

SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOODS:
FROM OUTCOMES TO EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This research aims to add to the limited but growing body of literature on the potential impacts of Sport for Development (SfD) and livelihood programming. Previous research has predominantly focused on prescribed outcomes and reinforcing neoliberal capitalist ideologies of such programming (Zipp et al, 2019). The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the use of sport for livelihood programming in supporting the needs of youth facing barriers at one SfD facility, MLSE LaunchPad. This research is guided by two key objectives: (a) How do participants (current and past) describe and interpret their experiences within a Sport and Livelihood program? (b) How are contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture shaped through this programming? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants of the MLSE LaunchPad Fellowship Program. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 25; with four self-identified men and three women, six identified as BIPOC, while one individual identified as white. Thematic analysis was an accessible and flexible way to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, perspectives, behaviours, and practices. Four aggregate themes emerged from the data: (a) program experience, (b) MLSE LaunchPad community, (c) workplace culture and infrastructure and (d) livelihoods, with a further subset of twelve themes also identified providing a deeper level of nuance. Analysis suggests that programming within the field of SfD and Livelihoods may (re)produce structural barriers participants face by providing precarious working conditions that do not meet the cost-of-living challenges faced by youth. Future research is needed to explore programming from an interdisciplinary, if not transdisciplinary (Whitley et al, 2022), perspective. As such, there is a need to understand the variety of forces - economic, political, cultural, psychological - that (re)shape SfD and livelihoods.

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Table 1. List of Acronyms

CA	Capabilities Approach
PYD	Positive Youth Development
SfD	Sport for Development
MLSE	Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment
LP (used in conjunction with MLSE)	LaunchPad
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, Person of Colour
EDI	Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Chapter 1 – Introduction

It is widely accepted that we are currently (i.e., in 2023) living in a time of global crises, that is marked by financial collapses and extended recessions, rising economic insecurity and inequality, escalating ecological imbalances, and uncontrollable mutations in economic and political relations at both the local and the global level. There is a need for greater historical depth in our scholarship to better understand better the genesis of contemporary events and to differentiate more confidently between those events that portend radical changes and those that reflect mere adaptation.

In Canada, for those under the age of 25, the rate of unemployment has been consistently double that of adults since 1976 (Statistics Canada, 2016). In 2022, Ontario figures demonstrate that the unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 is 10.4 percent (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2022). Given the currently high rates of youth unemployment, there is a need to address the challenges that youth are facing. Premiers, policymakers, community organizations, organized labour, and non-governmental organizations have devoted a significant amount of attention to address this challenge.

Historically, the focus on youth unemployment aims to distract attention away from the wider unemployment problems, allowing politicians to blame the seemingly natural barrier of inexperience and age, rather than other oppressions (Côté, 2014; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). In Ontario, youth have been recognised to be a threat to social order since the 1930's when large numbers of young men were without work and began to protest (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). Côté and Allahar (2006) explain that the social control approach views youth as a group which needs to be guided by the dominant group in this case, political elites. As such, the term “youth” is socially constructed, meaning that historical and social context influence how the population

of youth are described. Those who are able to define how someone becomes a “youth” is constructed by political and economic elites who do so for their own advantage (Côté, 2014; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015). An example of this construction is the extension of the chronological ages included in the youth category or definition. Prior to the late 1990s, the Canadian government defined “youth” as individuals aged 15 to 24 (Côté & Allahar, 2006). However, “youth” now includes those up to the age of 29 (Côté & Allahar, 2006). This has taken shape as young people have stayed in education after high school, due to the disappearance of good jobs which require only a high school diploma (Marquardt, 1998; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015).

One of the most noticeable trends within labour policy in Ontario has been the move from designing youth policy as an explicit form of “social control” toward implementing a seemingly more positive or progressive youth development model (Bancroft, 2017). In March 2020, a new advisory group was established during the COVID-19 pandemic by the Government of Ontario (i.e., the Premier’s Council on Equality and Opportunity), to provide advice on how young individuals can overcome social and economic barriers and achieve success (Office of the Premier, 2020). Shortly after, a Sport for Development (SfD) and livelihood program was funded by the Ontario Government to support unemployed and youth facing barriers to enter the labour market. SfD is considered to be the practice of using sport as a vehicle to achieve non-sport development goals.

The use of sport programming to support the livelihoods of disadvantaged people through career and economic development has been referred to as SfD and livelihood programming. It is important to understand the influence these programs have on youth that are facing barriers and are unemployed as well as the context in which youth unemployment is produced, namely the

capitalist labour market. Recent research highlights that the study of livelihoods is one of the least studied areas within the field of SfD (McSweeney et al., 2020; Svensson & Woods, 2017). The research that has been undertaken thus far, has focused primarily on prescribed outcomes, which often obscure underlying inequalities (e.g., gender, race, class) and reinforce neoliberal capitalist ideologies (Zipp et al., 2019). Thus, there is a need to explore SfD and livelihood programs from an inter-disciplinary approach and not in isolation (Spaaij, 2013).

