Sports Matters Cultural Plunge Project

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to engage in the discomfort of being an outsider to an unfamiliar sport. Growing up, I was involved with team sports including basketball, softball, soccer, and volleyball. In 2023, I moved to Forest Hills in Queens, New York City, which is near to where I was raised. There is a NYC public park across the street from my building, and it has an asphalt running track. Over the summer and autumn seasons, I have taken interest in a competitive youth inline speed skating team named IDOLS Skate because I was impressed by how often they would train on the running track. The children appear to always have fun, and their families often crowd around the practices and cheer the skaters on. I was drawn to the community aspect of their team, and I feel like an outsider because I am not at all familiar with inline speed skating. The skaters, their families, and even their head coach, Gibenny, mostly speak Spanish, which is a language I only have basic conversational proficiency in, as my first language, Tagalog, shares a lot of the same words. The following paper explores the history of inline skating, the foundations of IDOLS Skate, a sociological analysis, incorporating ethical practice, and overall reflections.

History of Inline Skating

The International Inline Skating Association (IISA; 2022) was created in 1991 as a non-profit organization that advocated for educational programs, safe skating, and increased access to skate spaces throughout the United States. The IISA (2022) disbanded in 2004, yet the community of inline skating enthusiasts continues to grow today. According to Nakamura (2022), roller skating was the predecessor of inline skating and was developed by an ice skater in Northern Europe who wanted to find a way to continue training during the warm summer months when there was no ice. John Joseph Merlin is credited with inventing the first documented roller

skate in the 1700's, although his original creation had no means of commanding direction or speed (Nakamura, 2022). Scott Olson was a young hockey player from Minnesota who modified a pair of Chicago inline skates to have better wheels and a heel brake in 1979 (Nakamura, 2022), which is said to be the first official inline skate. Nakamura (2022) includes that Bob Naegele, Jr. was a businessman who purchased Olson's inline skates company in 1984, which he eventually introduced as Rollerblade, Inc. Rollerblades provided access to everyday people outside of hockey players (Nakamura, 2022).

Rising Popularity

Many people find health benefits associated with inline skating because it not only enhances one's ability to improve balance and build overall strength, but it allows participants to maximize their aerobic capacity with less impact, unlike running or cycling (IISA, 2022). The Netherlands has been known to dominate the world of inline speed skating since 1981. In addition to health benefits, skaters also enjoy the social aspect of inline skating (IISA, 2022). Relay races are an integral part of most speed competitions.

Rules of the Sport

According to Inline Speed Skater (2024), relay teams are generally made up of two to four skaters. Races vary in length and distance and can take place on either indoor tracks, which are plastic-coated, or outdoor tracks, which are typically made of concrete and are more common in North American and Europe. The Olympics (n.d.) recognizes roller speed skating as an event. A maximum of five wheels are accepted, but they cannot exceed a diameter of 110mm.

History of IDOLS Skate

Gibenny Cuesta (she/her) is the owner and head coach of IDOLS Skate. She comes from a tight-knit family in Medellin, Colombia, and was introduced to speed skating at the age of

twelve. Gibenny recalls falling in love with skating because of the freedom and adrenaline it gave her, almost like she was flying on wheels. She competed in speed skating in high school, but she also played volleyball simultaneously. Gibenny believes both experiences shaped her work ethic and deepened her passion for sports. After attending college and obtaining degrees in international business administration and even production, Gibenny moved to the U.S. and began coaching.

IDOLS was born in 2022 from Gibenny's dream to create a space where fitness and community went hand-in-hand. Her goal is to empower individuals, especially families, to lead healthier lives while exploring their potential through sports like skating, dance, and fitness. IDOLS' mission is to inspire and empower individuals of all ages to embrace an active and healthy lifestyle by striving to improve physical and mental well-being and building strong family connections. Most of the skaters' ages range from four to eighteen, but they also offer beginner programs for adults. The majority of the skaters start around four to six years of age, but all ages are welcome. The team is co-ed, while most of the skaters right now are young girls.

