage
American Indian/Alaska Native	6.7%
Asian	1.1%
Black	13.7%
Hispanic	4.5%
Pacific Islander	4.5%
Two or More Races	5.3%
White	3.4%

Note. Adapted from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rda.asp#f2.

Black and other historically marginalized students of color continue to suffer from negative student outcomes and inequitable exclusionary discipline practices (Skiba et al., 2014). In an

attempt to disrupt inequitable gaps in student achievement and success, many racially diverse school districts across the United States are enacting policies, implementing interventions, and increasing partnerships with various community stakeholders (Davison et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2019). However, many of the efforts to combat disproportionality within our educational institutions show minimal progress towards closing persisting achievement gaps.

Although there has been incremental growth towards eradicating gaps in student achievement through policy, interventions, and community partnerships, researchers have discovered correlations between adolescent participation in extracurricular activities, particularly organized youth sports, and improved academic achievement and adolescent development (Bradley et al., 2012; Eitle & Eitle, 2002; Syväoja et al., 2018; Van Boekel et al., 2016). Given youth sports provide adolescents with crucial benefits, it is important for stakeholders to continue promoting youth sports in communities across the country. In 2022, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) noted that in 2020, during a 12-month reference period, 54.1 percent of adolescents aged 6-17 participated in sports (Black et al., 2022). Furthermore, an analysis of survey data gathered by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) reveals that nearly 7,600,000 youth participated in athletic competition at the high school level during the 2021-2022 school year (NFHS, 2022). While celebrating youth across the United States who are participating in youth sports, it is imperative to note that we are still seeking ways to continue increasing engagement in order to reach our pre-COVID-19 levels of participation. According to the Aspen Institute's "State of Play 2022" annual report, children and adolescents are increasingly finding their way back to youth sports involvement after seeing declines due to COVID-19 (State of Play 2022, 2022). The "State of Play 2022" annual report explains this recent increase in youth sports participation is due to families and community stakeholders' new

appreciation for the physical and mental health benefits that sports activities can provide (State of Play 2022, 2022).

Based on the benefits youth sports and other extracurricular activities provide adolescents, the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) continuously promotes and advocates for the existence of interscholastic and out-of-school sports and extracurricular activities. In their article, “The Case for High School Activities,” the NFHS highlights the value and benefits of extracurricular activity participation, like sports, among adolescents. “These activities provide important developmental experiences that enrich a student’s high school experience and entire life, and these programs must be protected and sustained” (para. 2). In order to truly promote and protect the benefits of youth sports activities for all, and increase adolescent participation across communities, we must deepen our understanding of the experiences, skills, and outcomes adolescents gain through their continued involvement.

Connectedness and Sense of Belonging

Many students of color feel isolated and unsupported in school due to the dominant cultural values that are upheld and reflected in their academic environments (Brown & Evans, 2002). Because adolescents of color are most at risk of school failure, Brown and Evans (2002) contend that it is crucial we create opportunities for improved connectedness between students from different racial backgrounds and increase their access to positive inclusive experiences like sports participation. In addition to students of color feeling isolated and unsupported in schools, youth from all backgrounds are struggling with maintaining positive mental health, particularly teen girls (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2023). “While all teens reported increasing mental health challenges, experiences of violence, and suicidal thoughts and

behaviors, girls fared worse than boys across nearly all measures" (CDC, 2023). Due to the isolation, lack of support, and mental health challenges adolescents currently face, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) urges schools to implement programs and services that can address the social-emotional and mental health needs of adolescents.

Because youth across the United States spend numerous hours in schools daily, increasing school-based activities can positively impact the social-emotional and mental health of adolescent youth and can help cultivate environments that promote school connectedness (CDC, 2023). Adolescents who are involved in youth sports and other extracurricular activities have a greater sense of belonging in schools related to feelings of inclusion, acceptance, and support (Knifsend & Graham, 2011). Although participation in sports and extracurricular activities create a sense of belonging and connectedness, Renwick and colleagues (2019) assert that authentic belonging is a continuous process "...through engaging in social relationships, interacting with people who are similar, negotiating meaningful roles in the community, and through navigating norms and expectations..." (p. 961). These authentic social relationships and interactions adolescents experience through activity participation may increase intrinsic motivation, support the perceived development of positive relationships, deepen existing relationships among peers, and help youth build new friendships (Bouchard et al., 2022). Adolescents who have an increased sense of belonging in school also see growth in their academic motivation, engagement, and achievement (Knifsend & Graham, 2011).

Better Educational Outcomes

School environments that create and/or support opportunities for students to understand and engage in healthy habits and behaviors can have a positive impact on scholars' health and educational outcomes (Michael et al., 2015). Adolescents who participate in physical activities

like youth sports enhance their physical health and have better educational outcomes related to grades, graduation rates, and test scores (Basch, 2011; Feldman & Matjasko, 2006; Haapala et al., 2017; Trudeau & Shephard, 2008). Adversely, youth who do not learn, practice, or have exposure to healthy habits are subject to more health problems, which consequently impacts their academic success, ability to focus, and overall motivation (Basch, 2011). Youth who engage in physical activity also experience immediate improvements to their thinking and cognition (CDC, 2022). As youth engage in physical activity, increased levels of executive functioning have an impact on cognitive engagement and functioning, self-regulation, and impulsivity (Best et al., 2011; Egger et al., 2019).

Positive Youth Development

Adolescent development through extracurricular activities, like youth sports, help youth positively navigate through multiple stages of adolescence (Denault et al., 2022). As youth progress through adolescence, their overall development is shaped by their participation in sports that provide them with access to people and programs that promote opportunities for Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Blomfield & Barber, 2011; Larson, 2000). The positive development adolescents gain from their involvement in youth sports and other activities is attributed to the quality of opportunities they are provided. Youth need access to sports and activities that provide opportunities to create positive relationships with peers and adults, engage in identity development, practice social skills, and develop initiative (Blomfield & Barber, 2011; Larson, 2000; Shiah et al., 2013).

Additionally, Fitch and colleagues (2016) explain how participating in youth sports support the development of “perseverance, emotional self-regulation, self-efficacy, and self esteem” (p. 29). Throughout various stages of adolescence, youth also have to navigate peer

pressure and other temptations to engage in harmful and unproductive behaviors. Guèvremont and colleagues (2014) find that participation in youth sports and/or extracurricular activities can also contribute to improved behavioral and social-emotional outcomes. Fitch and co-authors (2016) support this finding by discussing how participation in youth sports helps adolescents combat pressures to engage in negative behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use, because of their aspirations to do well in their sport(s).

Life Skills

In addition to positive youth development, youth sports engagement increases opportunities for adolescents to obtain valuable life skills (Martin & Camiré, 2020). The life skills adolescents learn throughout their involvement in youth sports include initiative, goal-setting, respect, teamwork, and leadership (Holt et al., 2008). Youth who are able to attain these life skills see a significant impact on their physical, mental, social-emotional, and cognitive well-being that extends beyond adolescence (Bailey et al., 2009). Nonetheless, if youth are unable to practice the life skills they gain consistently, they risk not having the skills transfer into adulthood. “However, for the skills learned in sports to actually be considered life skills, they must be transferred and applied in other life domains such as school or work” (Camiré et al., 2012, p. 243).

According to Camiré and co-authors (2009), many youth sports organizations/programs create mission statements that promote the attainment of various life skills that can contribute to adolescent success as they transition into adulthood (see table 3). Yet, many programs and coaches fail to intentionally provide adolescents with access to individuals that directly teach and practice these life skills across domains inside and outside of sports (Martin & Camiré, 2020). By increasing adolescent access to youth sports and coaches who internalize and uplift key

interpersonal and intrapersonal life skills like teamwork, respect and leadership, organizations and coaches promote culturally responsive environments that foster learning and growth among individual athletes and their communities (Camiré et al., 2021).

Table 3

Spring 2023 Mission Statements of Youth Sport Organizations/Programs in the United States That Promote Youth Development and Success

Youth Sport Organization	Youth Sport	Location	Mission Statement
Running Rebels	Basketball	Milwaukee, WI	“The Running Rebels Community Organization engages the community, youth, and their families; prevents involvement in gangs, drugs, violence, and the juvenile justice system; intervenes and guides youth by assisting them with making positive choices; and coaches youth through their transition into adulthood. We accomplish this through building relationships with youth and providing the resources and skills necessary for them to become thriving, connected, and contributing adult members of our community.”
Riverside Hawks	Basketball	New York, NY	“The mission of the Riverside Hawks is to help the students and families in our community use basketball to pursue academic opportunities and promote character development.”
Force Performance Volleyball	Volleyball	Elk Grove, CA	“Force is committed to provide a program of excellence: excellence in the achievements of its athletes; excellence in consistently strong coaching and administration; and, most importantly, excellence in opportunities for every athlete to develop into the best athlete and person she can be.”
Solar Soccer Club	Soccer	Dallas, TX	“Our goal is to combine soccer & education to develop character - Focusing on education and behavior is part of our core

			philosophy. Ultimately we aim to build players in a healthy team environment where everyone knows their role and values their contribution.”
Sun Valley Youth Hockey Association	Hockey	Sun Valley, ID	“Sun Valley Youth Hockey Association (“SVYH”) is committed to providing high-quality ice hockey programs for the young people of the Wood River Valley in an environment that is open to youths at all levels of interest, ability and economic standing. Sun Valley Youth Hockey assists all participants in reaching their athletic potential by teaching skills that enhance the performance and enjoyment of ice hockey, while also developing lifetime skills of goal setting, commitment, self-discipline, determination, teamwork and sportsmanship.”

Note. Adapted from: <https://runningrebels.org/about/>, <https://riversidehawks.org/>, <https://www.forcevbc.com/about>, <https://solarsoccerclub.net/our-club/>, and <https://svyha.pucksystems.com/page/show/44074-mission-statement>

Barriers

Feldman and Matjasko (2006) argue that youth from underserved backgrounds are the adolescents who benefit most from extracurricular activity participation. Although \$30-40 billion are spent by families annually on their children’s sports activities, disparities correlated to race and socioeconomic status continue to have an impact on who has access and who participates in youth sports and other extracurricular activities (State of Play 2022, 2022). “Across the USA, disparities closely linked with race and socioeconomic status (SES) exist such that physical, health, and educational outcomes associated with youth development are negatively impacted for children and adolescents from underserved, marginalized communities” (Bopp & Roetert, 2018, p. 1560). As we continue to examine the various benefits sports provide adolescents, we must also explore the barriers historically marginalized youth and underserved communities face that

may prevent their participation and access to these benefits. For example, expenses related to out-of-school extracurricular activity participation can require access to a substantial amount of money and require youth and families to provide their own modes of transportation (Guèvremont et al., 2014).

Financial costs associated with playing sports, and the impact affordability has on adolescents' experiences within sports, perpetuate systemic divides that currently exist between American families (State of Play 2022, 2022). On average, families pay \$833 annually for one child's primary sport, with wealthy families spending nearly four times more than families from low socioeconomic backgrounds (State of Play 2022, 2022). Furthermore, the "State of Play, 2022" annual report also reveals discrepancies in how much Black, Hispanic/Latino, and white families spend on one child's primary sports activities based on race/ethnicity (see table 4).

Table 4
Fall 2022 Annual Dollar Amount Spent Per Family on One Child's Primary Sport Activities by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Annual Dollar Amount Spent
Black	\$574
Hispanic/Latino	\$883
White	\$881

Note. Adapted from <https://projectplay.org/state-of-play-2022/costs-to-play-trends>.

With increasing sports expenses for families due to inflation, new equipment, increased personal training/individualized lessons, camp registration fees, travel, and better coaching, some families are forced to reduce the number of sports and/or leagues their child participates in due to finances (State of Play 2022, 2022). Additionally, some parents are forced to work more hours to

cover rising sports costs, which impacts their level of commitment and involvement in their child's sport(s) (Knight et al., 2016). Because of practical barriers like money, time, and transportation, Heath and colleagues (2018) explains that youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities consistently over time, and therefore lack the exposure needed to fully gain the positive developmental benefits youth sports and other extracurricular activities have to offer. "Issues of expertise and individual talent; popularity, status, and election procedures to offices and certain clubs; and minimum academic performance requirements all influence participation in sports, fine arts, and other in-school extracurricular activities" (Brown & Evans, 2002, p. 52). Schools and communities must effectively utilize their resources to dismantle barriers that have consistently deprived some adolescents from participating in youth sports. At the same time, it is important for sports organizations, coaches, and other adult role models to deliberately acknowledge the impact barriers have on the health and development of youth and leverage their backgrounds and connections to create valuable developmental experiences for all youth (Camiré et al., 2021).

Highly Effective Coaches and Role Models

Adolescents, particularly youth from historically marginalized backgrounds, need access to effective youth sports organizations, coaches, and role models. This access provides adolescents with opportunities to learn the knowledge and skills needed to navigate various societal barriers that have the potential to prevent their successful transitions into adulthood (Martin & Camiré, 2020). Effective youth sports coaches often state that their main reasons for coaching are extending their passion for sports to athletes and upholding their desire to positively shape and impact athletes beyond the game (Martin & Camiré, 2020). Coaches and other supporting adults must successfully design and implement climates that uplift positive behavior,

lean into teachable moments, foster relationships among adolescents, and create a strong sense of belonging for each athlete (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2018; Martin & Camiré, 2020). Through sports, supportive climates open up avenues to high quality engagement and growth for all adolescent athletes. They also ensure adolescent athletes have exposure to affirming environments, supportive teammates, coaches, and/or other adults who authentically care about their well-being (Papaioannou et al., 2008; Van Boekel, et al., 2016).

Two examples of highly effective youth coaches are Carlos and Tatum Honore with the 5th Ward Saints in Houston, Texas. After visiting friends in the 5th Ward with his wife, Coach Tatum, Coach Carlos had an idea to create an opportunity in the community that would make a difference in the lives of young people (KHOU, 2011). Coach Carlos and Coach Tatum decided to move to the community and founded the Texas Women and Children's Advocacy Services, which included the creation of a youth football team. The Texas Women and Children's Advocacy Services was founded to help youth ages 4-20 acquire stability in their life through family-centered programming (KHOU, 2011). As coaches of the 5th Ward Saints, who create familial bonds with the youth and families they serve, Coach Carlos and Coach Tatum built uplifting environments that promoted the values adolescents need to be successful youth athletes and scholars. "They get on us about our grades and being good in school and stuff, says 7th grader Tyrell Wooten. They watch over us like we are a second set of family" (KHOU, para. 15). Because Coach Carlos and Coach Tatum personally know and understand the plight of the youth they lead, they foster affirming and supportive environments that will help youth persevere through their circumstances (KHOU, 2011).

Another example of a highly effective youth coach is Coach Khali Sweeney, founder and CEO of Downtown Boxing Gym (DBG) in Detroit, Michigan. Like many adolescents growing

up in urban communities, Coach Khali lacked vital support and resources during adolescence (DBG, 2023). Due to his personal experiences, Coach Khali set out to create an organization whose purpose and mission is to help young people mature in a safe, supportive, engaging, and uplifting environment by providing them with the tools, resources, and educational opportunities necessary to succeed (Witsil, 2021). With a 100% high school graduation rate since its founding in 2007, Coach Khali and DBG have utilized the sport of boxing and other extracurricular activities to engage students in tutoring and mentoring opportunities that are designed to reach the “whole-child,” while developing their skills inside and outside of the ring (Witsil, 2021). By giving youth long-term, personalized support and guidance through age 25, DBG continues to ensure they have lifelong impact on the youth they serve (DBG, 2023).

Brokering Organizations

In addition to providing adolescents with access to supportive environments and caring adults to combat barriers, youth sports organizations and their leaders have the potential to impact the quality of life players and their families experience beyond sports. In *Unanticipated Gains* (2010), Mario Small demonstrates how organizations play key roles as connectors, also called brokers, by providing adolescents and their families access to beneficial relationships and resources that stem from the social, cultural, and political capital these organizations possess. While underrepresented and underserved adolescent athletes are confronting and navigating a multitude of barriers along their paths toward a safe and constructive adulthood, they require access to organizational brokers that can provide them with support networks that can lead to increased opportunities and resources (Small & Gose, 2020). In *Unanticipated Gains* (2010), Small contends that through organizational brokerage, “the general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the

resources they contain" (p.19), individuals develop and nurture trusting and purposeful relationships that expose them to networks of support and connection.

As Small's work suggests, these networks of support and connection can provide adolescents and their families with "unanticipated gains" that are a result of simply being members of brokering organizations that promote engagement and the development of positive relationships across communities. These organizations are places where people interact with other members of their community on a routine basis as part of their daily lives (Small, 2010). The space, norms, activities and practices of these diverse "routine" organizations affect their ability to broker. "Routine organizations include workplaces, restaurants, barbershops, childcare centers, grocery stores, bodegas, churches, botanicals, gyms, community centers, neighborhood clinics, coffee shops, bars, and so on" (Small & Gose, 2020, p. 94). Routine brokering organizations serve as the dominant method in which low-income families obtain resources, build community connections and relationships, and combat the impact of poverty on their families. It is essential for routine brokering organizations to be embedded into the fabric of impoverished neighborhoods and help to improve the outcomes of socioeconomically disadvantaged adolescents and families (Small & Gose, 2020). Additionally, brokering organizations must intentionally and welcomingly embrace the role they play in network formation due to their natural ability to bring people across communities together through their routine contact with the organizations.

One example of a brokering organization that naturally brings adolescent athletes and their families into networks of support and connections are schools. According to Miller and colleagues (2015), brokering organizations like schools connect families to "resources, relationships, and broader opportunities to achieve education-related success" (Millier et al.,

2015, p. 733). Schools that broker educational opportunities facilitate ongoing positive interactions between families, engage empathetic district staff across various levels within a school district, and ensure equitable access to opportunities and resources for all students and families (Miller et al., 2015). These trusting bonds and connections, centered around a shared purpose and mutually benefiting outcomes, leads to resource sharing and support for diverse families and communities. These trusting bonds and connections also contribute to the overall success of the institution (Miller et al., 2015).