Research Questions

This project aims to address some of the shortcomings in the research outlined above. Specifically, this work focuses on better understanding how SfD and livelihood initiatives are experienced by youth themselves, rather than restricting the focus of research in this area to program outcomes (Zipp et al., 2019). Specifically, this qualitative study will explore the utility of SfD and Livelihood programming for youth facing barriers at Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment LaunchPad in Moss Park, Toronto, Canada, guided by the following research questions:

- 1. How do participants (current and past) describe and interpret their experiences within a Sport and Livelihood program?*
- 2. How are contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture shaped through this programming?*

Rationale

Theoretically, this study enriches our understanding of the perspectives of youth, with consideration being given to class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture. Practically speaking, findings of this study have the potential to advance understandings of how SfD and livelihood approaches are experienced by participants. This study can also provide insights

specifically for MLSE LaunchPad's SfD and livelihood programming to further understand the perspectives of youth facing barriers and how to better support them. Additionally, the study may offer deeper insights into the benefits, limitations or opportunities for SfD Livelihood approaches in addressing broader systems of oppression amongst populations facing barriers in an urban metropolis in the global North.

Svensson and Woods (2017) highlight that livelihood programming makes up a large portion of the SfD sector. In turn, it may be a useful space to challenge forms of oppression while developing new alternatives to traditional programming. At the same time, we know there has been very limited research conducted regarding how these programs operate within wider systems and structures. This is a glaring gap in our understanding that holds deep implications for policy, practice and for the 'targeted beneficiaries' (youth) themselves. Therefore, understanding the ways in which youth facing barriers experience SfD and livelihood programming is a key component of my research focus within this project.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my research, and situated this project within current practices and policies. I discussed the prevalence of SfD and livelihoods research and outlined the need to explore programming from an interdisciplinary perspective. Additionally, I listed the research questions guiding this project, as well as their justifications. I outlined the rationale for conducting this study, especially as this study fills the gap in literature surrounding the experiences of participants in SfD and livelihood programming.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this section, I begin by outlining key literature with respect to Positive Youth Development (PYD) and sport. Then, I explore how a PYD approach within sport programming

can serve as a context to develop positive outcomes among youth. Following this I explore recent literature within the field of SfD. I then take a deeper look specifically into SfD and Livelihoods.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) & Sport

In recent years, the benefits of sport participation with frameworks of PYD have been explored (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). According to Bean et al. (2018), sport is an optimal place for learning and development to occur. Participating in intentionally planned sport programs can nurture the skills, qualities, and attributes necessary for youth to become productive and contributing members of society (Camiré et al., 2012). There are several sport-specific PYD frameworks that support the understanding of developmental outcomes associated with participating in sport (Côté et al., 2014; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2017). Recent research from Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) argued that organized sport can facilitate positive outcomes if organizations and programs aim to maximize positive opportunities and experiences for youth. Further, Holt and colleagues (Holt, 2012; Holt et al., 2017) posited that sport provides opportunities for young athletes to experience an environment that can lead to desired psychosocial outcomes and life skills. Within this emerging field, PYD outcomes include ‘life skills’, described as skills that can be developed in sport settings and transferred to non-sport (life) settings (Pierce et al., 2018). Previous research has correlated the participation of youth in extracurricular activities in community organizations such as sport with PYD outcomes (i.e., including life skills such as personal and interpersonal skills, communication skills, teamwork, and resilience) (Dworkin et al., 2003; Larson, 2000). These skills are often considered important for individuals to be able to successfully navigate employment.

PYD aims to move towards promoting specific outcomes among youth - qualities which society values and believes that youth require to be successful (Damon, 2004). This approach

aims to build a set of skills that can foster youths' positive developmental outcomes, to enable them to lead healthy and productive lives (Holt & Neely, 2011). A commonly embraced framework of PYD outlines 5Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. According to Lerner et al. (2005), adolescents manifesting the 5Cs are more likely to have positive developmental trajectories and demonstrate fewer negative behaviours. Research has shown that fostering the 5Cs can lead to optimal youth development through an asset building approach (Lerner et al., 2005). These are again skills and attributes that have often been considered important to navigating and securing employment opportunities. Over the past few decades, programs that aim to foster PYD using sport as a vehicle have seen significant growth (Hellison, 2011; Weiss et al., 2016, Warner et al, 2020).

Sport for Development (SfD) and Livelihoods

Historically, SfD was viewed favourably for its ability to “hook” individuals who are interested in sport - and use that passion around sport as a vehicle to achieve non-sport development goals (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). SfD has been defined as

the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution (Lyras & Peachey, 2011, p. 311).