Gibenny's training approach focuses on building foundational skills, confidence, and discipline through a mix of technique, endurance, and having fun to keep students motivated. Monthly memberships begin at $85.00, and they also offer memberships for $200 which includes access to competitions and their private fitness studio. The skating season runs for about eight months, and they take a four-month break for the winter and holidays so that skaters can recharge. For many of the skaters, this sport allows them to have a shared safe space where they can express themselves, build confidence, and make lifelong friendships. Parents see this team as an opportunity for their children to stay active, build character, and develop valuable life skills like teamwork. 80% of the team members are of Latin American descent. So far, they have

competed at the NYC Marathon, the Florida Skate Marathon, the San Jose Skating Festival in California, and other various local competitions throughout the city. Gibenny hopes to see her team grow both in sizes and in skill level in the upcoming 2025 season. One of the biggest challenges she and her team faces is that there is a lack of professional speed skating tracks in NYC. Gibenny believes this limits their development in the sport. Their team is the first speed skating club in NYC and one of the first in the country to use rollerblades. According to Gibenny, they have inspired the creation of five new schools throughout the U.S. Gibenny credits her "forever coach," Cielo, as one of her most inspirational mentors.

Live Practice Participation

Gibenny showed up for practice about thirty minutes prior to the start time in order to set up cones throughout the center of the public race track. One set of cones was shaped into a circle, while the other set of cones were shaped into a smaller circle. The smaller circle was used for the youngest children and beginners, and the bigger circle was used for the older, more experienced skaters who have already competed before. Parents flooded the track's perimeter, some ready with foldable chairs to sit on and homemade food and baked goods to exchange with the other families and skaters. Parents helped skaters get ready for their session, and the athletes all wore their skating uniforms, skates, helmets, elbow pads, and knee pads. Gibenny was equipped with her own pair of 3-wheeled inline skates, a whistle, and a timer. She often would circle back with her skaters and check in with them after each drill. Drills included solo races around the track as well as relay races. Some drills included sharp turns as well as skating backwards.

Socialization

According to Coakley (2021), socialization is defined as a process of learning and social development that takes place when we interact with each other and become familiar with the

different social worlds in which we live. In other words, people form relationships and are influenced by others at the same time as they are influencing them (Coakley, 2021). While the members of IDOLS Skate are training and traveling together at such a young age, they actively participate in socialization, social development, and identity formation, which are all part of an interconnected process. Coakley (2021) states that the social interaction model shows that humans learn values and norms as they interact with others and participate in social worlds. In the case of the IDOLS Skate team, we can consider the skaters' and their families' foundation for participation through their physical and psychological abilities, resources, influences from others, and availability to opportunities to play sports that are personally satisfying (Coakley, 2021). Coakley (2021) shows that parents define sport participation as important for young people and willingly dedicate considerable family time, money, and energy to support their children as they play sports. It is clear that after attending the skating practice, the parents of these skaters are deeply invested in their sport participation and trust Gibenny. It would be interesting to note whether any of these parents had these opportunities available to them growing up. Most of the parents placed their daughters into this program not because skating is highly televised and covered in the media but because their daughters would be able to do something most young women do not while also exploring their identities as first-generation immigrant children.

Organized Youth Sport Programs

There are three models of organized youth sport programs: skills and excellence, physical literacy and lifelong participation, and growth and development (Coakley, 2021). The skills and excellence model focus on the performance ethic, which essentially emphasizes that people are evaluated based on their progress in developing skills in a sport, participating in high levels of