Nonprofit community organizations also have the natural potential and capacity to serve as brokering organizations for adolescent athletes and their families. One example of a nonprofit brokering organization that serves as a brokering organization is the Center of Life located in Pittsburg, PA (Hobson et al., 2016). Through its role as a critical broker under the direction of founder Pastor Tim Smith, the Center of Life (COL) provides residents from the Hazelwood community with, “life skills, education, training, and resources necessary to be strong and make their community strong” (Center of Life). As COL continues to provide leadership, stability, services, and connections to Hazelwood youth and adult residents, it remains closely connected to its central focus, which produces innovative and empowering programming to youth and connects residents to resources across the Pittsburg community (Hobson et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the COL has been instrumental in building and maintaining mutual reciprocal relationships with stakeholders throughout the greater Hazelwood community. This is evident in the creation and implementation of the Hazelwood/Duquesne University Partnership. The Hazelwood/Duquesne University Partnership aims to provide Hazelwood residents with the tools and knowledge they need to become the community they are striving to be, while also seeking solutions to various local social and economic community issues (Hobson et al., 2016).

Under the powerful leadership of Pastor Smith, and through ongoing interactions between Hazelwood residents and community partners, COL continues to be a key voice for Hazelwood residents. Additionally, COL provides opportunities for families in the neighborhood to build relationships among one another and creates opportunities for community residents to build relationships with key community institutions like schools (Hobson et al., 2016).

Conclusion

As our next generation continues to bounce back from the lasting effects of COVID-19, it is essential for our nation to invest in the development and well-being of all youth, regardless of their backgrounds. Compelling evidence illustrates the impact communities, institutions, peers, and adult relationships have on the physical, mental, and social-emotional development of all adolescents. Despite this evidence, many youth, particularly adolescents from marginalized communities, continue to remain detached from asset-based environments (Wilson, 2012). Research surrounding inequities related to the social-emotional well-being and academic achievement of adolescents of color reveals a vital need for all institutions to partner together to collectively empower, uplift, and support youth from underrepresented backgrounds (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

This literature review suggests a future research agenda that provides researchers and practitioners with information about how participation in extracurricular activities, specifically youth sports, provides adolescents with critical benefits that aid in their overall growth and development. Equally, this review of literature suggests a future research agenda that provides researchers and practitioners with information about how youth sports leaders and organizations can adopt deeper identities as brokering entities.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

As I strive to better understand how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations provide marginalized communities with access to meaningful relationships, resources and opportunities, I find certain elements of Hopson, Miller, and Lovelace's (2016) critical brokerage perspective relevant to my study. Hopson and colleagues' study examined a university-school-community partnership, with a focus on one community empowerment agency, Center of Life (COL), located in Hazelwood, Pennsylvania. Hopson and colleagues (2016) "consider the work of COL—both within and beyond the confines of the partnership—as brokering work in that the community residents who live and work in and through COL are afforded new resources, relationships, and opportunities" (p. 37). The brokerage that occurs within and throughout COL is identified as *critical brokerage* as it is dedicated to addressing larger societal inequities in "active pursuit of improved conditions for all who are traditionally placed on the fringes of society" (Hopson et al., 2016, p. 39). Due to its critical brokerage nature, COL leaders intentionally strive to uplift social injustices that are built into the fabric of the Hazelwood community (Hopson et al., 2016).

A critical brokerage perspective widens Small's (2010) organizational embeddedness perspective, which emphasizes the ways that "organizations can shape the extent to which they [organization participants] form either social or organizational ties" (p. 18). For this study, I examined the practices youth sports leaders and organizations employ to impact individuals' access to relationships, resources, and opportunities. For that reason, I designed my research question to examine Black, community-based, youth sports leaders' practices and seek to understand the impact these practices have on historically marginalized communities.

Organizational Context

Small's (2010) mixed-methods study of childcare facilities in New York City desired to better comprehend the ways an individual's social capital is affected by organizations. Small's organizational embeddedness perspective suggests "above all, that what researchers have called a person's social capital depends substantially on the institutional practices of the organizations in which the person routinely participates" (Small, 2010, p. 177). The organizational embeddedness perspective emphasizes organizational context as a valuable contributor to one's social capital. This notion of organizational embeddedness perspective exists in contrast to traditional social capital concepts that claim a person's motivation and mobilization of resources determine their social capital. Although our personal levels of motivation, and or ability to mobilize resources contribute to our social capital, "organizational brokerage introduces the possibility of acquiring resources while exercising little agency in the process" (Small, 2010, p. 155). Small (2010) further offers that "mobilization does not depend solely on how willing a person is to use her ties; mobilization is mediated, and sometimes perpetuated, by organizations" (p. 18).

By enlightening my research with tenets of organizational embeddedness theory, I was able to center the practices of community-based, youth sports leaders from a human and organizational perspective. In doing so, I utilized Small's definition of an organization: "An organization refers to both the actors who compose it and the institutional practices that organize their behavior" (p.15). During his examination of childcare centers, Small (2010) viewed each center as being composed of children, families, staff and directors. Small also looked at the childcare centers as being composed of institutional practices like PTA meetings, pickup and drop-off procedures, play, napping, and teaching. Building off of Small (2010), I looked at youth

sports organizations as composed of adolescents, families, communities, and organizational leaders. Across all settings, I viewed youth sports organizations as being composed of institutional practices/norms that include organizational-based resources—goods, various services, information,—opportunities, relationships, connections, and other practices that surface.

The inclusion of the institutional practices described above further highlighted the importance of having an organizational context to this study. “The organizational embeddedness perspective directs attention less to structure than to context—to the everyday settings in which people interact with others” (Small, 2010, p. 178). By examining the various contexts community-based, youth sports leaders operate within , I was able to center how historically marginalized communities benefit and develop as institutional practices unfold within everyday settings and interactions. Extending a critical brokerage perspective from Small’s (2010) organizational embeddedness perspective fit my study because: I looked at the actions and motivations of individual leaders and contextually examined the ways that community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations shaped marginalized communities’ access to meaningful relationships, opportunities, and resources.

Major Tenets of Critical Brokerage

Hopson and colleagues’ (2016) critical brokerage perspective centers relationships, resources, and opportunities within an organizational context. Center of Life (COL), the focal organization in their study, serves as resource, hub, and critical broker. Hopson and colleagues’ (2016) study explored the formation of relationships and interactions created by, and existing within, COL. “COL nurtures frequent interactions and trusting relationships through wide-ranging programming that engages residents of all ages” (Hopson et al., 2016, p. 39). The frequent interactions and trusting relationships nurtured by COL is essential to their role as a

critical broker. Although there are many components of a critical brokerage perspective, I drew most substantially from a few of its major tenets as I formed an organizing framework to support and make sense of the empirical data I collected and analyzed. By focusing on these major tenets, I was able to prioritize the context and practices of Black, community-based, youth sports leaders.

Relationships

Relationship formation is one major tenet of critical brokerage. Leaders within organizations like COL, which function as a critical broker, create opportunities for members to build relationships with one another and with staff embedded within the organization. Additionally, critical brokers establish relationships for their members with other organizations, which is referred to as organizational ties. Small (2010) used the phrase “organizational tie” to highlight the relationships that mothers of children within the childcare centers made with other organizations or to formal representatives from those organizations. Small (2010) further discusses organizational ties by asking the following questions: “To what organizations did the mothers form ties? What resources could they acquire through these ties? And exactly how did mothers acquire these resources?” (p. 132). In a similar fashion, Hopson and colleagues (2016) conclude that,

Principals, teachers, social workers, and others who work within schools can play critical roles as connectors to resources within and beyond school walls. They can naturally operate as relational boundary spanners for students, families, and the organizations that are relevant to their lives. (p. 42)

The critical brokerage perspective is inclusive of many forms of relationships within its relationship tenet. Relationships between adolescents, between families, between adolescents,

families, and organizational leaders, and between organizational leaders, adolescents, families, and other organizations are all essential to understanding how community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations serve as critical brokers. These key relationships are present within organizations across communities as youth sports leaders promote the formation of relationships that help navigate inequitable systems, structures, and institutions.

Resources

A focus on resource access is another component of a critical brokerage perspective. COL, a critical broker, “accrues human, social, and financial resources in active pursuit of improved conditions for all who are traditionally placed on the fringes of society” (Hopson, et al., 2016, p. 39). Throughout the Hazelwood community, COL provides various key resources to the area and prioritizes “innovative programming that empowers youth and connects residents to resources throughout the city” (Hopson, et al., 2016, p. 36). This prioritization allows COL to serve as a resource that empowers and connects residents, which occurs in addition to any material resources they may provide to members of the Hazelwood community. Through COL’s ability to serve as an influential broker between individuals and institutions within the Hazelwood community, they are able to support the building of productive and understanding relationships and have become a hub of resources for youth, families, and institutions within their community.

Small (2010) also discusses resources by examining the various ways childcare centers provide families with access to them. The childcare centers Small (2010) explored were formally tied to organizations from diverse fields such as: other childcare centers, public k-12 institutions, youth-serving organizations, mental health centers, hospitals, food pantries, substance abuse centers, theaters, zoos, and ethnic organizations. By having ties to these

organizations, Small (2010) explains how childcare centers were able to provide youth and families with access to specific resources they may not have been able to acquire without their support. Small (2010) identifies three categories of resources that organizations provide to members: “(a) information provided or available to the parent, (b) services provided for free or at discounts..., and (c) material goods offered at no or reduced cost to center patrons” (p. 135). Similar to the resources offered by COL in the Hazelwood community, resources offered by critical brokering childcare centers are available to all organization patrons. Furthermore, access to these needed resources do not require inconsiderate amounts of effort and/or prerequisites for members to have access to them because they are acquired through formal ties to other organizations.

Organizational Practices

A prevalent feature of organizations composed of leaders with critical brokering orientations is their inclusion of institutional practices that create avenues for members to access valuable relationships and resources. The intentional organizational practices of COL provides support for Hazelwood residents and creates access to resources, opportunities, and relationships for Hazelwood community members. Hopson and colleagues (2016) found that Hazelwood constituents who were connected to COL were afforded “resources and support throughout the steady decline Hazelwood has experienced since the turn of the century” (p. 36). Because of its positionality within the community, COL functioned as the “chief conduit of social and educational opportunity” and “provides several key resources to the area” (Hopson et al., 2016, p. 36). By drawing on logic gained from Small’s (2010) organizational embeddedness perspective, we are able to observe how members of COL are presented with a number of

opportunities to gain vital resources and access to meaningful relationships solely because they are members of the organization.

Like COL, Small (2010) found that some of the institutional practices exercised by daycare centers produced more opportunities for families to expand their social and organizational ties. One daycare center, for example, established a morning dropoff policy to encourage families to bring students within a specific timeframe to increase the probability of classes beginning on time. Although class start times were impacted, the unintended consequence of the policy was that families began to foster relationships with one another because they started to interact on a more regular basis. “The opportunity to interact with other parents did not emerge naturally from participating in a center; it resulted from centers’ norms or policies that, whether deliberately or not, either provided such opportunities or failed to do so” (Small, 2010, p. 69). By routinely interacting with each other, families are able to collectively build trust, which creates stronger support networks and social ties.

Rationale for Using Critical Brokerage Perspective

The essential tenets and constructs of Hopson and colleagues’ (2016) critical brokerage perspective supported the framing of this study, which explored how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders in organizations develop and operate within critical brokering orientations. Additionally, this study sought to understand the impact Black, critical brokering, youth sports leaders have on historically marginalized communities. The critical brokerage perspective aligns well with this study for several reasons. First, a critical brokerage perspective centers organizations as sites of critical brokerage, which includes organizational leaders, practices, and members. In this study, I sought to comprehend how community-based, youth sports leaders serve as critical brokers by examining their daily institutional practices and organizational

context. Second, extending a critical brokerage perspective from an organizational embeddedness perspective called for a focus on the everyday environments people engage and interact in as patrons of the organization (Small, 2010). It was this study's aim to analyze and understand various types of brokering interactions that exist among leaders and patrons within youth sports organizations across everyday environments.

A critical brokerage perspective also aligned well with this study because it showcased the ways community-based, youth sports leaders provide its members with access to relationships, resources and opportunities. By grounding this study in the critical brokerage perspective, I explored the development of relationships between adolescents, between adolescents, families, and organizational leaders, and between organizational leaders, adolescents, families, and other organizations. A critical brokerage perspective further provided a framework to observe the tangible and intangible resources and opportunities community-based, youth sports leaders provide marginalized communities.

Because the critical brokerage perspective has a focus on practice and outcomes, I investigated community-based, youth sports leaders' impact beyond the traditional measures of success for sports organizations/programs. Typically, youth sports organizations identify success through measures such as individual player accomplishments, postsecondary scholarship opportunities and attainment, access to scouts, and the number of athletes that go on to play at the professional level. By embedding a critical brokerage perspective, I focused on qualitative indicators like adolescent and family empowerment, community engagement, and the relationships, resources, and opportunities patrons gain by being connected to youth sports organizations. Furthermore, I investigated the critical brokering orientations of

community-based, youth sport leaders by examining how they respond to inequities that plague the marginalized communities they serve.

Applying a Critical Brokerage Perspective to My Research

By utilizing critical brokerage as my conceptual framework, I was able to identify the constructs to explore and the conceptual definition of critical brokerage I employed. My research question is framed to examine critical brokerage orientations and the impact these practices have on historically marginalized communities. Particularly, I am seeking to understand how these critical brokerage practices, and their impacts, exist among Black, community-based, youth sport leaders that serve these communities. My conceptual framework also informed my decisions surrounding the data I collected. Along these lines, my framework informed the interview questions and my analysis. Throughout my data collection, I circled back to interview questions that stimulated discussion surrounding the impact the coaches had on the lives of historically marginalized communities beyond sports. Furthermore, in conjunction with the larger Wisconsin Coaching Project, I incorporated interview questions that asked participants to speak to relationships, resources, and opportunities within the context of the youth sports organizations they belong to.

After collecting data, I utilized inductive and deductive data analysis. I allowed themes to emerge from my notes and participant responses. Once I identified emergent themes, and established relationships between the themes, I examined key components of the critical brokerage perspective for empirical interpretation. Specifically, I explored what the data indicated about the practices and the relationships, resources, and opportunities historically marginalized communities have access to by being connected to Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations. While utilizing a critical brokerage perspective, I remained

open to other emergent findings that were not directly informed by Hopson, Miller, and Lovelace's (2016) critical brokerage perspective.

Chapter 4: Methods

As noted, the overall conceptualization of the problem and research design of my study is supported by Hopson, Miller, and Lovelace's (2016) critical brokerage perspective. As I sought to understand how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations functioned as critical brokers, and the impact this critical brokerage orientation has on historically marginalized communities, I employed a qualitative research design. Utilizing a qualitative research design helped me gain this understanding by empowering me to study "people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences in the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312).

For my study, I collected and analyzed data as part of a larger, multi-year study, *the Wisconsin Coaching Project (WCP)*, identifying promising practices that excellent coaches use to develop meaningful relationships and connectedness on their teams. Peter Miller, an Education Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, serves as the primary investigator for this study. Initially, the larger study had the names of over 150 coaches who have a history of winning and are recognized as being a broker among their teams. We narrowed down our list of coaches to 77 and a research group member was assigned to interview the coaches. As one of his project assistants, I worked with Professor Miller to contact coaches across the country, particularly focusing on Black, community-based, youth sports coaches in the midwestern United States for my study. In our initial communications, we described the purpose of our research and the data collections methods we would use. We also described what their participation as a coach would consist of and included our contact information so participants could communicate their intent to participate or ask any questions they may have had. If we did

not hear back from potential participants, we sent follow-up communications reiterating the information from our initial communications and asked them to consider participating in the study. Next, we interviewed the coaches that agreed to participate in the study.

Research Design

My work was part of the larger WCP, but the conceptualization, analysis, and writing of this dissertation were entirely my own. Other aspects of the WCP more generally examined the connective practices of coaches using social capital frameworks. Employing a qualitative interview study, I explored critical brokerage as a practice that exists among Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations. Utilizing a qualitative interview study is an appropriate approach to understanding how and why the practice of critical brokerage exists and how critical brokering practices exercised by youth sports leaders serve marginalized communities.

The primary data collection technique I used was semi-structured interviews to gain more insight into the ways Black, community-based, youth sports leaders in organizations practice critical brokering. As Seidman (2005) explains, “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (p. 10). By using semi-structured interviews, I had opportunities to ask follow-up questions and go deeper into important topics that arose without the restrictions of structured interviews.

In addition to interviewing, I used document analysis as a confirmatory method of data collection. I examined several of the participants’ websites and various representations of their work in order to see examples of their practice. By engaging in such confirmatory analysis, I was able to deepen my understanding of the ways Black, community-based, youth sports leaders

practiced brokering. Ultimately, my analysis of websites and other documents was useful, but not central to the study's data collection like the interviews.

Context, Participants, and Data

Within this qualitative interview study, I sought to include Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations from midwestern states. Leaders are considered community-based due to their affiliations with organizations that serve adolescents within community-based institutions. These institutions included k-12 schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) teams, YMCAs, and other community organizations that serve adolescents through sports. The participants interviewed for this study have also been selected for their demonstrated success as community-based, youth sports leaders among adolescent athletes ranging from ages 12-18 years old.