SfD programs, most often run by non-governmental organizations, have been implemented in regions enduring political, social and economic crises that have a great impact on youth (Collison et al., 2017). SfD programs are programs designed to pursue development-related goals using sport as the tool or vehicle to do so; these are sometimes referred to as “plus sport” programs. These differ from “sport plus” programs, which have a more central focus on

sport participation, and assume sport will itself lead to development outcomes (Coakley, 2011). Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) Launch Pad (LP) views sport and physical activity as powerful tools to teach employment skills and uses “plus sport” programs to focus on individual development with a secondary focus on community development (Warner et al., 2020).

Livelihoods can be defined as the way in which an individual earns a living to support their basic human needs (De Vriese, 2006). Financial independence is considered a key condition to what is described when exploring livelihoods, along with improving living conditions and providing social benefit (Coalter, 2010; Portes, 2000). The United Nations (2020a) emphasizes livelihoods directly in relation to three of its Sustainable Development Goals: no poverty (goal #1), decent work and economic growth (goal #8), and reduced inequalities (goal #10). SfD is recognized as being well-positioned to contribute to the achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #1 “no poverty” through individual and community impacts. In addition, it could be argued that professional sport organizations, through their support of local and regional social justice efforts, as well as their corporate philanthropic efforts, have turned towards poverty reduction strategies. As such, SfD is considered to be well positioned to contribute to the United Nations’ first sustainable development goal through individual and community impacts created by accessible and equitable programming, employment, and other intentionally designed and delivered opportunities for youth (Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Svensson & Woods, 2017).

Sport and livelihoods can refer to a number of different employment or financial opportunities that exist within the sporting context (McSweeney et al, 2020). They explain that on a basic level, sport and livelihoods can be described as making a living through sport. This

could be when athletes receive professional contracts or sponsorships, coaching, administration or even as a physiotherapist. Indirectly, participating in sport can lead to opportunities such as improved access to education, which may make individuals better able to compete in the labour market (Dudfield, 2019), while directly vocational programs alongside SfD programming is designed to provide youth and emerging adults with job skills training and increased access to employment opportunities (Moustakis et al, 2022, Spaaij et al., 2016, Warner et al 2020,).

According to Svenson and Wood (2017), SfD programming aiming “to improve livelihoods of disadvantaged people through career and economic development” (p. 39) is the second most common thematic area for SfD programming. They analyzed the approaches of 955 SfD organizations and found that 16.9 percent (N=160) of organizations were focused on livelihoods. Despite this, there has been limited research examining the relationships between livelihoods, poverty, and sport. Various organizations around the world utilize sport for the purposes of alleviating poverty (McSweeney & Hayhurst, 2020; Schulenkorf, 2017). Further, in the limited research conducted in the field, the primary focus of this work has been on employability of program participants as an outcome, which is often informed by and works within the confines of neoliberal capitalism (Coalter et al, 2020; McSweeney et al, 2020, Spaaij et al., 2013; Theeboom et al., 2020). Thus, there is a need to explore SfD and livelihood programs from an inter-disciplinary approach and not in isolation (Spaaij, 2013). Livelihoods remain a pressing and important research domain for academics, development agencies, policymakers, practitioners, and those targeted by development programs.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided a summary of the literature as it pertains to this research project. Specifically, I reviewed the literature on sport-based programs that incorporate a PYD

approach to their programming. I outlined how this approach has been recognized as an effective way to promote positive development outcomes for youth (Bean et al., 2018; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). I then explored the current relevant literature within the field of SfD. I discussed how a significant amount of SfD programs' primary target is the support of livelihoods (Svensson & Wood, 2017), but that sport and livelihoods is recognized as an understudied area within the literature (McSweeney et al., 2020). Further, Sport and Livelihood programming and related research has historically focused on outcomes and there has been a lack of research on experiences of participants, especially youth. Given the call to explore SfD and livelihood programming from an interdisciplinary perspective, one that ensures an exploration of class, gender, race, and importantly the neoliberal and capitalist narratives of the 21st century, I aim to ground myself in theoretical frameworks that allow for this exploration.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, I outline two theoretical frameworks that guided this project to answer the research questions listed above; these are Marxism and Capabilities Approach. I discuss the rationale and tensions associated with the proposed framework.

Marxism

Marxism can be understood as a method of socio-economic analysis that uses a materialist interpretation of historical development, to understand class relations and social conflict, as well as a dialectical perspective to view social transformation (Wolff & Reznik, 1987). According to Vidal et al. (2015), Marxism offers insights into both the broad sweep of human history and the dynamics of capitalist development. A Marxist understanding of social structures demonstrates that the state plays a pivotal role in advancing capitalism and neoliberalism through its monopoly of violence (e.g., security, police, and military), and also

through institutionalized forms of control such as the legal system (Vidal et al., 2015). Vidal and colleagues further describe how the state serves the interest of the capitalist (owning) class, where they are able to influence state policy with economic power.

Capitalism can be broadly defined as “an economic and social system based upon the ownership or control of key productive resources (such as factories, patents, and tools) by a relatively small number of people who profit from the labour of the majority” (Sears & Cairns 2015, p. 204). Individuals can then be organized into two classes defined as the owning class and the working class. The owning class is able to profit from their private ownership of productive resources as well as the surplus value extracted from workers, while the working class have little choice but to sell their labour-power (Stanford, 2008).

