



Lived Experiences of Acculturation and Identity Exploration among Newcomer Youth in and Through Community-Based Recreational Sport

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Abstract

Background: Community-based recreational sport (CBRS) provides an important context for newcomer youth to learn social and cultural norms and build social connections within new sociocultural environments (Jeanes et al., 2015). Environmental transitions can challenge newcomer youth as they adapt to unfamiliar cultural contexts and engage in ongoing processes of identity exploration (Berry, 2005). Given that positive identity development is central to positive youth development (PYD) (Lerner et al., 2015), it is essential to provide meaningful opportunities for newcomer youth to explore diverse cultural perspectives and expand possibilities for identity development (Alim & Paris, 2017). This study examined newcomer youth's lived experiences of acculturation and identity exploration within CBRS, focusing on how these experiences contribute to PYD and cultural sustainability. The research questions were: (1) How do newcomer youth experience acculturation and identity exploration in and through CBRS? and (2) How do these experiences contribute to PYD and cultural sustainability?

Methodology: A longitudinal qualitative approach was employed to examine how newcomer youth's experiences of acculturation and identity exploration were shaped and evolved over time (Neale, 2019). Ethics approval was granted by the authors' institutional research ethics board. Seven newcomer youth participated in monthly one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted over three months. Field notes and self-reflective journals were collected as supplementary data. Data were analyzed thematically using a data analysis spiral that guided five iterative stages of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Results & Conclusion: Two overarching themes were identified: (1) Negotiating Multicultural Acculturation Through Social Connections and Cultural Exchange; and (2) Cultivating Multicultural Competence and Agency for Identity Development. The findings revealed that CBRS provided newcomer youth with spaces to navigate new environments by establishing social networks that facilitated cultural learning and fostered a sense of belonging. Participants developed a greater understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, including their heritage cultures, contributing to ongoing identity exploration processes (Deardorff, 2019). Continued engagement in social and intercultural interactions through CBRS enhanced newcomer youth's confidence, competence, and motivation to initiate such interactions (Pink et al., 2020). Positive experiences with culturally diverse peers fostered inclusiveness, multicultural competence, and agency, empowering newcomer youth to take active roles in their identity exploration and cultural adaptation processes (Middleton et al., 2021). These findings have important implications for physical and health education by highlighting the need to design physical activity opportunities that foster intercultural engagement, affirm diverse cultural identities, and support newcomer youth in sustaining connection to their heritage cultures while navigating new sociocultural environments.

Keywords: Culturally sustaining pedagogy; acculturation; youth identity, positive youth development, community-based sport



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