I have selected Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations as my unit of analysis for a few reasons. First, I have lived and worked professionally throughout the midwestern United States where these participants have served for numerous years. Therefore, I come into this research with some contextual knowledge of the environments in which Black, community-based, youth sport leaders serve historically marginalized communities. Furthermore, through my connections to various community-based, youth sports organizations, I have built many relationships with Black, community-based, youth sports leaders. By establishing trusting relationships with Black, community-based, youth sports leaders, I was able to engage with participants in interview environments that prioritized authenticity, comfort, openness, and honesty. Lastly, my relationships with Black, community-based, youth sports leaders, and my prior knowledge of the organizations they are affiliated with, allowed me to understand how they

strive to connect marginalized communities to opportunities and fight to dismantle the inequities they face.

Following my search process, which was nested within the larger WCP project, these 13 individuals were the interview participants in my study (presented in alphabetical order):

Rico Cooper (note: pseudonyms are used for all names, schools, and communities)

Rico Cooper is a Black male in his 30s. He is currently a student engagement practitioner within the Money Area School District in the town of Ebony. Rico also serves as the head varsity boys basketball coach at Till High School within the greater Ebony community. Rico has over 10 years of coaching experience.

To Rico, openness, approachability, and transparent communication are the personality traits he models for players and coaches to develop the deep bonds that exist within his basketball program. Rico uses culturally responsive language with his players and leans on his credibility as a former standout Till High basketball player to foster genuine interactions that center each player's personal experience, wellbeing, and growth on and off of the court. By sharing his personal experiences as an athlete within the Till basketball program, Rico makes it clear to players, coaches, and families that the success of the basketball program will depend largely on collective team effort, continuous reflection and growth, and a shared desire to persevere through any challenges they may face. Rico contends that adaptability, and the delicate blend of humor and the serious nature of competitive sports, has supported his efforts to meet his players where they are as he pushes them to understand valuable life lessons that can be learned through basketball.

Brandon Vance and Brittany Day

Brandon Vance, a Black male in his 60s, and Brittany Day, a Black female in her 50s, are the executive directors of the Young Warriors. The Young Warriors is a community-based youth-serving organization located in the town of Redrum. The Young Warriors organization has served youth and families within the Redrum community for over 40 years.

Through their leadership and mentorship, Brandon and Brittany describe devoting their lives to the betterment of the Redrum community. The Young Warriors, a dream conceived by Brandon to protect families and friends from losing loved ones to incarceration, is dedicated to nourishing the full potential of each adolescent and adult they serve. Brandon and Brittany preach the “full circle” philosophy, where it is understood that investing in youth today will positively impact the Redrum community tomorrow and create generational change. By proactively striving to serve marginalized communities, Brandon and Brittany have fostered an organization that equips adolescents with knowledge, skills, and relationships that have the power to transform their lives. To Brandon and Brittany, the sport of basketball is viewed as a platform to teach discipline, communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, community engagement, resilience, and other critical life skills. The Young Warriors also emphasize personal integrity, educational excellence, and reinvesting into the Redrum community.

Whitney Dotson

Whitney Dotson is a Black female in her 50s. She currently serves as the Director of Athletics, Activities, and Program Development for Leonard Public Schools in the city of Hooks. Previously, Whitney served as a head collegiate women’s volleyball coach for nearly 20 years. 12 years of Whitney’s coaching experience took place at Goble University, a liberal arts college located in Toni City.

Throughout Whitney's coaching career, she has maintained a coaching philosophy that exists beyond the physical components of collegiate women's volleyball. Her dedication to creating an environment centered on women empowerment and unity is a tangible display of her commitment to the holistic well-being of her student-athletes. Whitney believes that the prioritization of interpersonal relationships among players, families, and coaches is foundational to her holistic approach to developing players. Whitney also strives to nurture environments that center resilience, the power of collaboration, and the continuous pursuit of growth and development. Furthermore, Whitney focuses on nurturing athletes who advocate for their needs and remain confident in all aspects of life.

Otis Farmer

Otis Farmer is a Black male in his 40s. He currently serves as a collegiate men's basketball coach at Belafonte University. Otis is also the founder of the Shawn Carter Coaches Association. The Shawn Carter Coaches Association is a community-based organization that serves the Porter community. Otis has led the Shawn Carter Coaches Association for nearly 10 years and has served as a collegiate men's basketball coach for nearly 20 years.

To Otis, his coaching and leadership style is deeply rooted in the values and principles his father and other influential coaches have passed down to him. For Otis' father, and other youth sports leaders along Otis' path, the continual development of fundamental skills is at the heart of success in any area of life, including basketball. Otis contends that if players and coaches master the simple details, they will establish the discipline required to have success on and off of the court. Through the development of the Shawn Carter Coaches Association, Otis remains committed to guiding young coaches to a path of personal wellness, compliance, and progress for themselves and the adolescent athletes they serve in the Porter community. Otis also uses his

personal relationships within the Porter community to recruit speakers and mentors for coaches who attend his coaching clinics. As a coach, Otis highlights the value of defense and the life lessons this component of the game teaches players. To Otis, defense teaches the resilience and endurance necessary to overcome the vast challenges life will inevitably bring your way.

Victor Johnson

Victor Johnson is a Black male in his 30s. He currently serves as a head boys youth football coach for Club Moss. Club Moss is a community-based youth sports organization located in Garvey City. Victor has over 10 years of coaching experience.

For Victor, mentorship, collective responsibility, teamwork, and guidance lie at the core of his philosophy to coaching. By establishing a culture of transparency and authenticity, Victor has the unique ability to create atmospheres rooted in accountability and success. These principles are well understood by each individual player on his team and by their families. Victor is extremely passionate about creating strong connections on his team that will allow him to extend his care and support beyond the youth football field. Often, Victor goes above and beyond to support his players and families during times of hardship. His empathy, along with his commitment to building a community-based youth program centered on empowerment, shows his genuine compassion for the Garvey community.

Peter Jordan

Peter Jordan is a Black male in his 50s. Peter is currently a community advocate. He also serves as a head boys youth football coach for the Young Payton Elite, a community-based youth organization located in the community of Barnett. Peter has coached for nearly 20 years.

Peter is deeply committed to youth development and community engagement within the city of Barnett. As a coach for the Young Payton Elite, Peter has a reputation for guiding young

adolescents through their introduction to youth football, while fostering community, growth, and resilience among the players he serves. When other youth coaches are prioritizing winning games, Peter embodies an approach to coaching that uplifts collective harmony, the individual development journey of each athlete, and the formation of strong relationships between coaches, players, families, and the community. Like his father, who was devoted to building young talent and nurturing supportive networks, Peter works to position himself as a transparent communicator and mentor for all. His transparency ensures that all stakeholders connected to the Young Payton Elite understand his dedication to instilling discipline, fostering compassion-centered environments, and providing character-building opportunities for youth within the greater Barnett community.

Charles King

Charles King is a Black male in his 30s. Charles is currently a teacher within the Wakandan International School District in Trayvon.. He also serves as the head varsity football coach at Huey Seale Memorial High School. Previously, Charles coached collegiate football at Hampton Community College, a private college located in Florida. Kevin has nearly 10 years of coaching experience.

For Charles, his coaching journey is inspired by his uncle and father, who played a valuable role in fostering his love and passion for sports and coaching. On the football field, Charles is dedicated to nurturing a sense of community that upholds the values of respect, perseverance, and personal growth. Charles also strives to create a culture of trust and authenticity among players and coaches. He consistently pushes athletes to go beyond their comfort zone, supports players through tough life decisions, and encourages players to openly embrace understanding and learning from their collective differences. Because of his lived

experiences and self-reflections, Charles practices empathy in his coaching philosophy and is committed to being an advocate, positive role model, and mentor for young athletes.

Henry Monroe

Henry Monroe is a Black male in his 30s. He currently serves as a head coach and director for Dreamville Select, a boys Ametuer Athletic Union (AAU) basketball team located in Owens that was originally founded by his uncle. Henry has been a coach and director for over 10 years.

Henry's sports leadership style is deeply rooted in his personal experiences as a Black male and his belief that youth sports is a conduit for essential life lessons that extend beyond player athletic development. While reflecting on his childhood decisions as an adolescent during a critical period of incarceration, Henry began developing a passion and desire to give back. Rather than letting his past setbacks impact his future endeavors, Henry became empathetic to the struggles adolescents face from historically marginalized backgrounds. This led Henry to youth coaching and eventually sparked the idea to reignite Dreamville Select. Throughout his tenure as a sports leader, Henry has built a philosophy within his organization founded on the principles of hard work, community, resilience, accountability, academic excellence, mentorship and inclusivity for all. Henry respects and values the individualized struggles each player exhibits and pushes them to believe they have what it takes to persevere beyond any adversity they may face during adolescence into adulthood.

Horace Moore

Horace Moore is a Black male in his 50s. Horace is currently a teacher with the King Public School District in Jordan. He also serves as the head varsity football coach at Highlander High School. Horace has over 20 years of coaching experience.

Overcoming adversity and personal challenges during adolescence has inspired Horace's dedication to the athletes he serves. After having a middle school teacher introduce him to the game of football, Horace went on to enjoy the positive outlet and developed a love for the game that eventually led to his coaching career. At the core of Horace's coaching philosophy are the values of courage, integrity, hard work, and unconditional love. Horace believes in the holistic development of his players and understands that sports have the power to develop character, build discipline, and instill important life lessons. Horace's dedication to the personal growth and emotional wellbeing of his players drives his commitment to creating a positive culture where all players can thrive. Unity, teamwork, and building strong relationships with the greater Jordan community are also aspects of Horace's philosophy that shapes his empathetic approach to coaching.

Franklin Morgan

Franklin Morgan is a Black male in his 40s. He is currently a restorative justice facilitator within the Colvin School District in Rosa City. He also serves as the head varsity girls basketball coach at Jo Ann Robinson High School. Franklin has over 10 years of coaching experience.

Franklin's love for the game of basketball stems from the unique way sports provided a safe haven for his four brothers and him during adolescence. The product of a single-parent household, faced with various socioeconomic hardships, Franklin found peace in the supportive and structured nature of the game of basketball. As a coach, Franklin describes striving to create the same empowering environments for his players and families by establishing trusting relationships rooted in individuality, growth, and respect. He continuously stresses the importance of discipline, focus, and dedication to his athletes as they simultaneously strive to

excel in basketball and life. His philosophy to coaching is centered upon his understanding that it is nearly impossible for him to control the circumstances and backgrounds of the players in his program. However, he has learned that coaching provides him with the ability to directly impact how athletes within his program combat the daily challenges they encounter.

Melissa Rogers

Melissa Rogers is a Black female in her 30s. She is currently a Director of Community and Recreational Development in Wells. Melissa also serves as the head varsity girls basketball coach for Michelle Obama Preparatory Academy with the Truth Area School District. Furthermore, Melissa is the founder and director of Blue Thunder Elite, a community-based youth basketball organization within the greater Truth community. Melissa has nearly 10 years of coaching experience.

As a sports leader, Melissa draws from her personal struggle as a female athlete during a period of time when women's basketball lacked the recognition and respect it deserved. Because of her perseverance and self-confidence as a female athlete, Melissa continuously strives to instill motivation, respect, self-care, and academic success into the hearts and minds of her players. Her personal resilience, commitment to developing athletes, and dedication to the game of basketball has shaped her philosophy as a sports leader. Throughout her coaching and sports leadership roles, Melissa has dedicated herself to fostering an authentic, support-centered atmosphere among her coaches, teams, and families. These supportive environments prioritize the teaching of valuable life skills and core values that reach far beyond the basketball court and have an impact on future adolescent success into adulthood.

Haley Roman

Haley Roman is a Black female in her 40s. Haley is currently the Director of Greek Life at Shakur University. She also serves as the head varsity dance, stepping, and cheerleading coach at Jackson Memorial High School in the School District of Allen. Haley has over 15 years of coaching experience.

To Haley, her passion for coaching stems from her love of music and dance, which she found along her own journey of self-exploration and self-acceptance. Haley vividly remembers having the desire to find a caring adult during adolescence. Therefore, she strives to create safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for her athletes while uplifting their cultural backgrounds and personal identities. As an advocate for authenticity and mentorship, Haley provides guidance and support to her athletes, who are predominantly Black and Brown youth. Developing young people personally and athletically is deeply embedded into Haley's coaching philosophy. Haley describes tirelessly striving to instill the values of unity, self-love, and accountability into her entire program. Due to her commitment to lead by example, Haley shares her own vulnerabilities and life lessons with players to maintain a culture of open communication and personal growth.

Interview Protocol

We used a semi-structured interview protocol to collect interview data for the larger study (see Appendix B). Additionally, the interview protocol for the larger study draws from social capital theory to organize its analysis of coaches' leadership practices with their teams. In my study, I sought to provide a thorough understanding of critical brokerage practices employed by Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations and the impact these critical brokering orientations have on historically marginalized communities. Therefore, I explored the interview protocol from the larger study to identify the specific research questions from the study

that relates to my research question. Throughout the semi-structured interview process, I was able to follow up with participants that I interviewed with questions that probed matters of specific interest to my study. For example, when asking about how they forged connections, I was able to dig deeply into issues relating to race and personal life experience. One strength of my study is the thick and rich descriptions I provided for each Black youth sports leader. By providing thick and detailed-rich contextual descriptions of each participant, findings from my study may be transferable and applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As mentioned, interviews were the primary data source. Each interview was set up via email communication with each participant. One of my research colleagues or I then set up virtual or in-person interviews with each participant. One interviewer interviewed one participant at a time. Interviews were scheduled at locations and/or at times that were suitable for participants. The length of an interview depended on the amount of time a participant had available in their schedule and how detailed participants were in their responses.

Interviewers used the semi-structured interview protocol to guide the interview. Each interviewer used an electronic program or physical device to record each interview after first receiving participant permission to do so. Interviewers were also encouraged to take field notes about the setting and the “nonverbal communications, gestures, and behavioral responses” of participants (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1998, p. 514-515).

I also triangulated the interviews, transcriptions, and several documents with one other. The triangulation helped me to gain “a holistic understanding of the situation and generally converging conclusions” (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 33). The triangulation of multiple data sources also increased the trustworthiness and credibility of my study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, by verifying the data collection methods, I desired to ensure “that

the study would be accurate because the information was not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection" (Creswell, 2002, p. 280).

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I embedded an approach explained by John Creswell (2012). "The processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (Creswell, 2012, p. 182). This approach by Creswell (2012) examines the research process through a cyclical lens and calls for the researcher to constantly engage in data collection, analysis, and report writing. One key aspect of the data analysis process was the transcription of interview data. Transcribing the large number of interviews we conducted took a substantial amount of time. However, the transcription process does have benefits. "The actual process of making detailed transcripts enables you to become familiar with what you are hearing" (Rapley, 2007, p. 30). Comparably, Patton (2002) notes that "transcribing offers another point of transition between data collection and analysis as doing all or some of your own interview transcriptions provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insight" (p. 441). After finishing each transcription, we uploaded each document into the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Box platform, so that each member of our team could have access. I personally analyzed the data pertaining to the 13 participants selected for my study with my research purpose in mind: "How do Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations utilize critical brokerage practices to positively impact historically marginalized communities?"

My primary role in the larger study was to collect, transcribe, and thematically analyze data from participants. Collecting data from participants led me to reflect on the role youth

sports leaders play in brokering opportunities for marginalized communities that impact inequities and disparities. After listening to coaches recount how they fostered relationships and connectedness within their organizations, I found myself reflecting on the varying degrees this process took place among the leaders and the impact it had on players and other coaches within the organization. As I interviewed coaches who served in various contexts, I found myself wanting to understand how they felt their positions as coaches, particularly within community-based organizations, impacted how they utilized brokering orientations for marginalized communities connected to their teams/organizations. Furthermore, I felt the qualitative data I collected could be analyzed to help me learn more about the leadership behaviors taking place, how the participants in the study make sense of their behaviors, and how this sense-making led to impact with marginalized communities.

Inductive Data Analysis

I began the data analysis process by coding interview transcripts. This involves “applying some coding scheme to...categories and themes diligently and thoroughly marking passages in the data using codes” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 155). First, I engaged in inductive analysis by openly letting themes emerge from the data participants provided in their responses. During this data analysis stage of open coding, I carried out a “careful, line-by-line reading of the text while looking for processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 275). Throughout this process, I took note of key issues or events that consistently arose within the data. After identifying similarities and themes across the participants’ responses, I used codes that identified “categories or concepts...abstracted on the basis of constant comparisons of data incidents with other data incidents” (Contrad, 1982, p. 257).

After open coding, I engaged in axial coding by drawing connections to coding categories that emerged during open coding. Axial coding is defined as a “process of relating categories to their subcategories to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123-124). Through axial coding, I situated coding categories to establish conceptual/theoretical coherence (Miles et al., 2014).

Deductive Data Analysis

Once I applied open and axial coding, inductively identified emergent themes, and determined relationships among them, I deductively drew insights from Hopson, Miller, and Lovelace’s (2016) critical brokerage theory as a basis for interpreting the data. I examined how coding categories that surfaced during inductive analysis related to key components of critical brokerage, including practices that create opportunities in the context of community-based youth sports. Furthermore, I utilized elements of Hopson and colleagues’ critical brokerage theory as organizing principles for my research findings. While employing deductive analysis, I remained open to themes that emerged from the data that were not informed by critical brokerage. Since it was my goal to provide the most valuable and accurate insights to the ways critical brokerage unfolds among Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations, I attempted to use theory to inform my data, but not solely determine my analysis.

Ethical Considerations

It was my aim throughout each stage of the research process to acknowledge my participants’ perspectives, remain mindful of the implications of my research on my participants, and respect the needs and interests of my participants (Sieber, 1998). I continually considered Sieber’s (1998) insight surrounding research, which prioritizes mutually respectful and beneficial relationships for participants, validity among results, and constructive conclusions for the

community. I also ensured that my study aligns with procedural ethics or actions “dictated as universally necessary by larger organizations, institutions or governing bodies” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). The study was approved by the UW-Madison Institutional Review Board. Lastly, I continually reflected on how my research study could benefit the participants and the communities studied. Because Black adolescents, families, and communities have been historically marginalized, and are a vulnerable population, I will maximize how my research can uplift and benefit them (Sieber, 1998). It is my hope that my research will give back to youth sport organizations by helping them build and/or improve upon their practices in serving Black adolescents, families, communities, eradicating existing inequities, and ensuring that everyone has access to greater relationships, resources, and opportunities.