The labour theory of value is one of the core ideas of Marxism. The first sentence of *Capital* Vol. 1, Marx (1992, as cited in 1887) states that wealth presents itself as an accumulation of commodities and one must begin with the analysis of a commodity. The commodity is described to be in conflict or contradiction between the use value (i.e., satisfying a need), and the exchange value (i.e., the ability for it to be sold). How exchange value is determined is regarded as the labour theory of value, which is determined by the socially necessary labour time associated with the creation of the service or product. Within the capitalist system, as technological innovation enabled more efficient production, the labour time required decreased, thus reducing the value of output relative to the value of the capital invested, and thus overtime, the rate of profit would decline. Given the constant pressure to increase profits and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall within the capitalist system, there is pressure to reduce the costs of direct-labour costs (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887), as such providing poorer working conditions.

Primarily, the vast majority of workers do not have access to the means of production, and most cannot live self-sufficiently outside of the capitalist labour market other than by working for a wage (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887). Marx suggests that their labour-power then appears on the labor market as if it were a commodity. The cost of commodity in today's market is recognized by the state through the minimum wage. Secondly, the workers' lack of alternative survival strategies that capitalists count on to keep their profits coming in and thus inequality is embedded in the maintenance of a "healthy" capitalist economy (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887). The threat of being replaced by another worker, who is currently unemployed or underemployed keeps many employed workers from demanding an increase in wages or other costly workplace improvements from occurring (Jonna & Foster, 2016; Means 2017).

In order to maintain the system's reproduction, there needs to be a group of individuals who are unemployed. That is, unemployment is not something that simply appears out of nowhere (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887). Rather, the capitalist economy produces unemployment as a mechanism to perpetuate employers' advantaged position vis a vis workers (Jonna & Foster, 2016). The existence of a "reserve army of labour" concept coined by Karl Marx (1992, as cited in 1887) to identify a population that is unemployed but ready to work whenever their labour is required - permits capitalists to keep wages low, and to spend as little as possible on creating or maintaining decent working conditions. In today's global neoliberal capitalist society, a reserve army of labour is omnipresent in the field of sports management, a field that tends to offer – and benefit from - low paying jobs, poor working conditions, and exploitative internship opportunities, all with allure of working in sports industry (Hawzen et al., 2018; Wiest & King-White, 2013).

A Marxist perspective allows me to explore the exploitation of labour to meet capitalist development goals which are grounded in racial domination and inequality (Gilmore, 2007). Marxism also provides a framework to explore broad sweeps of human history with a specific focus to the material conditions and economic activities required to meet material needs individuals.

Capabilities Approach (CA)

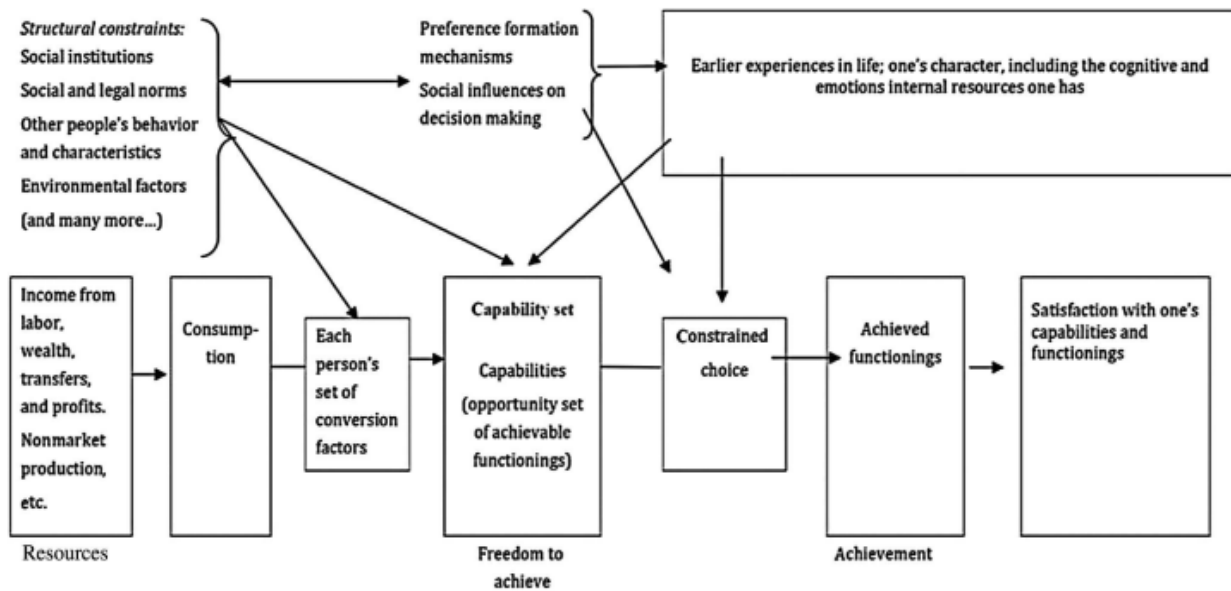
The CA was pioneered by economist-philosopher Amartya Sen (1992, 1999), and then extended upon by Nussbaum (2001, 2003, 2011) and Robeyns (2003, 2005, 2006, 2017). Sen (1997) identified the roots of this approach go back to at least Marx, while Nussbaum's (2006) ten central capabilities can be traced back to Marx's conceptions of truly human functioning. While Marx is mentioned briefly in discussions around CA, his thinking remains on the margins (Leopold, 2020). The CA states that freedom to achieve well-being is a matter of what people are able to do and to be, and thus the kind of life they are effectively able to lead (Robeyns & Morten 2021). This broad normative framework can be used for evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social change in society (Robeyns, 2005). Utilizing CA as a framework in this research allows the work to move past the predominantly outcomes-based approaches that have been utilized in the past when examining Sport for Development and livelihood programming.