competition, and leading with success and winning. White Gibenny wants her team to rise up to a more competitive level, she does not necessarily create a highly competitive atmosphere that focuses solely on winning. The physical literacy and lifelong participation model focused on increasing the amount of informal games that provide children with pleasure, friendship, and a sense of control as they engaged in physical activities (Coakley, 2021). In these cases, children learn that cooperation is the foundation for the existence of competitive games and sports. The primary focus is that the process of talent development begins with childhood exploration, play, self-expressions, and experiences across multiple activities (Coakley, 2021). Gibenny focuses on allowing her skaters to have fun and to try new things. She constantly jokes around with them during practices and also challenges them to participate in fitness competitions outside of skating in their studio. Lastly, the growth and development model creates programs that use sport to intervene in the lives of children and adolescents who are coping with poverty and personal trauma and a range of medical, psychological, and social problems. While Gibenny and IDOLS Skate set a reasonable price of membership at $85 per month, their specific program does not focus on the growth and development model.

Social Class

Coakley (2021) explains that active sport participation, attendance at events, and consuming media sports are positively connected to a person's income, education, and occupational status. Certain sports require expensive facilities, equipment, and clothing. When I think about the IDOLS Skate team, I think about what their parents may do for a living to support their children throughout the seasons. While inline skates can cost less than $100, there are not many programs like Gibenny's nor are there places to train. It is not common to see inline skating offered at most well-known high schools or college universities. Parents typically place

their children into sports that can lead to potential future scholarships into college such as basketball, soccer, hockey, football, baseball, swimming, and tennis. Considering the lack of competitive inline skating teams in schools and universities, parents of the skaters at IDOL Skate are choosing to dedicate their time and money towards having their children learn new skills that they enjoy, rather than pressuring them to do the sport to get into future schools.

Incorporating General Ethical Standard #3: Human Differences

Practicing ethically is important when working as a sport and performance consultant. Diversity can be understood as the visible and invisible characteristics that make us different. Doherty and Chelladurai (1999) found that diversity in team sports fosters a sense of unity and mutual respect among team members. Athletes can learn to appreciate and celebrate differences rather than letting them create barriers. While my experience with consulting is very limited, I can empathize with future clients because of my own personal experiences being raised by immigrant parents in a diverse city. Aside from racial, ethnic, and nationality differences, I can also understand gender and sexual orientation differences being that I am surrounded by a majority of cis White males in the fire service and also identify as a lesbian woman.

While I can speak about being exposed to people with many different backgrounds, I do not necessarily believe that growing up in a diverse city automatically makes someone more tolerant towards different cultures. Landy (2008) found that stereotypes may lead to unfair personnel decisions and that these most often involve demographic characteristics such as gender, race, or age. While I know what it is like to be treated differently for being a Filipino cisgender lesbian woman in the United States, I can also recognize that I carry my own personal biases and experiences into the work that I do. If I am working with a client who identifies as

Colombian, it may not be appropriate to share that I am familiar with some customs because that person may not follow the same cultural customs.

I would say that while my own upbringing does allow me to think deeply and be more curious about others and learn about others through their own experiences, I do also still face the potential to discriminate through stereotyping, which is recognized in both the scientific and the non-scientific domains (Landy, 2008). The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP; 2024) General Ethical Standard Code 3. Human Differences states the need for members to recognize that differences can significantly affect their work and that they must develop skills to be competent with these populations or make appropriate referrals. Areas of opportunity for me would also include working with clients with disabilities. I strive to treat each client with the same respect and sense of curiosity to learn from each person's individual experience.

Reflection and Conclusion

Learning about Gibenny and the IDOLS Skate team proved to be very rewarding. While I often felt like an outsider and felt uncomfortable or insecure about my lack of Spanish proficiency, Gibenny and her team always welcomed me. I was inspired to practice more Spanish and watch a lot of videos on inline skating, while Gibenny was also inspired to practice more English as well as learn more about mental performance skills and sport psychology consulting. We often communicated through the use of Google Translate, which I found to be very helpful and more accurate once translated compared to other translation programs. I was challenged to dig deeper, and I found it really reaffirming to learn more about Rollerblades, which is something I had the privilege of owning when I was a child. This project has also opened up my eyes to what my parents experienced and the challenges they faced financially and time-wise to support my sisters and me in sports participation.

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