Positionality

My journey as a revolutionary activist in the field of education began with my personal experiences as a Black male student in public k-12 educational institutions. Some of my reflections and perspectives were presented in the diary statements included in the beginning of the dissertation. As a vibrant and curious child, I quickly began to see and feel the ways schools operate to consciously and subconsciously fit students into boxes. Through the creation of conditions that often force you to abide by invisible codes of existence and being, schools negatively impact identity formation and development. With the active support of my mother, I began to fight to uphold my identity and freedom as a young Black scholar. I also fought to bring awareness to my peers around me, who I was connected with through youth sports.

This fight for freedom ultimately led me to a career in the field of education. As a Black male student and educational leader, I have historically existed within predominantly white institutions and faced bias, oppression, and institutional racism. Throughout my fifteen year

career in education, I have been a teacher, Coordinator of Equity, Student, and Family Engagement, Assistant Principal, Director of Youth ReEngagement, and Building Principal. The painful experiences I have faced within predominantly white educational institutions has created a deeply-rooted passion within my soul to dismantle the systemic inequities adults and adolescents of color face along their journeys within education. Despite the harsh conditions I faced throughout my path within education, I have sustained my commitment to creating socially-just environments within k-12 educational institutions for all. By personally and professionally fighting to uplift equity for all, I have developed the ability to identify environments, like community-based, youth sports organizations, that encourage and empower historically marginalized communities. I share this here because I know the impact youth sports, and the leaders within them, have on positively impacting entire communities. I also share this here because the role Black, community-based, youth sports leaders play in impacting communities of color has shaped my research question. Additionally, these Black leaders inspire me to continue my research in hopes that the results of my study can provide insight into the ways institutions can better serve traditionally marginalized communities.

I recognize that my positionality as a researcher may shape the lens through which I collected and analyzed the data. Because of this awareness, I intentionally tried to stick to asking questions of the interviewees to guide the discussion instead of overly sharing my own perspectives and experiences with the topic. I openly describe my positionality to account for subjectivity within my data collection and analysis.

Limitations

According to Ames and colleagues (2019), purposive sampling is more susceptible to researcher bias. The use of nonrandom sampling within my study impacts the generalizability of

my results. However, the use of expert sampling within this qualitative research design did ensure the selection of “individuals and sites for study because they [could] purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2002, p. 56).

Summary of Methods

To review, I conducted a qualitative interview study of Black, community-based, youth sports leaders within organizations. I primarily used semi-structured interviews as a data collection method. I first analyzed the data using open coding to let themes emerge from the data I collected. Then, I employed axial coding to determine relationships among emergent themes. Finally, I drew insights from Hopson, Miller, and Lovelace’s (2016) critical brokerage perspective to analyze the themes.

Chapter 5: Findings

My research sought to understand how Black, community-based, youth sport leaders within organizations create brokering orientations and utilize their social and/or cultural capital to positively impact marginalized communities. This chapter presents key findings from the 13 Black youth sports leaders selected for this interview study.

Theme 1: Kindred Spirits - Shared Lived Experiences

One of the first relevant themes that emerged from nearly all of the participants was the impact shared lived experiences have on their leadership philosophies and coaching practices as Black youth sports leaders (see table 5).

Table 5

Theme 1: Kindred Spirits - Shared lived Experiences	
Sub Theme:	
Complex Childhood Backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant interviews consistently noted the socioeconomic circumstances, adolescent traumas, family dynamics, and obstacles Black youth sports leaders encountered and overcame Participants expressed a sincere gratitude for their backgrounds and/or complex upbringings
Impactful Experiences in Youth Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant interviews showcased how access and exposure to positive interactions, environments, and youth sports leaders during adolescence helped shape their perspectives, values, personal philosophies, and approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences played a critical role in participants' decision to pursue career opportunities within youth sports

Collected narratives from participant interviews within my study consistently noted the socioeconomic circumstances, adolescent traumas, family dynamics, and obstacles these Black youth sports leaders encountered and had to overcome. Although many of the lived experiences participants faced played an impactful role in their adolescent development as members of marginalized communities, they also shaped the leaders they are today. One participant, Henry Monroe, explained how his time spent incarcerated shortly after high school led him to the desire to give back to adolescents from similar backgrounds:

I got into a little trouble out of high school so that kind of taught me some life lessons, right or wrong. Right away, I got incarcerated at 17 years old, fresh out of high school, so actually got robbed in my basketball experience, college experience, and wanted to be able to bring that right away. Instead of like keep chasing this, keep chasing this, I felt that was selfish of me to hold on to that. So, you know. While I was doing my service, while I was doing my time, I actually was reading. Doing a lot of reading, so I knew that I was put here to bless others, and you know, show others from my experiences, you know what they shouldn't do, or what they should do.

This quote from Mr. Monroe is representative of the types of shared lived experiences participants described. In the following paragraphs, I will describe key sub-themes that surfaced from the shared lived experiences theme.

Complex Childhood Backgrounds

One sub-theme that emerged from the shared lived experiences theme was complex childhood backgrounds. Participant interviews revealed the diverse childhood struggles adolescents from historically marginalized backgrounds may encounter and the complex nuances that may exist as a result of these personal experiences. From witnessing domestic violence, to

growing up in fatherless, single-parent environments, participants recalled persevering through backgrounds that potentially hinder adolescent growth and development within historically marginalized communities.

Mr. Morgan, the oldest child in his family, grew up in poverty and explained the impact it had on him and his childhood:

And so, you know, that was my childhood, you know. And I wasn't able to ever play, or you know...I grew up poor. We didn't have a lot. You know, I had a single parent who was raising 5 children. We didn't have a lot of means, and we'd move.

Although his mother directed him not to think about their financial instability and other traumatic household dynamics, he vividly recalled these childhood circumstances. "When we came to Rosa, Michigan, we were homeless, you know. Both times we moved, we were homeless the first couple of months we were there because my mom was escaping an abusive relationship."

As a result of his awareness, Mr. Morgan began stressing over matters pertaining to money in his household environment and felt called to help. This calling to support his mom led to Mr. Morgan personally sacrificing to ensure his brothers had opportunities he did not:

And you know, I actually didn't want to play organized football when we first got here. And the reason was is because I was worried about how much it was gonna cost. And I was like, I told my mom, you know, she... and maybe it was a confidence thing, but I remember telling my mom like, 'let the younger ones play like, so that they could have that experience and that opportunity.' And so my little brothers played because I was just worried about like the money of it, you know what I mean. So she said, 'Well, you can

play if you want to,' and I was like, 'it's gonna cost too much,' and so I didn't play youth football.

Mr. Morgan, who has never met his biological father, also shared insight into how his childhood background propelled him into embracing a father-like role within his family and the impact it had on his personal development of confidence:

I was confident, but I don't think I believed in myself. And some of that was, I think, because of how I grew up. And just kinda having that doubt of like, 'Well, they may have a little bit more than me, so, you know, I still think I could get them.' But I wasn't like, 'Oh, I got this,' you know. I was like, 'I think I can get this.'

Despite growing up without his father, overcoming self-doubt, and missing out on personal opportunities during adolescence, Mr. Morgan remains joyful and attributes components of his spirituality with helping him become the leader he is today.

And so that was for me... And again, throughout my life, for whatever reason, I've always had, you know, I always say God has had, has kinda had His hand on my shoulder and guided me when I didn't have a male figure or adult, to kind of like help me make some decisions. You know. He's always kind of spoken to me and helped me kind of figure out what was the path I needed to go.

Through his strong faith, Mr. Morgan remains grateful for his mother's dedication, love, and support. He openly cherishes the close relationship he has developed with her and continues to admire her resilience as she continues to conquer life's obstacles. Additionally, Mr. Morgan values the deep bonds he has established with his siblings by being an older brother and father-like role model to them.

Mr. Morgan expressed a deep gratitude for his background and what the game of basketball provided him in the form of an escape from the pressure and pain of his childhood:

It was a time to just kinda like forget about stuff at home and be out of the house, you know. And you know, not worry about what we didn't have. And that was also really, I think, a piece of what sports gave me. It gave me a place where like my upbringing, and all of that stuff didn't really impact anything.

Mr. Morgan also credited his background for his ability to understand the barriers marginalized youth and families face within youth sports and for his commitment to creating inclusive basketball programs that empower and uplift all adolescents. He stated,

And then, you know, being and finally being on a team, it was like a totally different experience. And really, it's something that I always kind of carry in the back of my mind with my youth program. Being on the team was like it took me out of my comfort zone, and it really...my confidence took a hit because it was so different. And so I always think about that with kids, and how coming into an organized environment. And really trying to make sure that when I do get kids who I think like, they're like natural ballers. I really make sure that we are intentional and purposeful about how we help them kind of transition into organized game, so that they don't get intimidated, and they don't run away from it early.

Like Mr. Morgan, Haley Roman expressed how her complex childhood background greatly shaped her future path and philosophy as a Black female leader within community-based youth sports. Similar to some of the female athletes she coaches, Ms. Roman expressed her desire to find her passion within the world of sports during adolescence that did not include popular sports for Black youth like basketball. “Well, I did play basketball in elementary school,

and I hated it. I did. So I was like, ‘Let me find something that I enjoy, but then I can still be involved, but not like super sporty.’” Ms. Roman shared that she was not supported during her exploratory journey into finding a sport she loved. She stated, “So there was nobody who influenced me to do that. It was me. And finding myself and what I enjoyed.” With both parents present in her household during childhood, Ms. Roman shared that she often felt she could not communicate with them, particularly her mom, about everything she desired. “My mom is great. Everybody loves my mom. Like she is awesome. She's sweet, but I didn't feel like I could go to her with certain things. It was always my friends.”

Ms. Roman found dance in middle school, which she competed in through high school. In college, Ms. Roman continued fostering her love for dance when she joined a Black, greek-lettered organization and began stepping and strolling. After returning to Allen, California, she became a coach. Through the sport of dance, Ms. Roman explained how she dedicated herself to becoming the supportive role model she desired during her adolescent development.

Some people think I share too much with my girls, but I just feel like I always wanted to be who I felt like I needed when I was their age...like I didn't have an adult that I could talk to openly about feelings, about boys, about whatever else. So I want to be that for them, because I didn't have that.

To Ms. Roman, it is her openness and transparency with female athletes that creates a welcoming environment rooted in support and guidance.

Beyond creating welcoming environments to open up channels of communication, Ms. Roman expressed that it is her empathy and understanding, along with her personal background as a Black female, that allows her athletes to be their authentic selves around her. Ms. Roman

explained that her athletes, who are predominantly Black and Brown, feel comfortable enough to talk to her about the diverse challenges they face because they know she can relate. To demonstrate her ability to connect with athletes from shared historically marginalized backgrounds, Ms. Roman shared this story:

Okay, so yesterday, over the last couple of weeks, the girls have been getting these Hoco-posals, you know. So football players, they have signs and everything. This is a new thing for me. I didn't know this was a thing. They go all out. But there's one girl who society, and I'm gonna say this, society wouldn't deem beautiful. Okay, she has not been asked to homecoming. When I was in high school I felt that way because I see myself in her. So we had a conversation. She was a little down. This is after the game. She's like, 'you know, coach, everybody else is getting asked, and all stuff,' and so we shared that. You know, I was just like, 'I didn't go to homecoming with anybody. I went with my friends,' you know.

Drawing more deeply on her background related to the complexities surrounding Black female beauty, Ms. Roman used humor to add,

So it might not make her feel better, but I was sharing how I felt when I was her age. We have dark brown skin. They don't see that until you get, you know, 42. Then they start knocking at the door in the dm.

Mr. Morgan and Ms. Roman both shared their own stories of how their complex childhood backgrounds play a crucial role in their ability to guide, support, impact, and mentor their athletes. Through the resilient navigation of their adolescent experiences, both of these Black, youth sports leaders are positively impacting youth from historically marginalized communities. Even though all of the participants within my study did not describe how their complex

childhood experiences shaped their approach to leadership and coaching, their stories provide insight into the value shared experiences.

Impactful Experiences in Youth Sports

A second sub-theme that emerged from the shared lived experience theme was impactful experiences in youth sports. Participant interviews showcased how Black, youth sports leaders' access and exposure to positive interactions, environments, and youth sports leaders during adolescence helped shape their perspectives, values, personal philosophies, and approaches. Furthermore, some participants expressed how access and exposure to impactful experiences within youth sports played a critical role in their decision to pursue volunteer and/or career opportunities within youth sports. Charles King shared,

Throughout my childhood, I was involved in all sports. Football, basketball, track. So most of my positive influences have come through sports. Started with my uncle, my father's older brother. He was my basketball coach as a young kid and up until I was about a teenager. And that's where it started. He was one of those positive role models for me growing up and he's a large reason why I got into coaching.

Similar to Mr. King, Victor Johnson's childhood was shaped by early interactions with impactful youth sports coaches and other role models he met while frequently engaging in community-based youth sports organizations in his hometown, Garvey, Minnesota.

My first interaction was, I wanted to say, around five, six years old, you know, Boys and Girls Club kind of slash the little Blue Warriors with Mr. Edwards. So obviously I experienced just different like people in my life. You was one of them, you know, when I was young, five years old, you know, obviously seeing a Garvey High, you know, player growing up, seeing, you know how you carried yourself. That's something I wanted to be,

you know, growing up so that kind of you know got me on to sports a little stronger. Um. Mr. Edwards was very, very influential on me, like kick starting actually getting into organized sports.

Mr. Johnson further noted how Mr. Edwards, a Black, youth sports leader from the Garvey community, shaped his early involvement in youth sports while also playing a pivotal father-figure role in his life.

Like Mr. Edwards pretty much took me under his wing after that. He came, he picked me up for every game, you know. We traveled, he fed us, you know. We had jerseys. Like that was my first real interaction of like i'm on team like and it means something, like we playing for an actual goal, you know. Trying to win something...Mr. Edwards I think with him it was, I was so young, and I never had a dad. So he was like that first like major dad figure that actually was solid. He was in my life and he was like wanting me to progress in a good way.

Mr. Johnson also discussed how his youth coaches in middle school extended their guidance and mentorship beyond athletics and later impacted his coaching philosophy. Mr. Johnson stated, And I think going through the coaching experience with Mr. Anderson like that helped me to understand how to translate into coaching because I was a certain type of player that they had to deal with a certain way. And once we got through those situations, and I explained and I comprehend everything better, that translated into coaching because I'm a person of connection. So when I see like little like this kid is literally following down, not my exact footsteps, but certain traits and habits that saw myself, and It was easier to coach these kids and understand them verses, I guess, giving up on them.

Horace Montgomery also encountered an impactful middle school sports experience during a time in his life when things drastically shifted. He explained,

In eighth grade, I had a very significant change in my life. My father was arrested. He was incarcerated in Hoover State Penitentiary. And it was those formative years, where I was really starting to grasp and grow and learn more about my dad. And then all of a sudden he was stripped from me...So it was one of these cases that everybody knew about, they knew he was my father. And so I had some, some self doubts about myself and I was very conscious of how people viewed me.

Mr. Montgomery recalled meeting Mr. H., a teacher and football coach, who impacted his life at a time when he felt he needed someone to support him the most. Mr. Montgomery stated,

And so it was one of those times where I had a middle school teacher, who was also one of the youth coaches for football in the area. Although I had never played football, he pulled me under his wing and was able to convince me to go out and try football. Even though I had very little knowledge of the game and really had no fundamental values or function. He was able to pull me in. His name was Andre Hickman. Dre Hickman, or Mr. H. everyone called him.

Mr. Montgomery further noted how Mr. H. was understanding and had the connection-making ability to help him develop the community he needed through sports.

He saw that I was longing for belonging with something. I don't know if he recognized that I had any athleticism, cause I really didn't at the time. But he did recognize that I was longing for a sense of belonging. He was very intuitive, understood athletics and understood young men quite a bit. And yeah, he was one who was very willing to go the extra mile for his players, not just for me, but for all of the young men.

Mr. Montgomery continued to talk about the instrumental role Mr. H. played in the development of his passion for football, which supported his mental health in middle school. He stated,

And so he started to instill this love that I had and it was one of those sports where with all the pent up aggression and feelings of anxiety and everything else that came with this incident in my life, it was a great sport for that outlet.

Lastly, when asked to describe the lasting impact Mr. H., and his experiences during youth football, had on his goals, success and philosophy as a coach, Mr. Johnson responded in the following way,

So I thought about what was it that gave me the ability to achieve some of the goals that I achieved in my life. And so I thought about the coaches that I had all from middle school all the way up to high school, even in college, and what were those values that they tried to instill in me.

Like Mr. Johnson and Mr. Montgomery, Otis Farmer shared a similar understanding of the impact positive experiences with youth sports and coaches can have on the coaching philosophies, leadership styles, and identities of some youth sports leaders.

So, you know, throughout my upbringing, in my childhood, I had a lot of different coaches, you know, probably three people that it really sticks out the most to me, as far as when I look at having a huge impact on my development as a player, you know, my father would be the first.

During our interview, Mr. Farmer recounted how one of his coaches, his dad, became aware of his goal to receive a full-ride scholarship to attend a division one college or university for basketball and committed himself to helping Mr. Farmer obtain it. Mr. Farmer shared,

You know, and as I got older, you know, my dad asked me, you know, about my goals and whatnot. So I set goals and he said, 'If this is what you want, I'm going to push you to be the best that you can be.'