According to Sen (1999), capabilities can be defined as the real opportunities that a person has. He states the programmatic commitment to supporting capabilities requires both the elimination of coercion or interference (negative freedom) and the promotion of real opportunities (positive freedom). The notion of capability reflects Sen's normative position that a person's well-being should be assessed in terms of the extent of the freedom they have in leading

their life (Sen, 1992, 1999). Capabilities in the context of development pushes for greater equality of people’s actual opportunities to achieve. This is possible by not only removing interference, but also by enhancing people’s abilities to convert resources into attainments or successes. The different combinations of functioning that one has the freedom to choose from, are considered a person’s capabilities. Thus, “a functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve” (Sen, 1987, p. 36).

Capabilities are generated as people engage with resources, using them in a way that is inhibited by various conversion factors (personal, social, and environmental). The framework is explained in the figure below, in moving from left to right through the description of key concepts.

Figure 1 - Capability Approach (Robeyns, 2017)



Ingrid Robeyns (2017) utilizes the case of riding a bicycle to demonstrate the concepts of capabilities and conversion factors. For a person to be able to achieve the mobility and excitement generated through riding a bicycles, various resources and conversion factors are

needed to support the capability. Obviously, access to a physical bicycle is necessary along with an instructor to support them to learn how to ride. These resources are interdependent on a range of conversion factors. For example, access to an instructor may not be something that the individual is able to afford or locate. In turn, these issues directly impact their physical ability to ride (personal). Second, family or their community must not restrict their ability to ride and potentially even actively support their decision to ride by serving as a role model or mentor (social). Finally, they must live in an environment where riding is safe and accessible such as bike paths or roadway (environmental). These factors are interdependent to each other, as they combine to mitigate or promote the real opportunity to ride a bicycle.

CA encourages a better understanding of how development initiatives are individually experienced, rather than restricting the focus of development (and development research) merely to prescribed outcomes. Indeed, focusing exclusively on outcomes alone potentially obscures underlying inequalities (e.g., gender, race, class), reinforces neoliberal ideologies, and overlooks restraints on people (Robeyns, 2005). Applying the CA to SfD and livelihoods research provides an opportunity to explore the (un)intended outcomes of programs, making space to focus on processes and possibilities over outcomes and outputs (Darnell & Dao, 2017).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical frameworks (Marxism and CA) that guided this project to answer the research questions, as well as to provide a rationale for putting these frameworks in conversation with one another. Theoretically, I drew from Marxism to explore the history of neoliberal capitalism, the labour theory of value, as well as the impact of a reserve army of labour and how these concepts influence working conditions. The CA allows for an analysis of the programming beyond outcomes. Drawing upon CA, I am able to explore the

opportunities that are created for individuals, while critically exploring the various conversion factors that influence an individual's choices.

Chapter 4 – Methodology and Methods

In this section, I outline the research design including my epistemological approach. I also include background information and context of the partner organization MLSE LaunchPad (LP). I describe and provide justification for the data collection tools and methods used for this project – namely semi-structured interviews. I follow with my approach to reflexivity. I end this chapter with details about the data analysis process.

Philosophical Position and Research Design

A social constructivist epistemology was used to guide this project. Constructionists explain that all knowledge is “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted with an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Alternatively, meanings are socially constructed through these interactions “and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 52).

Prior to commencing data collection, I held consultations with LP's Manager of Research and Evaluation, Jackie Robinson and MLSE Foundation's Social Impact Research Lead, Bryan Heal. I had a desire to explore and develop a relationship with LP to develop a research project that was inspired by principles of participatory action research. Participatory research attempts to make research more inclusive by fostering partnerships between communities and academics, and emphasizing the participation, influence, and control of non-academic communities in the process of knowledge production (Flicker et al., 2007). Multiple meetings and discussions were held with staff at LP to gain deeper understanding of their *Ready for Work* programming. There

was a desire to build an understanding with LP and work collaboratively with stakeholders to support future knowledge mobilization efforts. It is my intent for the research to be of benefit to all of the individuals involved in the process, including research participants and the organization. I received approval from York's Research Ethics Board for this project entitled Sport and Livelihoods: From Outcomes to Experiences (ethics certificate # 2022-427). In the next section, I provide background and context to LP and describe the recruitment and inclusion criteria.

Research Context: Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE) LaunchPad (LP)

LP is a Sport for Development facility located in Moss Park – a neighbourhood which has been framed as “in crisis” for generations (St. Louis-McBurnie et al., 2021). It is a small and diverse neighbourhood in the City of Toronto where approximately 50% of the neighbourhood population is born outside of Canada and 60% are racialized individuals (City of Toronto, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c as cited in Warner et al., 2020). Disproportionate numbers of youth from low-income families and racialized neighbourhoods such as Moss Park have few work opportunities beyond low-wage, precarious employment (Briggs, 2018).

LP is supported by the MLSE Foundation, which is the corporate philanthropic arm of the parent organization, MLSE, and owns multiple professional sports franchises in Toronto. In an effort to support youth facing barriers, LP has undertaken a collaborative partnership approach to poverty elimination (Warner et al., 2020). The facility focuses on achieving sustainable, wide-ranging social outcomes for youth facing barriers in downtown Toronto, Ontario, Canada (MLSE LP, n.d). LP defines youth facing barriers as “youth who need additional support and services to reach their full potential” (Warner et al., 2019 p. 4). Programs

at LP are grounded in PYD and support four related pillars: *Healthy Body, Healthy Mind, Ready for School* and *Ready for Work*.

LP's *Ready for Work* programs prepare youth who face multiple barriers for successful entry or re-entry into the workforce, through a PYD approach (Warner, 2022). The programs aim to provide secure sustainable employment in growing industries, with the goal of increasing personal income to move youth above the poverty line, and achieve food and housing security (Warner, 2022). In 2020, LP embarked on a collaborative strategy to help facilitate employment among youth facing barriers which consisted of three different *Ready for Work* programs: (a) *Digital Customer Care Professional* supported by N-Power, (b) *Cooking for Life* supported by Covenant House, and (c) *Leaders-In-Training* led by LP (Warner et al, 2020). Upon engaging LP in the research project in the spring of 2022, I was made aware that the Digital Customer Care Professional and the Cooking for Life programs were no longer offered by the organization. Both of these programs provided a direct pathway to employment, but no reason was provided as to why these programs were no longer being offered. I was nonetheless informed that a new *Fellowship Program* had been launched in October 2021. After consultation with relevant stakeholders, it was agreed that the Fellowship Program aligned with my research interests.

Participants: Ready to Work Fellowship Program

All participants in this study were currently or previously enrolled in the MLSE LP Fellowship Program. The program is a 12-week, 30 hours per week internship where participants are compensated via an honorarium of \$6,000. Individuals have the opportunity to join one of the eight LP staff teams: (a) Sport and Physical Activity Programming, (b) Community Partnerships, (c) Community Investment and Granting, (d) Youth and Community Engagement, (e) Administrative and Member Services, (f) Research Evaluation and Data Analysis, (g)

Communication and Digital Signage, and (h) Fundraising and Sponsorship. Once they are paired with a team member, they work to learn skills in their specific focus area while also having the opportunity to interact with other parts of the business and complete assigned tasks.

Recruitment for participation in the study occurred through email, with the assistance of MLSE LP's Coordinator of Partnerships and Programs, Diana Franco. Specifically, Ms. Franco shared a recruitment script (Appendix A) and informed consent form (Appendix D) with all 10 individuals who were currently or had previously been enrolled in the Fellowship program. Eight individuals responded to Ms. Franco's recruitment email agreeing to participate in the research project. Once individuals agreed to participate, their contact information was provided to me by Ms. Franco to follow up and arrange an interview. One individual did not respond to communication from me in trying to organize and interview, leaving a final of seven (N=7) participants engaging in this research project. Of the seven participants, six were program graduates and had completed the program sometime between October 2021 and January 2023. One was enrolled in the program at the time of data collection. Following ethics protocols, participants names were anonymized; one participant selected to use their given name, two provided a preferred pseudonym and the remaining four requested that I create a pseudonym for them. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 25; with four self-identified men and three women, six identified as BIPOC, while one individual identified as white.

Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, the most widely used qualitative method to help researchers understand how social phenomena are constructed through the everyday lives of people (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Interviews were chosen to meet the desired goal of gaining a more descriptive understanding of program

participants' experiences and involvement in the program. It was my desire to let participants decide on what they wanted to share, and leave space for refusal and consent. Participants were able to opt out of the interview at any point. Further, I was cognizant that as a researcher, I should be mindful to avoid sharing any information that might be protected by the community (i.e., to avoid misrepresenting the community).