Considering himself lucky, Mr. Farmer also talked about how his personal growth and development was impacted by his exposure and close proximity to coaches who achieved the goals he set out to accomplish for himself:

Oh, we were lucky. We had a bigtime staff, you know. Like, everybody on our staff played college ball. You know, as far as the assistant coaches, so it was great to be in that environment as a young kid coming up through the basketball ranks because you're getting, you know, high level training and development. You know, with your craft, you know. You know, for me, I had a goal of playing collegiate basketball. And here I am working with college coaches who played at that level.

As Mr. Farmer discussed his journey to becoming a Black, youth sports leader, he shared how the commitment his father and other youth coaches had to his development as a player ultimately influenced his decision to become a coach. Mr. Farmer stated,

And more importantly, they have a passion for developing student athletes and putting student athletes first. And for me, I've been fortunate to work for a lot of good coaches, where that was the main goal. And it's helped me because that's the reason why I got into coaching.

Mr. Farmer also shared that the development of his identity as a coach is largely influenced by the previous coaches he had access and exposure to. He explained,

You know, and I can remember that from, you know, as young as being 10 to 11 years old, you know, every coach that I played for really stressed defense, and then when I got

into college, you know, playing for Deon Bolton, playing for Jim Nereu, you know, they really stressed defense. So, you know, a lot of that comes back around to my experiences as a player. And then as a coach as well. I've coached under a lot of great defensive minds. And, you know, I've been able to learn and take bits and pieces of each and every coach to sort of build my own identity.

Mr. Johnson, Mr. Montgomery, and Otis Farmer were fortunate as adolescents to experience the type of impactful opportunities adolescent athletes need throughout their personal sports journeys. These participants shared stories of how shared lived experiences created conditions for personal growth, connection-making, and impact. Although these participants' lived experiences only represent a sample of the Black youth sports leaders within this study, their narratives offer insight into how access to impactful youth sports experiences during adolescence plays a vital role in the development and wellbeing of youth from historically marginalized communities.

Theme 2: We Over Everything - The Value for Relationships

The second relevant theme that emerged from participant interviews within my study was the value for relationships (see table 6). Each Black, community-based, youth sports leader interviewed for this study expressed understanding the value of relationships and prioritized building positive and impactful relationships with adolescents from marginalized backgrounds. Many participant interviews also revealed the deep commitment many youth sports leaders have to fostering authentic relationships with family members of players and other influential members of their communities.

Table 6

<i>Theme 2: We Over Everything - The Value for Relationships</i>	
Sub Theme:	
The Desire and Ability to Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant interviews displayed the clear ability and desire of Black youth sports leaders to personally connect with youth from marginalized backgrounds, while providing outlets for youth to connect with one another Participants remained adaptable while creating connections with youth as they sought to meet individual players where they are and push them beyond their comfort zones
Engaging the Entire Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants practiced going beyond the traditional binary nature of the player and coach relationship by creating sports programs and/or organizations that build inclusive relationships with key family members and community stakeholders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Extended relationships = Success

The Desire and Ability to Connect

One sub-theme that emerged from the value for relationships theme was the desire and ability to connect. Participant interviews displayed the clear ability and desire of youth sports leaders to personally connect with youth from historically marginalized backgrounds, while providing outlets for youth to connect with one another. By prioritizing positive and intentional connection-making with and among youth, Black, community-based, youth sports leaders displayed their understanding of the value and need for connection among adolescent athletes. Participant interviews also revealed several youth sports leaders' ability and desire to be

adaptable in creating connections with youth as they strive to meet individual players where they are. Participants shared that this allowed them to be sources of comfort for adolescent youth as they pushed them beyond their comfort zones. Furthermore, participant interviews underscored the importance of creating empowering environments that are conducive for individual and collective player development and growth through connectedness.

During our interview, Melissa Rogers openly reflected on her coaching philosophy, which included her natural ability and deliberate intent to connect with players within her basketball program and organization. Ms. Rogers stated,

And I think the reason why I would say that is I really think it's just my ability to connect. I pride myself on that, and it actually comes very easy for me to connect with the players that I am coaching.

Ms. Rogers also talked about how she finds opportunities for connection-making with players through her engagement in conversations with them on relatable topics that extend beyond the court. Ms. Rogers added,

And that goes from like, if you take basketball itself, and the game of it, that's going everywhere from the sneakers to the actual game. So I think the influencer, part is, you know, the players are always like, 'Man, coach, you got the freshest kicks' or, you know, being able to come to me and say, 'You know what are, what would be a good basketball shoe?'

As we discussed Ms. Rogers' desire and ability to connect with players beyond the basketball court, she made it clear that the integrity of her basketball program remains intact, with players understanding the importance of maintaining high standards for their growth and development. She stated,

And I think over the years, I found the balance of being able to still create and build those positive relationships, but also being that coach that has high standards and holds my players accountable so they know, you know, the fine line of, you know, 'coach is mad cool, you know I can come to coach about anything, I respect coach, coach respects me, but also coach don't play.'

When discussing how she fosters program environments that are rooted in positive connections through accountability for coaches and players, Ms. Rogers shared,

So I like the family type atmosphere. Like that's what I preach. I preach it to my players. I preach it to the coaches. You know, if we're on staff together and we're coaching together, you know, we all need to be comfortable around each other. So prior to the season beginning, I like to have meetings with my coaches. Like we'll go out to dinner, you know, I'll invite them over my house, or whatever, and we'll just be in that relaxed mode, right?

Although she sets the tone for connection-making within her program and organization, Ms. Rogers also expects her athletes to be responsible for creating conditions for connection-making as well. She explained,

So I try to make sure that our upperclassman are, you know, getting to know and building relationships with the younger players as well. So we do a lot of those social things, and those are things that I keep consistent.

She further discussed her philosophy related to players' role in creating conditions for connection-making within her program in the following way,

Because I mean I could sit up here, and say, 'This is what we're gonna do, but I don't want to be a dictator. Like really, I'm just steering a ship. Like, this is your team, you

know. I'm putting you guys in the best positions, you know, to be successful.' So I allow the team to come up with their expectations, whatever that looks like.

Ms. Rogers also discussed the lasting impact her coaching philosophy, related to connection-making, has on players using the following example,

This young lady I remember coming out of middle school was just hearing that she wasn't coachable. Had the skill, had the talent, but you know, was gonna be difficult to coach and things like that, and I didn't want those words to hold true. Like I was, you know, trying to figure out like, 'Okay, this is a 14 year old kid that's already kind of being written off.' And so, I just formed a relationship with her mother, you know, worked to form a relationship with her, and honestly, it wasn't difficult...So like I said she's one of the success stories of yeah just someone that I was able to connect with and build a bond with. And we still talk to this day. Like, she'll still send me things from school if she's having questions or frustrations.

Rico Cooper's coaching philosophy also displayed a deeply-rooted commitment to connecting with players. In our interview, Mr. Cooper explained,

I take those opportunities to really just get to know people, you know. Ask them about who they are, you know, who they/where they come from, you know, what their interests are, who's at home, you know, who's meaningful to you. And just make those connections, you know. That's how I build relationships.

Mr. Cooper is also diligent about creating team environments centered on transparency and program success, which he described as a prerequisite for establishing connections with adolescents. He stated,

So just being able to create those spaces that you can kind of have those conversations, and, you know, I think as a coach for me at least, I always try to put out there like I don't have any hidden agendas when it comes to individuals. You know, this is a team sport, I'm not perfect, but I try to do the best I can to make decisions that's gonna be in the best interest of the program and the team overall.

Although Mr. Cooper intentionally creates structural dynamics to foster impactful relationships through connections within his program, he is aware of the complexities associated with building connections with youth. He shared,

For example, you know, we always start with like just a quick check in, you know. So we hit the baseline, and I'll, you know, 'Hey, how's everybody doing? How's your day?' A lot of times, kids, you know they don't say much, you know. They might have a lot going on. So what I'll do is, I'll kind of, you know, share something that happened in my day.

To further display his ability to connect with players, Mr. Cooper discussed how he adapts to meet challenging players where they are:

And so I've had a few players that just have challenged me, you know, from a maybe attitude standpoint, maybe from a selfish standpoint, or just lack of effort. Like man, you got all these tools, but you're not, you know, you're not showcasing it right here. And I've just been able to just kind of, 'Okay, well at the end of the day I'm going to meet them right here.' And understanding like this is what I'm gonna get out of them and to get that, you know, do this here and, you know, we'll figure out how to make that work.

During our interviews, Victor Johnson and Charles King also discussed how they personally connected with players and how they prioritized connections among their players.

Shedding light on aspects of his coaching philosophy related to making connections, Mr. Johnson described it in the following way,

So the three different things that I kind of really had to work on for me was my prep, my delivery, and my connections. And so with them three, basically the way I started my day, my prep, will start up for how I would deliver it. And my delivery will set up for my connections with those you know, particular players.

Mr. King shared,

But last season's team I will say it was one of the closest teams I've seen. I will say a lot of it went to those to the exercise we did and camp leading up to the season. The Hero Highlight hardship, I'll say that that definitely brought those guys together a lot. It brought all of us together a lot just being able to hear someone else's story. And like I said, 'See people be vulnerable.' And some guys, you know, share their emotions and stuff like that.

When Mr. Johnson discussed the impact his connections with players had on his leadership approach, as a coach, and his program, he stated,

So connecting with all of them individually helped me to better mold my team in a better process, because I, you know, got over that nerves, and knew how to connect with every person to where now if you, if I do a certain move or something, you don't feel left out because it's a window for us to talk, and it's an opportunity for me to really get that deeper connection with you where you feel comfortable... You know 'Well coach, this is happening and this is why I feel like that.' So once that connection got deeper, um it really became hard to almost let them go for a second. At the end of the season, I threw a barbecue for them and um, you know we won the super bowl. You know, we just when he

had a ball and I was like almost a tears because it was like I would say I got so much of deep connection with each individual kid there to where when I had two kids had to leave before the end of the season, I was literally almost in tears trying to speak to them. To, you know, just tell them how good they was, how much they meant to the team, and how much I appreciate them just being around.

To create environments conducive for establishing brotherly bonds among youth through connection-making, Mr. Johnson expressed how he started with his players' mindsets. He recalled,

I taught them to never leave anybody behind. Y'all come here as a team, y'all leave as a team, and y'all going to stay a team. And y'all gonna stay, you know, connected like that. I don't want y'all to separate and have anything that can come divide y'all. So, when I started making them jog as a team they got used to that. Soon as they got to the field they was already down there like, "Alright. Can we go coach?"

Mr. Johnson also recalled supporting players in finding ways to maintain communication and connection off of the field. He shared,

All of my players exchanged numbers, like I said earlier. So we all had it to where they would meet each other at somebody's house. At maybe Brock's house or Chet's house and it's like four or five players there, and they're, you know, literally rehearsing the plays physically, or they're rehearsing them through the playbook.

Mr. Johnson also expressed how the connections that were established within his program extended to player development beyond sports through accountability. He stated,

A lot of them went to school together, so they would hold each other accountable. Like to the point where literally, they would come back to practice and tell me, 'Aww such and

such ain't here. Aww yeah coach, this what happened. This is what's going on.' And I'm like, alright if I can't, like I'd call them and stuff. If I didn't get a hold of them, my players would. And call me right back.

Additionally, Mr. Johnson and Charles King both discussed how the connections they have with their players create opportunities to show what caring connections look like that center accountability. Mr. Johnson explained,

When I get on that player, I let him know like, and you need to go thank your brother because he cared enough about you to tell me something to come, and you know, get to you. And even though you corrected it now, I'm not the one who found, you know, the problem right off the back. Your brother was and he helped you out because had he not, and things could have got worse if he didn't care about you, he would just let you get, you know, kicked off the team, or get you in trouble, or however the case was. But he cared enough to be involved with you, you know, based on them accountability drills.

Mr. King added,

I believe so. I believe the guys know. I would say the best compliment I've received from a player, you know, I had to get after a guy in practice, and always at least try to talk with them afterwards to let them know like, it's never, you know, nothing personal, you know, I just wanted to help you to help us. So I got after this guy, went over to talk with him, and he let me know, like, it was no issue with me yelling at him or coaching him up because he knew it was coming from a good place.

Engaging the Entire Village

The second sub-theme that emerged from the value for relationships theme was engaging the entire village. Several of the sports leaders interviewed in this study practiced going beyond

the traditional binary nature of the player and coach relationship by creating sports programs and/or organizations that intentionally builds inclusive relationships with key family members and community stakeholders. Participants also discussed the impact engaging the entire village/support system of adolescent athletes has on their ability to have successful programs and foster nurturing environments that guide, support, and develop adolescent athletes within sports and beyond.

While discussing the conditions needed to build relationships with families and community entities, Brittany Day and Peter Jordan identified the importance of maintaining positive communication and healthy partnerships. Ms. Day stated,

I think one of the greatest changes, and one that I'm pleased with, is seeing how that has transformed into that feeling of, you know what, you know, whatever happens, we will be stronger, stronger together. So let's figure out how to do that in a better way. How can we connect differently to meet the needs of our community? So you know, collaboration and partnership, we know is the way to go and being able to work with people who bring something and enhance the work that you do together. If both parties aren't benefiting from it, then it's not a partnership. You know, you want to make sure and partnership and collaboration isn't always easy that way. So we want to make sure that they're healthy partnerships. That makes sense.

Mr. Jordan discussed the value of communication in the following way,

And the key is communication. Communicating with the parents, being able to be transparent with the parents, that takes you a long way, rather than a parent guessing, or making assumptions on why their kid may not be playing much, or why the kid come home super tired, you know, it's just, you know, communicating if that means emailing

after each practice, that means a long email at the beginning of the week, or an email at the end of a game, you know, explaining everything. That communication creates a relationship between the coach, coaching staff and the parent. So that's one thing I've learned, you know, you gotta communicate. You got to be, you know, if they need to meet with you one on one, meet with them one on one, you know. Just make sure you make yourself available because once you close down, it's not a good situation.

Mr. Jordan and Whitney Dotson both discussed their philosophy around family engagement and the role extended family plays in supporting the growth and development of athletes within their programs. Mr. Jordan explained,

It go back to just thinking about a situation, you know, I've dealt with, with a player with conflict, you know, I go right to the parent, with the child. If they meeting at home, at their house, at my house, at the football field, and just try to be transparent, you know, try to be transparent. The best thing, you know, that can happen is have those guidelines at the beginning of the season, if there's guidelines at the beginning of season, parents sign off on them, kids sign off on them, now you can go it's black and white, you know. You can go by what the kids sign up for, what the parents sign up for, and make a decision based off that. And that's kind of some of the things we've done in our program, was to go through those expectations. And, you know, follow through on them.

Ms. Dotson added,

Embracing that whole core that you need. You need the parents. They're important because as I'm holding them to a standard. They're calling home like this is some bullsh*t, lol. You need the parents to say, 'Remember, this is why you went there like you went there because of these reasons. So go back to practice and work hard.' So without

that relationship with the parents, and then I don't have those advocates when I know they're calling home and saying I don't want to do this anymore. So I want those parents to be on my side and push them back to practice.

Ms. Dotson and Victor Johnson also discussed how they created opportunities to get to know families. Ms. Dotson recalled using the recruiting process. She stated,

So, at Goble, you know, you spend like a year, you know, developing this relationship with the parents and with their siblings, and you know, just like the whole thing. So by the time they're there, you're just kind of folding them in. You know you're folding them into the group.

Mr. Johnson remembered engaging the entire village during his weekly pizza parties. He shared, They loved each other. Like I threw...okay, another thing...pizza parties. I threw that every week at the end of the game. I really bought pizzas for everybody, but it was for us to simmer down after the game, and, you know, connect with each other. So we would, you know, eat pizza, talk about the games you know, connect with the parents. The parents could, you know, have the opportunity to come talk to me. You know what I mean. I could talk to them. The players can pull me to the side instead of feeling like you know, at practice or anywhere else they may not feel like they can, you know. I want everybody to feel comfortable. So when we threw our pizza parties, that was kind of like our, like our, community gathering, you know what I mean. That was like a way like our connection, like our family connection type, you know, our bonding period. That was a period of parents, coaches, and then, you know, players all being able to be in one area combined, and you know, bouncing ideas, bouncing concerns, whatever, and you know,

being able to have just a closer connection instead of by the time the game done, I'm just leaving, packing up, and going. And the parents don't know that much about me.

Franklin Morgan also described how he has come to know his families within his program and the added benefits. He stated,

A lot of these kids, I've known since they were fourth graders. I've known their family, since they were fourth graders. Like, I don't have a lot of parent issues here at Jo Ann Robinson High, which has been a blessing...But I know families, I know parents, I know kids, and I've invested in them.

Participants Rico Cooper, Peter Jordan, Brandon Vance, and Brittany Day also shared how they successfully develop and support players within their programs by intentionally establishing relationships between their players and members of the community. These sports leaders talked about inviting community members into their organizations to support their desires to develop players' social networks, skills, and increase players' interactions with positive role models in their communities. Mr. Cooper shared,

Or just kind of, you know, just making that connection, you know what I mean. 'Aww okay, coach knows different people from different walks of life and professionals. You know what I mean. So that's also establishing those relationships that way, too. You know, I've brought us some firefighters, some construction workers, you know guys that hoop, though. Right? But this is what they do, you know, on a daily basis and they're making that connection.

Mr. Jordan shared the following,

And I know it's not just because of me. It's not because of me. It's because the community. It's because the culture around us. It's a group thing. My workout, I have the

kids workout with CJ Lofton, you know. CJ work with them with footwork, with skill, with agility, you know. Coach Payton is a good mentor, you know. And even you Coach Anthony. You know, being able to work with the kids and work with Sincere and the guys and give them some quiet confidence, you know. You know, being able to trust their skill. And it's been a group thing.

Mr. Vance added,

We have another gentleman that came to us through our court-ordered program, scheduled to go to jail for 10 years plus. Got connected to his mentor, he got introduced to Tuskegee University, and years later, he graduated with an engineering degree. So that's success for us...But was perfect example of basketball, the tool to head him in the right direction, keep him around the right environment, kept him away from some negativities that may have been in his neighborhood.

Building off of her co-executive director, Brittany Day stated,

You know, at Young Warriors, we're not just connecting them to a person. So it's not like I'm coming to Young Warriors for just my mentor. Our goal is to connect them with several people. So you have different dynamics within your network that you can draw from. And we know the longer and the better they're connected to that as a whole, the more successful that there'll be.

The insights shared by participants within this study, related to their desire and ability to connect and engage the entire village, displayed Black, youth sports leaders' comprehensive understanding of the value of relationships within adolescent youth sports. Their ability to connect with athletes on a personal level, paired with the engagement of families and other community members, creates supportive and growth-centered environments for youth from

marginalized backgrounds. These environments impact adolescent growth within youth sports, but also provide athletes with life skills and connections that transcend the actual sport.

Theme 3: More Than a Game - A Bigger View of Sports

The third theme that emerged within the study was a bigger view of sports (see table 7). Although not all of the participants described having a bigger view of sports in great detail, a number of participant reflections and experiences collectively acknowledged sports as a complex educational platform that is a vehicle for youth and community development. As youth journey through adolescence within their programs and/or organizations, participants shared high expectations for adolescent development across multiple domains. These domains included players' physical, mental, and social-emotional growth and life skills education. Many participant interviews also highlighted the value Black, youth sports leaders placed on ensuring adolescent athletes from marginalized backgrounds had access to high quality mentorship as they transition into adulthood.

Table 7

<i>Theme 3: More Than a Game - A Bigger View of Sports</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participant reflections and experiences acknowledged sports as a complex educational platform that is a vehicle for youth and community development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participants shared high expectations for adolescent development across multiple domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Physical ○ Mental ○ Social-emotional ○ Life skills education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participants are dedicated to providing high quality mentorship to adolescents

Henry Monroe's social media pages for Dreamville Select and his interview comments displayed how he personally embodies being a sports leader that impacts adolescents beyond the game. Mr. Monroe stated,

Mine is like, I say, mentor/big brother. So, I would say teacher, but to me a teacher is told what to teach. You know what I'm saying. Like no disrespect, my mom is a teacher. You know what I'm saying. But she's put herself in that box. She's got every degree you could possibly have and she knows now and she's put herself in a box because they're only letting you teach what they allow you to teach. To me, a mentor can guide you everywhere, you know what I'm saying. Not just on this court. If you play football I got a tip for you...About life, about trouble, about women, about kids. Like I could talk to you any field you want to talk to you about. Like I'm not gonna say I'm the best to talk to about that, but if I don't have the right answer I'm not too proud to lead you to somebody who does. You know what I'm saying? So, Mentor for sure. And then for me, I coach girls and boys, so absolutely Big Brother. Like I'm not trying to be Dad and I'm not trying to be friend because the friend coaches get ran over and the dad coaches they get drowned out.

Mr. Monroe also described his desire to prepare young men for life and how it informs the life skills he teaches his athletes. He stated,

Real questions because it's about being young men and about being ready for life. You know what I'm saying. Being ready for life, man, cause it's not enough of that. I teach about taxes, You know what I'm saying. And filling out job apps. Stuff like that. They're not doing that in marketing class even. I took Marketing. You know what I'm saying. So that's what I mean. It's like that's a big thing to me. So mentor and big brother, Bro. Like

things that your big brother would do for you, that you would do for your brother. You know what I'm saying. That you wouldn't let them go out to the world naked and naive. I wanna make sure they're at least equipped, so they could be like, 'Okay, if I want to go out here and be hard-headed, and do it my way, at least somebody told me a different way. Now it's on me if I'm going to choose that.'

Mr. Monroe also added,

I got high schoolers. I'm bringing in tax paperwork now. I'm bringing in job applications. Last year we brought in things about the recession and about depression and things like that, you know what I'm saying? About all that. About mental health and anxiety and how it's not...how anxiety does not mean weakness.

Mr. Monroe's desire to create a culture of openness to understand why his players personally engage in sports was also discussed. He shared,

I'm never trying to be like, 'Call me, call me Mr. Monroe,' or you know what I'm saying, nothing like that. Like you can call me coach, you can call me Monroe. I want you to feel like I'm your brother. Like we're family. You can come talk to me about whatever, because once that is, once that is open, then I can figure out your why. I can figure out why you're doing this. When I can figure out why you're hooping, I got it. I can. I can pull your triggers, I can push your buttons, I can motivate you, I can light a fire, or I can figure out how to humble you, you know what I'm saying. It's so many different things I can get off of your Why. Why are you playing this game? Your mom, your brothers, poverty, NBA, what? Whatever you're doing, not just, 'I want to play pro.' No, we gotta get deeper than that.

Whitney Dotson, Melissa Rogers, and Haley Roman highlighted the role coaches play as life mentors who leverage sports to support player challenges, teach key life skills, and address social issues. Ms. Dotson discussed her philosophy related to going beyond sports the following way,

So, it just showed the other parts of coaching. Like, yes, you have to know your x's and o's. You've got to know your sport, but coaching is more than just, you know, the sport on the court. Like it's all this other stuff that people are bringing into the gym. So you have to address that stuff, too.

Ms. Dotson's comments pertaining to her leadership philosophy, which encompasses going beyond sports, was also supported by the various types of posts she composed and shared with her social media followers. Ms. Dotson also discussed striving to instill confidence and other life skills in her female players. She stated,

...like I saw coaching as a way to make women feel confident because one of the things that drove me crazy was this narrative that women can't get along or that if you're on a team of girls that there's got to be drama.

Ms. Dotson added,

This is a benefit that men have had for years like, understanding how to collaborate with other people, and maybe I'm not your best friend, but we still have to work together like all these things that help you in life that sports teach you, and I knew that girls and women needed that. Like to me, that I've always been. I wouldn't call myself a feminist, but I've always been like, like girls, and women need this. Like you need these skills.

Ms. Dotson's communication with players about the confidence she sought to instill in them was also discussed. She stated,

I was a certified strength and conditioning coach, so that was always a big part of what we did in the off season. And I always told them, 'When you're done I want you to feel comfortable going into a weight room. I don't want you to walk into the gym and think you gotta get on the elliptical, because that's what women do. I want you to go in there and load up a Barbell and lift weights. You know what I mean, like if that's what you wanna do, I want you to feel confident with that.' So I know for sure that was always in my mind.

Ms. Rogers described how her first coaching job shaped her coaching philosophy, which entails teaching adolescent athletes to use basketball to escape life challenges. She stated,

Yeah. And I think with getting my first job at, my first high school coaching job at Central High, I saw a lot of the young women that came from similar backgrounds that I came from. And so it was actually very easy to, you know, be able to be in a space where they were able to come to me for things and I was able to kind of give them some of the things that they needed as far as like knowledge, as far as experience, putting myself in position to be transparent, but also vulnerable with them at times, and you know, being able to motivate and say, 'Okay, I know you're going through this personally, but let basketball be an outlet. Let it be a positive distraction for you.'

Like Ms. Dotson, Ms. Rogers also described how she builds confidence in her female players.

She stated,

It's, you know, you're coaching, and you know, a lot of players, and especially female players, like they lack that confidence. And so, I really feel like, that's a thing for me that I didn't realize the skill that I have is like, instilling confidence in young players and

making these, you know, believe and know that they really can, you know be successful and do whatever it is they want to do.

Ms. Rogers also discussed how she teaches her athletes self-respect and problem-solving skills:

No. I'm just very big on respect. So that's out there. Really, if we're talking specifically for basketball, it's letting the players know like first and foremost, is respect for yourself. So we're not even talking about, you know, how you're gonna treat each other in this space because that usually is not a problem. What it is is the respect of you knowing that when you're in basketball season how are you going to be able to take care of your body, so that you're being able to perform at the level you need to to help your team right? So that respect. The respect of knowing that your academics comes first, so you need to have your butt in class. And if, you know, you're struggling you need to ask for help.

Ms. Rogers added,

But I think once you get to high school, again, these are young adults that will turn into adults very quickly. And it's, again, our job to make sure that they're prepared. And we're only talking about sports, but a lot of things that I'm teaching them, and making them hone into their own responsibility, that's gonna help them when they do become adults and they're done playing basketball, and they're finished with high school. Right? Like, how do they problem-solve out in the world? How do they kind of figure things out? How do they navigate in the spaces outside of school and things like that?

Similar to Ms. Dotson and Ms. Rogers, Haley Roman discussed a philosophy of coaching that prioritizes high expectations and the development of life skills among her female athletes. She shared,

We have parents come to us all the time like, ‘They’re not even scared of me. They’re like, what is my coach gonna say if I get this F, or if I, you know, mess up in school, or if I fight.’ They’re more worried about what we think and what we’re gonna say than the parents.

Ms. Roman also expressed her aspirations to help female athletes believe in their own greatness. “I don’t know if they’ve been given that expectation, or that the challenge of being great before, but we put it out there and then most of them live up to it. Or try at least.” Ms. Roman also shared how she shapes players’ concept of self-love and beauty. She stated, “I think she’s beautiful. I want her to see it. She’s not getting that from who she thinks she wants to get it from, but it has come from within. So, I’m pouring into her” Ms. Roman’s direct impact on her athletes and the challenges they face was also discussed when she shared a story about receiving a call from the younger sibling of a player who had already graduated. She recalled,

Said that to say this is when she was on team. Graduated couple of years ago. But earlier this year, she and her mom got into it again. Big time. Mom was saying some things that hurt her deep. She took a bottle of pills. So they found her. I’m at a conference in Atlanta. My phone is blowing up. I’m like, I don’t know this number. Like, I stepped out, I answered the phone. It’s her little sister. ‘Coach!’ Never even had the little sister. Little sister calling me coach. ‘Coach. She told me to call you.’ You know, like she’s telling me what happened. She’s like, ‘She’s in this facility. They pumped her stomach. They sent her to a mental health facility. This is the number. Call her.’ And so I’m like I’m trying to call the place, and I reached out finally caught, you know, caught up with her. She told me what’s going on. She was just like, ‘I didn’t really want to kill myself. I wanted to prove a point because my mom said, ‘I should have killed you when, you know, I

should've aborted you. I didn't want you.' Also she's like, 'Well, you don't want me here, so I wont be here.'

Franklin Morgan and Peter Jordan explored the life lessons adolescents learn within youth sports and the long-term impact youth sports can have on adolescent development. Mr. Morgan explained his philosophy pertaining the lessons he instill into his athletes in the following way,

And it just rang out in my head at certain situations where I felt like I needed to step up and lead. And that's the power that we have as educators and coaches and mentors is that you know, we may say something to a kid, to a 14 year old, that you know changes how they see themselves. Or it doesn't resonate with them until they're 25, but then they get it, you know. And so just always reminding myself to keep pouring into kids and keep, even if it doesn't seem like they're responding, you keep giving them that feedback, because I don't get to choose when that message will resonate. When that fruit, when that seed, will bear fruit. I don't get to make that choice, but it's my obligation to keep planting seeds.

Mr. Morgan also discussed being a teacher of life and a sports leader:

Yeah, I hope they will see me as a teacher. I really do. I hope they will see me as somebody that is like not only teaching them basketball, but teaching them about life. Teaching them about themselves, teaching them about how to work together with other people, teaching them about the world and how the world works. I hope that's, I hope that's how they would describe me. You know, who knows what teenagers think, how they interpret things, but I hope that they would feel like, yeah, he's just trying to guide us. You know a guide, you know, of some sort. That would be kind of what I would say. I think the metaphor would be for them, and I would hope that it would be.

Mr. Morgan added,

You know I tell all the girls this all the time, like it's not about, oftentimes, what you say, but how you make people feel is what they're gonna remember. Like, I don't remember the words, I don't. In very few situations, do I remember what they said to me exactly, but I remember how they made me feel. I remember they made me feel like I belonged. They made me feel like I was valuable beyond just being a basketball player, and that's the thing that I want my kids to always know.

Peter Jordan discussed a commitment to teaching life lessons beyond the game as a youth sports leader. He shared,

And I look for growth. I look for growth from the first day in the camp to the last practice and last game. I want to see that they have grown skill wise, grown as young men. And it's, I mean, it's important, the role that we have as youth coaches is not all about the scoreboard, the wins and losses. It is about, you know, having success on the field, you know, being able to make the correct block or make the correct read or, you know, do things correct. But every time it's correct don't mean that there's gonna be a victory behind it. It may mean that you did that right for that moment. And being able to teach the young men how to handle a loss. How to handle, you know, we lost the game, but you know, we played well. Or, you know, what, we lost the game, we can get better, you know, it's always something positive. And in a situation you just got to find it."

Mr. Jordan continued,

So make sure you figure out what you want to teach. Whatever life lessons you have, and make sure you drill that into them, you know, and there's gonna be more than just football. Once I think about my fourth grade group to eighth grade group, I would say

probably less than 50% of them are probably still playing football, about 50%. And that means the time I had with them, it's about life lessons for those that's off the field now. So we just got to look at them as we got an opportunity to shape, you know, what they're doing outside of, you know, outside the gridiron.

Participants like Otis Farmer, Brandon Vance, and Brittany Day shared leadership philosophies that viewed sports as a tool to empower youth sports leaders and adolescents from marginalized communities with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Mr. Farmer, founder of the Shawn Carter Coaches Association, discussed how youth sports led him to create an uplifting network among coaches within his hometown community that, in return, positively impacts adolescent athletes. He stated,

So from that, I sort of built a Facebook page that's kind of gauge the interest. And this was, what, four years ago? Just to see where it would go. And, you know, we have over 500 members on our Facebook page. And you know, we regularly talk about basketball topics. I mean, it could be anything, you know, somebody can pose a question, you know about something as it relates to coaches or even, you know, handling student athletes from a mentor standpoint, and, you know, there's an open dialogue and conversation about the topic. So it's good, it's a platform for everybody to sort of express themselves and have open dialogue about things that they may be facing as a young coach or mentor coming up through the ranks. So from there, I figured I said, 'I'm gonna do a coaching clinic, just to see the type of turnout that we get,' you know. And my goal was to keep the coaching clinic where there was... the coaches who spoke and it had ties to the city.

Mr. Farmer also highlighted the significance of creating a coaching community that focuses on teaching coaches skills that impact their overall wellness and development:

So, you know, it's a lot of inner city sort of flavor that's been able to speak at the clinics. And the clinic is not just basketball focused. The clinic focuses on self improvement, you know, diet, exercise, things of that nature. Talks about being a healthier coach, you know, because it is a stressful profession. My wife has come in and talked about, you know, wellness things, I had a girl who I went to school with at Ohio, she's a compliance director at Brooklyn, she came and spoke about compliance and, and academics, you know, so the clinic touches on a lot of different things. It's not just about basketball, it's about the holistic approach of being a coach.

Brandon Vance displayed his commitment to positively empowering youth sports leaders within his organization and community by making the decision to step away from Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball. He stated,

Yeah, we participated in AAU for many years. It had become so negative, trying to stay right in something that was becoming so wrong. So we kind of changed our model. Our model now is a lot of the kids that played for us are grown and they are coaching now. So we wanted to step back and be the big brother organization that helps all of them. We've helped them understand doing it the right way, help them with resources they may not have, but because we've been blessed and in a good position. So now, I'm excited about helping others.

Through her work with the Young Warriors, Brittany Day also expressed a commitment to ensuring leaders within their organization understand they are role models and have the responsibility to empower young people by embodying the skills adolescents need to develop.

Ms. Day stated,

First and foremost, you have to accept being a role model and what that means. In every single orientation, we use the story of Charles Barkley, when he told the world that he's not a role model. And, and, and we, we say, Look, if you're coming to Young Warriors, it doesn't matter if you are a maintenance worker, or you're working in accounting, or you have a job directly working with young people, you are taking on that title. So you are saying that you're ready to be a role model.

Ms. Day also mentioned her desire to have sports leaders who are deeply committed to youth. She explained,

That means I myself, I'm going to live with integrity in such a way that I'm not just working with the young person on one side of my mouth and living a different way. So we look for people who want to do this work who are committed, because there's nothing worse than starting off a relationship with a young person and that you can't follow through it. You know, so we look for you know, that quality, you know, are you going to be reliable? Are you, do you genuinely like being around young people? What do you have to offer them? And are you making strides every day in your own life to be better, because you can't ask a young person to do that, and you're not doing that as well.

Ms. Day added,

Our philosophy is different, it's really about guiding from the side and really helping them within themselves to see what is best for them for a couple of reasons. One, we want to make sure when young people leave our care, that they're not dependent on us, but they have a skill set. They have a set of skills that they can draw upon for the rest of their lives. So if I'm just steadily giving advice to a young person but not teaching them the skill set of making healthy decisions, I'm not doing my job as a mentor.

Lastly, teaching job readiness skills within the Young Warriors was also discussed by Ms. Day.

She stated,

And from there, we've continued to develop our job readiness and training programs to make sure you know that they have some of those soft skills needed, you know. Are you going to be reliable? Do you understand that being on time is important? Do you understand that in order to be on time, you might not be able to do what you want to do the night before so that you can get up early in the morning? What about communication skills? What about understanding that you can't just get so emotional and upset when you're on the job and curse out a customer and expect to have your job. So we want people to have the skills to not only get a job but to maintain and be successful at that job.

Youth sports serve as a transformational vehicle for empowerment, mentorship, and life skills education. The insights, experiences, and philosophies shared by these Black, community-based, youth sports leaders displays their commitment to impacting community and adolescent development through sports. Participant narratives also provide insight into how sports leaders can serve as a catalyst for social change within marginalized communities.