Interviews were completed in person at LP, except for one interview that was conducted virtually via Zoom. This individual was not employed by the organization at the time of the interview, and they requested to conduct the interview virtually for reasons related to accessibility (i.e., they stated that they were not planning to visit the facility in the near future and were travelling). Semi-structured interviews provided an organized interview guide that was created to help address the research objectives while also giving participants the opportunity to steer the conversation in the directions that they saw fit, in order to provide new insights and meanings (Galletta, 2013). The interview guide for this project included open ended questions to explore participants' experiences in the *Ready for Work* Fellowship Program, with an additional focus on their identity, heritage, and community. A final series of questions focused on topics related to their future goals and challenges, and perspectives on social change. The interview guide is included in Appendix B. While I followed an interview guide, semi-structured interviewing allowed me to ask participants further probing questions based on their responses.

Data Analysis

Interviews were held with the 7 participants between January 19th and March 7th, 2023. I transcribed interviews on a rolling basis as they were completed using Otter.AI, an online software that transcribes audio files into text. There was a need to manually edit the Otter.AI transcripts by listening to the interview recordings and typing edits directly into the downloaded

transcripts. Interviews were transcribed by mid-March 2023. I then emailed transcripts to each respective participant and invited them to review the content of the transcript and respond by late March if they had any questions or comments. Only two of the participants responded affirming they had no questions or concerns. During March and April 2023, I used NVivo 2022, a qualitative data analysis software, to assist in the data management and organization process; all transcripts were entered into the software.

When coding, I turned to my theoretical frameworks as well as my research questions to interpret the data. I drew upon a Marxist theoretical understanding (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887) as well as CA (Robeyns, 2017) to allow for a better understanding of how this SfD initiative was experienced by interviewees. Data was then analyzed using “thematic analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2019). Using thematic analysis was an accessible and flexible way for me to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants’ lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices (Clarke & Braun, 2006). The first step entailed familiarization with the data, which included the reading and re-reading the interview transcripts to become familiar with the texts. Secondly, data was organized in a systematic way through coding. Codes are a basic element of raw data that can be processed in a meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, codes were used to identify features of the data that were of interest. Data was organized categorically and reviewed repeatedly, and coded. Each segment of relevant data or text that captured a significant aspect of the research question was given a code (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). For example, a participant spoke about how they felt they were their own manager during the fellowship as they had to organize meetings for themselves. This data point was coded to the theme of influence of program structure.

Third, themes were identified by integrating components of ideas or experiences (Nowell et al., 2017). Specifically, at this stage in the data analysis, codes were grouped into three aggregate themes, that overlapped with the CA's three conversion factors: personal, social and environmental. The personal conversion factor was related to the aggregate theme of *skill and career development*, which contained three sub-themes, formed from codes related to full-time employment, corporate skills and livelihoods. Second, the social conversion factor was related to *program structure*, containing seven sub-themes which included duration, support, safe space, connections, individualized programming, community, and prestige. The third conversation factor of environmental was related to the aggregate theme of *social structures*, which contained five sub-themes; employment barriers for youth, codeswitching, whiteness and race in the workplace, financial challenges and equity diversity and inclusion.

In the fourth stage, coded data excerpts for each theme were reviewed with my academic supervisor, who served as a critical friend (Schuck & Russell, 2005), to consider whether excerpts formed a coherent pattern (Nowell et al., 2017). Various factors were considered, such as: (a) Do the themes tell a compelling story of the data? (b) What is the relationship between the themes? and, (c) How are the codes interconnected? During this process, we determined that there were some overlapping ideas and themes that did not necessarily align with the aggregate themes. In this further review we identified codes and data that were structured around distinct topics, which eventually resulted in near final themes. In particular, the third aggregate theme of social structures was subdivided, creating an additional aggregate theme; all three/four aggregate themes were renamed and reordered, with some subthemes also being somewhat revised.

In the fifth step, themes were defined in order to “identify the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92). Theme names were ‘tweaked’ and finalized based on the

purpose of the research and compelling data quotations that captured the central aspect of the theme. Finally, the sixth step involved the final analysis and write-up of the report by incorporating the analytic narrative and data extracted in relation to existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher using a constructionist paradigm, it is necessary to examine the impact of the researcher and participants on each other and explore the dynamics of the researcher to researched relationship, which fundamentally influences the results (Finlay, 2002). “[R]esearchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 52), and practicing reflexivity can help explore and make transparent the biases researchers carry into their work. In the research and evaluation process of SfD, reflexivity plays a particularly critical role.