Theme 4: Navigating Practical Challenges and Barriers

The fourth theme that emerged from participant interview data was navigating practical challenges and barriers (see table 8). All of the participants within this study did not describe how they navigated the practical challenges and barriers they faced as community-based youth sports leaders. However, a number of participants acknowledged the role practical challenges and barriers play in their ability to provide opportunities for adolescent athletes to learn, grow, and succeed in life and sports. These leaders noted that the challenges and barriers they navigated ranged from financial constraints and transportation needs to logistical issues. There are also

nuances to the types of challenges and barriers sports leaders must navigate depending on if they are school-affiliated or community-embedded. Regardless of their affiliation, participants expressed the need to be resilient and innovative to provide adolescent athletes with impactful experiences within their programs and/or organizations.

Table 8

<i>Theme 4: Navigating Practical Challenges and Barriers</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants noted that challenges and barriers ranged from financial constraints and transportation needs to logistical issues like time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-Affiliated vs. Community Embedded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants expressed the need to be resilient and innovative to provide adolescent athletes with impactful experiences

Franklin Morgan, a sports leader affiliated with a school organization, emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for youth to ensure they all have access to play adolescent sports. He stated,

And so you know for me, it was about creating an opportunity for young girls on the westside to play, to have an experience, to be able to play, and to find kids who otherwise wouldn't. Who wanna play ball, but don't really see themselves as ball players and give them opportunity to do that.

Because Jo Ann Robinson High School is the community-based organization Mr. Morgan is affiliated with, he often benefits from being directly linked to educational resources, facilities, and the athletes who are embedded in his program. Mr. Morgan described the benefit of being a sports leader at Jo Ann Robinson High the following way,

Yeah, so you know what I love about coaching at Jo Ann Robinson is that we make a concerted effort and we're very intentional about having as many coaches as possible in the building. And so, I'm here, my JV. Coach is a Restorative Justice Coach here. I'm sorry my Varsity assistant is the Restorative Justice Coach. My JV coach teaches history here. Our JV Assistant is a Spanish teacher. My second assistant at Varsity is one of our security assistants.

Mr. Morgan's affiliation to Jo Ann Robinson also creates easier access to gyms and other sports facilities, which is essential for youth sports programs and organizations. Mr. Morgan's access to facilities at Jo Ann Robinson also provides a platform for him to navigate the burdensome financial barriers some adolescent athletes encounter that may prevent them from participating in youth sports. He explained,

You know, they coming to free camps. We do a lot of stuff for free. A lot of free clinics, a lot of free camps. We just want kids in the gym that want to be in the gym. Again, that's my upbringing, you know. I want stuff to be free so that kids can come in. I'm not trying to get rich off this. I want kids who love the game to be able to access the game, and I get to watch these kids grow up in the gym with us.

Because they are school-affiliated, Mr. Morgan and his coaching staff have access to resources, facilities, and the ability to monitor the academic progress of their players. However, they still have to navigate challenges and barriers as Black, youth sports leaders who are school-affiliated. These challenges and barriers include bureaucratic politics, school district policies, the alignment to school schedules, and state athletic associations' rules and regulations. Furthermore, these challenges and barriers have the potential to impact Mr. Morgan's ability to respond to the needs of the communities he serves.

Like Mr. Morgan, other participants in this study shared that financial constraints were one of the most significant barriers they navigated, especially if they served as community-embedded youth sports leaders. Before highlighting the financial sacrifices he personally made in the past, Henry Monroe discussed not having financial support from families as he exposed youth to opportunities outside of the state of Ohio through Dreamville Select. Mr. Monroe also shared how he navigates financial barriers to provide adolescent athletes with access and opportunities despite their complex backgrounds. Mr. Monroe stated, “And I mean, I'm charging minimum fees. We're getting sponsorships and fundraising, barbecue fundraisers every month, and I'm coming literally...I'm spending \$10,000 out of my pocket every year, right, and that's not an exaggeration.” Mr. Monroe continued to discuss financial constraints and recalled why he values ensuring marginalized youth have access and exposure to impactful sports opportunities within his organization. He shared,

So I was willing to go into my pocket just to show them something different, because some of them had never left Ohio. I got so many kids. I used to get kids from Water Tower projects in Owens, Knights Manor, Jefferson projects out here on the west side, West side of Richardson, East side of Richardson, Fayetteville, Brownsville. Any area that's underrepresented. Any area that does not have a premier team, sponsorship, a pro athlete that came from there. Any of that stuff I was looking for those areas.

Other participants within community-embedded programs and organizations discussed navigating logistical challenges like time. Peter Jordan discussed the struggle of trying to holistically develop adolescent athletes with very limited time and access to them. He described, So in six hours, you know, we got to train them, we got to teach them life lessons, we got to condition them. And, you know, that's beyond the situation of academics or how things

are going on at home. You know, we try to figure all that, and muddle through all that, at the same time as prepare them, you know, for a competition on that Saturday. So, you know, we don't get enough time with them.

Victor Johnson expressed how he made himself accessible to families to combat the logistical complexities of his players' transportation needs. He stated,

I was like so available and accessible to all the parents. Like to the point where I first put the message out there like your kid need a ride like to the practice, to home, anything yall need, excuse me, anything you guys need, I'm there for. Like it got to the point where some kids, some mom like she got two or three other kids, and they got schedules too. And they live in Merrillville, and they can't, you know, get him all the way down here and be back, and you know, got to go here. So I would pick kids up from school.

Although the practical challenges and barriers community-embedded youth sports leaders face significantly impact their programs and organizations, leaders like Brandon Vance and Brittany Day have found success in navigating them by remaining true to their purpose, building partnerships, and by being responsive to the needs of the Redrum community. Examples of this success was highlighted in Mr. Vance and Ms. Day's interview and throughout the Young Warriors' website. Like other participants, Mr. Vance and Ms. Day had to navigate practical challenges and barriers within the Redrum community before becoming the Young Warriors they are today. Mr. Vance shared,

So in our neighborhood was a basketball court, it was one court. And I, you know, had started shooting around and I had one young man that was kind of down and out. And this is where it comes from, as far as the initial start. He was down and out. And I asked him why. And he indicated that he was not being treated fairly on the basketball court.

They wouldn't let him play. And I knew that he liked the game, but he was not allowed to play. So I told him that we were gonna do something about that.

Mr. Vance also discussed navigating financial constraints. He stated,

I remember once we were in, allowed to operate out of a building, a location. Just somebody, I didn't have funds, and they would let us, you know, pay them whatever we could. Once it got to where we couldn't pay enough, they told us we had to leave. So I remember one of my young people I used to work with. Tough guy. Street guy. Just really grit, right? He broke down crying. And he said that they put us out the building. And he was crying. He was hurt. And I had to let him know that, you know, sometimes in life you can get dealt that curveball, and it'll be okay.

As community-embedded leaders, Mr. Vance and Ms. Day discussed consciously striving to ensure the Young Warriors remain connected to their humble beginnings, which prioritizes a deep understanding of, and connection to, the community. Mr. Vance stated,

So one of the things that when we talked about full circle for the young people, it's the same with the organization, I really want to make sure that we don't forget the struggles, we don't forget the times when it was rough and where we came from, and the blessings we have now to be able to be where we are now and be helpful to other people.

Mr. Vance and Ms. Day also discussed how they lean on networks of community support and partnerships to navigate community challenges and maintain the sustainability and impact of their programs. Ms. Day described a key collaboration in the following way,

And, you know, one awesome opportunity that came our way was a collaboration with employee Redrum and Tri Illustration, where we actually train. Well, we recruit and train people from the community to work and have a career within Tri Illustration. So we're

working with two of their plants right now. And just it's just been a blessing to be able to reach outside of our normal ages that we serve, to say adults of any age, this is an opportunity because in order for the young people to be successful, the people around them have to be successful too. So if that means that there is a parent or somebody else in the community who needs steady employment, we want to help to make that happen.

Operating as a community-embedded organization, Mr. Vance and Ms. Day are not confined by systemic structures and policies like Mr. Morgan at Jo Ann Robinson High School. They are able to remain flexible and guarantee that their programs are designed and implemented to meet the specific needs of the Redrum community, which is at the heart of Mr. Vance and Ms. Day's organizational mission:

Engages the community, youth, and their families; prevents involvement in gangs, drugs, violence, and the juvenile justice system; intervenes and guides youth by assisting them with making positive choices; and coaches youth through their transition into adulthood.

In order to carry out the mission of the Young Warriors during COVID-19, Mr. Vance and Ms. Day capitalized on their ability to quickly make system-level changes as a community-embedded organization. As a community-embedded organization, Mr. Vance and Ms. Day had the freedom to quickly adapt their strategy and mobilize resources to navigate the barriers COVID-19 created within the Redrum community. Ms. Day's story, pertaining to the redesigning of spaces within the Young Warriors organization during COVID-19, demonstrated how the Young Warriors empowered youth and the Redrum community in spite of the practical challenges and barriers presented by the pandemic. Ms. Day shared,

When COVID hits, that's really when our space needs...we gained a whole new level of appreciation for the space that we had. So that we could really spread out so that we

could offer up rooms where young people could come if they needed to be in a space quiet to do their online learning, and to have access to an adult to help them. So having space, you know, has changed the game. It's really allowed us to increase drastically the capacity of young people that we can serve and you know, those who have been with us the longest appreciate it the most.

The practical challenges and barriers many youth sports leaders overcome vary in their significance, but remain conquerable through resilience, collaboration, and innovation. In spite of these challenges and barriers, sports leaders have found impactful ways to build, connect, adapt, and support individuals and communities from historically marginalized backgrounds. Whether school-affiliated or community-embedded, the contributions of these youth sports leaders emphasize the vital role community-based sports leaders play in enriching marginalized communities, facilitating access to opportunities, and promoting positive change in the lives of adolescents athletes.

Theme 5: Being a Black Youth Sports Leader

Being a Black youth sports leader emerged as the fifth theme from participant interviews within this study (see table 9). Even though not all participants described the nuances of being a Black youth sports leader in detail, a number of participant reflections and experiences collectively acknowledged the complexities of navigating the systems, structures, and environments within the community-based youth sports context. Many participants also discussed their commitment to positive impact, authenticity, and community empowerment despite experiencing systems and/or organizational practices that were unwelcoming to their backgrounds, leadership philosophies, and/or approaches as Black leaders within community-based youth sports.

Table 9

<i>Theme 5: Being a Black Youth Sports Leader</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Participants experience unwelcoming environments, systems, and/or organizational practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Participants discussed their commitment to positive impact, authenticity, and community empowerment ● Participant personal reflections and experiences within community-based youth sports exposes the underrepresentation of Black leaders and Black cultural ways of being within adolescent sports

Black youth sports leaders within this study often operated within environments full of systemic challenges and cultural disconnections. Participant reflections and experiences within these environments exposed the underrepresentation of Black leaders and Black cultural ways of being within community-based youth sports. Whitney Dotson shared her surprise and concern when she learned she was the only Black coach to ever win a conference tournament championship. She stated,

So I found out recently that in the PAC Conference, so that's the conference that Goble University is in, I am the only black person who has ever won a conference tournament championship ever, ever in any sport. I have the same reaction. I was like oh, I mean yay, but aww.

Although there is a lack of Black representation among youth sports leaders within community-based organizations, participants like Henry Monroe and Horace Moore discussed navigating hiring barriers. Mr. Moore shared, “I applied for the job several times. And, you know, for various reasons. Either I was passed over or I did not meet the billing for the position at Highlander. But this last opportunity was me being hired.” Mr. Monroe’s experience provided

insight into his hiring journey and illustrated the role community allyship played in him overcoming the hiring barriers he encountered due to a criminal charge he had on his record from adolescence. He explained,

I got to coach under Mike Covarrubias at Owens High School. So I was his J.V. Assistant and actually he fought for me because they actually were trying to prevent me from coaching because of my felony that I acquired. And it was just a, you know, a marijuana charge man in college. Not like I did some violent crime or something like that, but they painted a picture of me already. So you know, Mike fought for me and he went to the AD. He went into the higher ups and said, you know, put his back on the line and said, 'If you don't let him coach with me, I'm not coaching.' So, you know, he put his neck on the line for me, so you know I really felt that.

Mr. Monroe also discussed his decision to walk away from his leadership role at Owens High due to the systemic politics and biases he faced. He recalled,

I kind of stepped back from Owens High because it was a lot of politics. And I really wanted to...I was gonna apply for the head, but I was told through inklings that I probably wouldn't be considered. So I really didn't even do it. You know, I probably shouldn't let that stop me. But I didn't even want to go through the games and I saw what they were kind of doing, looking for kind of a clean cut person, that didn't have experience, wasn't from the area, and that just not me. Like I didn't want to be somewhere where I couldn't be myself.

In spite of the structures and systems that present challenges to Black youth sports leaders, Melissa Rogers and Victor Johnson also described how they break through barriers by

remaining true to themselves as Black leaders. These participants also noted how they communicate this form of resistance to the youth they serve. Mr. Johnson stated,

But it's not as dramatic, but it's real. It's authentic. Like, if that's what the word you want to say. I'm real authentic. You know, that's just how I feel. Like I feel like I don't want to ever go into coaching, or go into life, or anything, and a person don't feel like they getting the real me. And so when we are on the field, I want the real you. So I'm gonna talk to you in a real way. I'ma connect with you in a real way. And I'ma get, you know, down to, you know, weed out any misunderstanding. I want to be a direct person. So, I think that's just how I go about my life. That's how I go about coaching.

Ms. Rogers added,

And I don't think there's a right and wrong, in really any aspect, cause there's always an exception to the rule, right? So I would say, you know, definitely be true to yourself, and when I say push the needle, I mean, you know, being an advocate for yourself, you know, don't allow anyone to just treat you any type of way. If you don't understand, ask questions, you know. If you feel like something isn't right, you push the needle on that and you stand up for that, or for that person, for that situation or whatever, and just, you know, do your part to just give the world what it needs essentially.

During our interview, Haley Roman further explored breaking down systemic barriers, creating inclusive environments, and promoting authenticity as a Black youth sports leader. She also discussed her experience inheriting a sports program from white sports leaders who did not appear to create inclusive environments for Black and Brown athletes. She described what she encountered in the following way,

Well part of it was that I was seeing us, black people, black girls on the team that looked very uncomfortable, doing what they were doing, and it looked...It wasn't up to the standard that I would want it to be. I was gonna say it looked a mess, but I mean they might have been proud of it. So, I wanted them to be able to do what they could do without...The coaches were white. Let me say that. I think that was a disconnect there. It was mostly white girls on the team, but the black girls on the team looked like they wanted to do something more with the culture with whatever, you know, our God given talent, and they just looked comfortable.

The impact Ms. Roman had on Black and Brown athletes through her role as the new leader of her sports program was also explained. She stated,

But just my squad. So football season was still predominantly white, and then basketball was Black and Brown, and then I took over both. And now all of it is... So that lesson was that one, I don't know if they were not participating because they didn't feel comfortable, because where they come from all of a sudden? Were they interested this whole time and just didn't feel comfortable trying out, did they not make it you know with the white coaches? What were they looking for, you know? Did they get cut because they weren't doing the traditional pom dance routines and all that? So that had me questioning that, too. Like, were they being shut out, or did they just not feel comfortable? Never asked, but it's always in my head. So it made me create, make sure that I was creating a space for them to be authentic to who they were.

Beyond navigating challenges and barriers, some Black youth sports leaders within this study also mentioned fostering a sense of community within their organizations by creating

cultural connections and exposing athletes to aspects of their shared heritage. Horace Moore discussed his ritual of distributing black-eyed peas to players before games. He explained,

Each week, I have routines and rituals that I go through. One of the things that I have done in the past, that I continue to do, is... I'm biracial. My mother was white, my father was black. And not many people are aware of the cultural tradition of black-eyed peas in the African American community. So every gameday, I go through... At the beginning of the year, I always explain what is symbolic of the Black Eyed Pea. The Black Eyed Pea was a source of sustenance for African Americans when they were enslaved. And it was constantly thought of that if you owned a black eyed pea, you were able to grow and develop that pea. And you could provide nourishment and health and wellbeing for their families. And since then, it took on the symbolic role of being good luck, especially on New Year's Day. People eat black eyed peas for bringing on good luck for the year. So every game, I give a black-eyed pea to the players. Sometimes they eat the pea, sometimes they'll tape it to the shoulder pad or put it on their thigh pad. But the point is, I tell them that I can only put 11 players on the field at a time, but the black-eyed pea is representative of me, wishing them to have good luck and being on the field at the same time while I'm there with them. And so these are our rituals and traditions that I pass on.

As a member of a Black, greek-lettered organization, Haley Roman discussed uplifting aspects of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) within her program and the impact it has on inspiring her players to pursue post-secondary education. She shared,

So it's, you know, we mimic sorority life. So then that also creates, it's almost a conduit to college. Now, they're interested in sororities. 'I can't be in a sorority if I don't go to college. So now I want to go to college.' And so we're in, you know, just dropping all

these little nuggets. Like, if you do this, we'll take them to step shows. Like look, this is what you could do. Oh, I bet you y'all can beat this team. We go to Vardaman City, we perform, we outstepping the Greeks, and then like, 'oh, you know, I want to be a part of this. I wanna experience this on a campus when I grow up.' So yeah, we just...experiences. Getting them out there. Just allowing them to see things that they wouldn't normally see and doing it with them, not just sending them.

Charles King also discussed how he builds off of his heritage as a Black man and encourages Black youth to pursue the educational opportunities Black ancestors did not have. He stated,

So I try to, try to be as good an example for them as I can. You know, there's tons of negative examples of what it is to be a Black man. And I just want to be one of those positive ones. And for me, like I said, you know, understand that there were people that looked like us that were deprived of the opportunity to educate themselves and to make themselves the best that they can be. So it is a privilege for us to be able to do that. So try to get them to take it seriously and understand what getting your education can do for you and your families. For generations.

Participant narratives in this study reveal the nuanced realities Black youth sports leaders navigate as they develop and empower youth from historically marginalized backgrounds. Despite the systemic and structural challenges they continually overcome, Black, youth sports leaders maintain their commitment to authenticity, resiliency, and cultural community empowerment. By challenging the existing systems and structures that hinder deep feelings of cultural connection and belonging within youth sports, Black leaders are continuing the legacy of Black ancestors who knocked down doors that serve as barriers to inclusivity and freedom for future generations.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This study investigated Black, community-based, youth sports leaders' experiences as they seek to positively impact historically marginalized communities through sports. By employing a qualitative research design for this interview study using critical brokerage theory, I gained a deeper understanding of the critical context Black youth sports leaders operate within along their journeys to positive impact. This study also afforded me the opportunity to study "people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences in the world" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312).

The objectives of this study were to understand how critical brokerage practices exist among Black, community-based, youth sports leaders and how these practices positively play a role in impacting the lives of historically marginalized communities. Critical brokerage theory, written by Rodney Hopson, Peter Miller, and Temple Lovelace, provided conceptual guidance for this study. I used critical brokerage theory because it spotlights the ways leaders within organizations provide its members with access to relationships, resources, and opportunities using critical orientations (Hopson et al., 2016). Furthermore, critical brokerage theory focuses on practice and outcomes, which allowed me to explore how youth sports leaders have impact beyond the traditional measures of success for sports programs and organizations. The objectives of this study were primarily met through in-depth interviews with each Black youth sports leader. Lastly, a review of publicly available documents/platforms was conducted to confirm what I learned in the interviews.

The findings in this study have contributed to the understanding of the ways Black, community-based, youth sports leaders, in the organizational contexts I examined, utilize critical

brokerage practices to positively impact marginalized communities. Although the findings within this study highlight the critical brokerage practices of Black youth sports leaders, there are insightful lessons to be learned by non-Black youth sports leaders as well. The findings of this study reveal that Black leaders tap into their shared lived experiences, value relationships, have a bigger view of sports, overcome practical challenges and barriers, and navigate the nuances of being Black leaders within the context of youth sports. These findings validate many of the findings that are present in the existing body of work and scholarship on the role youth sports, and youth sports leaders, play in positively impacting adolescent development and wellbeing. Furthermore, these findings align with and provide both theoretical and practical implications for youth sports leaders and the individuals who study historically marginalized communities, youth sports programs and organizations, and youth sports leadership.

In the following discussion section, I provide implications for the study's findings. The implications focus on sports leadership practices within historically marginalized communities. Additionally, the implications discuss future research pertaining to youth engagement and the holistic well-being of leaders serving in historically marginalized communities.

Implications for Practice

Critical Awareness of Context

The study was informed by critical brokerage theory, which is dedicated to addressing social injustices and inequities through access and exposure to meaningful relationships, resources, and opportunities (Hopson et al., 2016). Critical brokerage theory necessitates that leaders and organizations intentionally examine inequitable systems through a critical lens while proactively seeking to enact change. Each of the participants, and their respective programs and organizations, actively pursued improved conditions and outcomes for the communities they

served. The findings from this study support notions that youth sports leaders within organizations, particularly those serving marginalized communities, need to maintain a systemic awareness and readiness to resist and create change within these systems and conditions. Through their recognition of the complex challenges present within marginalized communities, and their personal navigation of the realities impacting Black leaders within the youth sports context, participants were critical of the system and remained resilient in their pursuit of positive impact.

As Hopson and colleagues' (2016) study on the Center of Life (COL) revealed, community members who are directly tied to organizations that are critically aware of community contexts gain resources, meaningful relationships, and opportunities for growth. Because community-based organizations have the potential to play valuable roles in impacting entire communities, it is imperative that organizational missions and philosophies intentionally uplift a commitment to understanding and changing the current realities marginalized communities face. It is also essential that youth sports organizations develop and promote leaders, like the participants in this study, who are capable of critically understanding the societal contexts adolescent athletes and their communities combat daily.

Respect the Culture: Embracing the Culturally Rich Aspects of Sports

This study establishes that youth sports leaders should recognize, embrace, and extend the positionality athletics have maintained within marginalized communities, particularly in the Black community. As Paulo Freire (1970) states, we must “start where the people are,” and in communities across the world, the people are engaged in sports. If we look at basketball across all levels, the “basketball culture” we see today is steeped in Black community traditions and histories. Seeking paths to overcome societal barriers and inequities, marginalized communities

have recognized and witnessed the potential impact sports, like basketball, can have on elevating their lives in deep and personal ways. This recognition has contributed to youth and communities' unwavering interest in, and value for, athletics.

Black youth sports leaders within this study showcased how athletics had deep multigenerational roots in their lives, serving as both an escape from harsh adolescent realities and a critical component of their success as leaders within the Black community. These experiences and narratives highlighted Black youth sports leaders' ability to embrace the culturally rich aspects of sports that exist within historically marginalized communities. Sports leaders, particularly in these environments, must recognize and elevate the historical and cultural impact of sports. Sports leaders must also understand the potential role athletics play in opening doors to future opportunities within and beyond their communities. Oftentimes, youth from marginalized communities view sports as their sole path to upward mobility, financial security, and a better life for their loved ones. Youth sports leaders must be aware of these perceptions and invest in ways to creatively provide access and exposure to the diverse possibilities that exist in the world of sports. Like the participants in this study, youth sports leaders need to openly embrace the role athletics play within marginalized communities and respect the cultural love for "the game" that has consistently existed across space and time.

Making Deeper Holistic Connections

Adolescent sports provide amazing opportunities for youth sports leaders to holistically engage with youth and their communities in impactful, transcending ways. Many youth sports leaders in this study discussed their ability and desire to connect with athletes on a more personal level. Participants in this study also described how established relationships with the entire village surrounding athletes played a positive role in the success of their programs and

organizations. Through these connections, study participants illustrate the all-inclusive value they place on fostering deep, meaningful connections with their athletes and their broader community.

When youth sports leaders prioritize building connections that extend beyond the realm of sports, they can build personal bonds with athletes and communities that lead to transformative relationships and outcomes. Like the participants in this study, youth sports leaders must prioritize building holistic connections in order to gain an understanding of the empathy, resilience, and community engagement needed to create personal and communal growth within marginalized communities. Additionally, youth sports leaders must intentionally develop the ability to establish connections with adolescent athletes that can lead to their growth and progress beyond the sport. Also, sports leaders should view sports as a tool for helping adolescents develop life skills like confidence and self-respect that extend into adulthood. Youth sports leaders must also see sports as a vehicle to disrupt inequities and promote community improvement, a key aspect of critical brokering.

Accessing Funds of Knowledge Through Purposeful Connection-Making

In addition to making deep holistic connections with adolescent athletes and their networks, youth sports leaders must purposefully connect with family and community members who contain valuable “funds of knowledge.” The “funds of knowledge” concept by González and colleagues (2005) is based on the assertion that people are competent beings who possess valuable knowledge and skills obtained through their personal backgrounds and lived experiences over time. González and colleagues (2005) contend that every household and community possesses unique funds of knowledge that are embedded in the historical and cultural understandings, practices, and routines of families and communities. Furthermore, these funds

of knowledge contribute to the overall cultural wealth individuals, families, and communities maintain.

By building connections with family and community members who hold valuable funds of knowledge pertaining to adolescent athletes, youth sports leaders have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the familial and/or community contexts adolescents are born and raised in. This in-depth understanding may include family history, challenges the community has faced over time, and/or the obstacles particular families and youth have overcome as a collective unit. Obtaining funds of knowledge can also reveal culturally relevant and responsive approaches and practices that can help youth sports leaders teach specific life skills that better serve and support adolescent athletes and their broader communities. Additionally, funds of knowledge support youth sports leaders in their ability to communicate, relate, and effectively advocate within communities.

Traditionally, specific skills, knowledge, and abilities have been prioritized and valued by privileged groups within our society (Yosso, 2005). This view of cultural capital is limited and has historically centered white, middle class values (Yosso, 2005). By centering the experiences of marginalized communities, we can identify the community cultural wealth they have obtained over time. This community cultural wealth is defined as, “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Like the participants within this study, youth sports leaders must understand and appreciate the knowledge, backgrounds, practices, and lived experiences adolescent athletes and their communities possess. This appreciation and understanding for “funds of knowledge” is essential for youth sports leaders to purposefully build authentic connections with individuals who hold priceless “funds of

knowledge" that spans across generations. This, however, will require youth sports leaders to break down any preconceived notions they were consciously or subconsciously taught pertaining to what constitutes valuable sources of knowledge through biased inequitable institutions and systems. By moving past potential biases, misconceptions, and deficit perspectives, youth sports leaders put themselves in position, like study participants, to critically uplift injustices and disrupt larger societal inequities for adolescent athletes and their families.

Implications for Research

This study focused on understanding how critical brokerage practices exist among Black, community-based, youth sports leaders and how these practices positively play a role in impacting the lives of historically marginalized communities. The findings from this study suggest three areas for future research. First, further research needs to be conducted on the contrasting landscapes of school-affiliated or community-embedded youth sports programs and/or organizations. Although some participants revealed the strengths and challenges associated with leading within each context, a comparative case study of youth sports leaders who function within schools, with those who are more community-embedded, can be insightful. This type of comparative case study can provide future researchers with the opportunity to explore the advantages and disadvantages of each youth sports context on a deeper level. Future research surrounding school-affiliated and community-embedded youth sports contexts could also reveal if one landscape is more impactful on the growth and development of adolescent athletes from historically marginalized communities.

Second, additional research needs to be conducted that provides insight into how Black, community-based, youth sports leaders maintain and protect their social, mental, and emotional well-being. Within this study, participants discussed how they impacted the holistic development

and wellbeing of adolescent athletes and their broader communities. However, one aspect of community-based, youth sports leadership that was not discussed was how these leaders maintained a state of positive mental health while supporting the communities they serve. A number of participants within this study described how their shared lived experiences and backgrounds supported their ability to positively impact youth, families, and communities from marginalized backgrounds. Yet, there was no discussion surrounding the impact reliving these experiences and traumas have on their personal wellbeing. There is a great deal of research emerging on mental health and its impact on our wellness. More research that uncovers the supports and resources Black youth sports leaders engage in to maintain and/or improve their overall mental health could lead to the development of future implications for practice within adolescent athletics.

Lastly, future research needs to explore how Black leaders can positively impact historically marginalized communities within other youth engagement contexts. Findings from this research study demonstrated the impact shared complex backgrounds had on Black youth sports leaders' ability to influence marginalized communities. Research findings in this study also indicated that Black youth sports leaders had nuanced experiences leading in community contexts as members of marginalized communities themselves. Since Black leaders within this study identified how their race and background played a role in their experiences and successes as youth sports leaders, it is important to conduct more research to explore how historically marginalized identities impact Black leaders, and their success, within other youth engagement contexts such as arts programs, music programs, and church settings.

Conclusion

This qualitative interview study strived to understand how critical brokerage practices exist among Black, community-based, youth sports leaders and how these practices positively play a role in impacting the lives of historically marginalized communities. Participants in this study were youth sports leaders who sought to have a positive impact within historically marginalized communities utilizing practices closely aligned to critical brokerage theory. Although their work spanned across various sports and community contexts, each youth sports leader exemplified and discussed the practical ways community-based, youth sports leaders and organizations have a positive impact on marginalized communities. It is important to note that these effective youth sports leaders had an impact by maintaining a bigger view of sports, having shared lived experiences, and by valuing relationships. These youth sports leaders also navigated practical challenges, barriers, and the complexities of being Black youth sports leaders.

Access to trusted adults and positive role models play a major role in adolescent development and success (Pringle et al., 2018). Although many adolescents face complex challenges along their journey towards adulthood, they still need guidance from adults who can support and motivate them (Meltzer et al., 2016). Research on inequities and the wellbeing of communities of color suggests that marginalized communities need this guidance and support the most (Frattura & Capper, 2007). Participants within this study illustrated the value and benefit of participating in community-based youth sports and the impact youth sports leaders can have on adolescents within marginalized communities. These youth sports leaders also provided opportunities for youth development and imparted valuable lessons and wisdom that help adolescents navigate societal barriers.

Throughout this study, I reflected on the idea of personally having access and exposure to the Black leaders in this study. More importantly, I meditated on how these leaders would have shaped my personal development as a Black athlete on and off of the court. Unlike the adolescent athletes discussed in this study, the majority of my experiences after elementary school within youth sports took place under the guidance of white sports leaders. As a Black man from a very complex childhood background, I sat and wondered how it would have been to grow up and develop alongside these Black youth sports leaders. I even asked myself questions like, “How would you have benefited from youth sports leaders who share similar lived experiences, value building relationships with your entire village, and want to provide you with the knowledge, skills, and resources you need to thrive beyond sports?” Even though I benefited from the financial resources of my white teammates’ parents, I rarely felt the sense of community and belonging that Black youth sports leaders within this study created for their players.

Although my youth sports experience was not impacted by the Black youth sports leaders in this study, I am grateful that there are adolescents within marginalized communities who benefit from having access and exposure to them. The guidance and development these leaders provide, coupled with the life skills and mentorship they bestow, have life-long implications that can disrupt inequities and create more socially just communities across the country. All thirteen Black, community-based, youth sports leaders highlighted in this study have truly exemplified that “Ball is Life.”

Dear Basketball...or God,

You are one in the same to me.

I had no idea I would deepen my connection with You during this pivotal stage of my academic journey. To be honest, I thought I'd never find a connection between You and I here on this campus again. I still think about that tryout from junior year and how I wished I could have guarded him. Instead, I had to watch as he played PG, doing what any player would do in that situation. PG or not, he showcased his skills during that final exhibition of the last ten players standing. Walking off of that court, I would have never known You had bigger plans for me. Plans that would leave me appreciating You even more.

I'll admit, I was wrong. Through You, "Ball Is Life" was born. I'm truly blessed to have the opportunity to gain a deeper love for You and a better understanding of what I yearned for all of those years as an adolescent athlete. Growing up, I knew the connections I established with the Black sports leaders I was exposed to was special. Yet, I had no idea that their impact would stay with me throughout adulthood. I now know, beyond a doubt, that I am Born Gift3d. Born with the opportunity to have access to You, be loved by You, learn from You, and now...uplift, teach, and empower others through You.

Thank You, Ball!

Thank You, GOD.

Ball Is Life!!!

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Appendix A

“Ball Is Life”: The Soundtrack

<p>* Parental Advisory: Explicit Content (Explicit)</p>	
Dissertation Heading:	“Track Title” / Artist:
Dedication	“Bigger Than Me” / Big Sean (Explicit)
Acknowledgements	“Grateful” / Hezekiah Walker & The Love Fellowship Choir
Table of Contents	“Levels” / Meek Mill (Explicit)
List of Tables	“Don’t Touch My Hair” / Solange ft. Sampha (Explicit)
List of Figures, List of Appendices	“The Bigger Picture” / Lil Baby (Explicit)
Abstract	“Ready ‘24” / J. Cole ft. Cam’Ron (Explicit)
Dear Basketball...or God: A Diary	“Immanuel” / Poetic Lace ft. Leezola Smith
Chapter 1: Introduction	“Basketball” / Lil Bow Wow ft. Jermaine Dupri, Fabolous, & Fundisha
Chapter 2: Literature Review	“Boplicity” / Miles Davis
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework	“Wake Up Everybody” / Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes ft. Teddy Pendergrass
Chapter 4: Methods	“Nonstop” / Drake (Explicit)
Chapter 5: Findings	“Alright” / Kendrick Lamar (Explicit)
Theme 1: Kindred Spirits	“Be Yourself King” / Fr33sol (Explicit)

Theme 2: We Over Everything	“F.U.B.U.” / Solange ft. The-Dream & BJ The Chicago Kid (Explicit)
Theme 3: More Than a Game	“Win” / Jay Rock (Explicit)
Theme 4: Navigating Challenges and Barriers	“The Highs & The Lows” / Chance the Rapper ft. Joey Bada\$\$ (Explicit)
Theme 5: Being a Black Youth Sports Leader	“God Did” / DJ Khaled ft. Fridayy, Rick Ross, Lil Wayne, Jay Z, & John Legend (Explicit)
Chapter 6: Discussion	“Today I Saved The World” / 5 Alarm
Critical Awareness of Context	“Dear Mama” / 2Pac (Explicit)
Respect the Culture	“Hook Mitchell” / Rexx Life Raj ft. Dame D.O.L.L.A. (Explicit)
Making Deeper Holistic Connections	“Healing Conversations” / Londrelle
Accessing Funds of Knowledge	“Father Time” / Kendrick Lamar ft. Sampha (Explicit)
Implications for Research	“Kobe Bryant” / Lil Wayne (Explicit)
Conclusion	“This Time Last Year” / WHATUPRG

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. How did you first get involved with athletics? Was there a coach or two who were especially impactful on you as a youngster?
2. What were your first coaching experiences? What were two or three of the key lessons that you learned from these experiences?
3. If you were to choose a metaphor to describe your coaching today, what would it be and why? (e.g., parent, teacher, mentor, friend, counselor, CEO). How would others describe you?
4. What are your defining attributes as a coach?
5. How have you changed over the years as a coach?
6. What are one or two stories of “connection-making” that have been most impactful upon/representative of your coaching journey?
7. Do you create options for change and adaptation within each new year of coaching? What are some examples of how you have adapted in a given year?
8. What everyday routines are important on your team and with your fellow coaches?
9. What tools of practice (technologies, physical spaces, etc.) do you use to facilitate relationship development?
10. How do you get to know members of your team “beyond the game?”