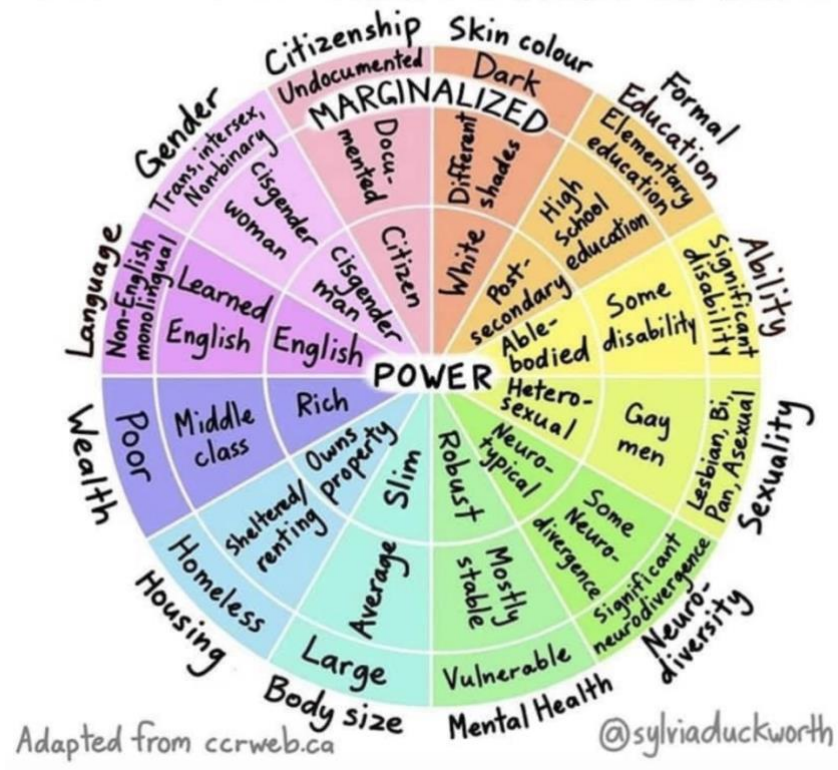
As such, I used a journal to track my reflexive field notes through data collection process and included notes about my interactions with participants (Ponic et al., 2010). I was reflexive of my own worldviews and how they may have influenced both the process and outcomes of this project. Being a researcher and someone who was coming into a space to learn about a program influenced the way participants saw me and the information they shared. In an effort to lay the foundations for a trusting relationship with the participants, I described that there are no right or wrong answers, that I was looking to learn about each individual from their perspective. I was able to rely on visual and verbal cues to reinforce this messaging throughout the interview process as required. During one interview, a participant shared that they initially perceived me as an authority figure, but as the conversation progressed, that feeling evolved, with the participant acknowledging that they were more comfortable and there was no reason to be anxious.

While engaging in research I felt that it was important to recognize the unearned privilege that I hold as an individual. I engaged in thinking critically about my own intersectionality to explore the concepts of power and privilege (Nixon, 2019). To formally explore this understanding, I utilized Duckworth's (2020) Wheel of Power and Privilege to explore my own unearned privileges and how this influences my interaction with the research questions posed, the interview process, as well as my analysis. Power and privilege can be understood to mean different things for different people. The wheel was adapted from the Canadian Council for Refugees. The wheel has 12 main categories and individuals can fall into one of three locations in each of the categories: (a) power and privilege, (b) marginalized, or (c) in-between (see Figure 2).

My positionality places me in a position of power and privilege in 10 of the 12 of the categories that are mentioned. These include, owning property, speaking English fluently, being a cisgendered man, a Canadian citizen, white, in post-secondary education, able-bodied, heterosexual, neuro-typical, and a slim body size. The two categories of mental health and wealth is where I find myself between power and marginalized. Being in my social position in each of these categories it is necessary to be being mindful of myself in relation to the participants and when I might be making judgements about the knowledge being shared with me.

Figure 2 - Wheel of Power and Privilege, Duckworth (2020)

WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



In each of my interviews, participants shared that housing was a vital part of a livelihood and a challenge youth will face in the future. Two participants specifically shared their inability to afford a home in Toronto. My unearned privilege puts me at odds with each of my participants as I currently own and live in a one-bedroom condo in downtown Toronto, mortgage free through the financial support of my extended family. This home is able to meet our current needs however, it will not be able to support our ability to have a family, something that my wife and I value. To be able to afford a larger home in Toronto, would require a significant mortgage and would drastically impact our livelihoods and quality of life.

While the use of structured categories allows for meaningful reflection positionality, there is nuance that is not necessarily captured. While I may hold a position of privilege in almost all the categories at this moment in time, it does not capture my historical positionality

that has influenced my attitudes and perceptions. I arrived in Canada as a refugee at the age of 2 escaping from a civil war in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia (today Bosnia & Hercegovina). Materially we left everything we had back home. Luckily, we were supported with housing by Jewish Immigration Aid Services for one year. My parents who spoke broken English were expected to find employment and assimilate into society. Serbo-Croatian is my native tongue and the language I use for communication with my extended family on a day-to-day basis. Growing up I was always curious about my native country of Yugoslavia, that no longer exists. This curiosity led to me explore the history of my identity, to be able to understand what circumstances forced my family to relocate across the world. This knowledge helped me understand the influence of western hegemony and the promotion of neoliberal capitalist ideologies that played a significant role in the breakup of former Yugoslavia. While I hold various positions of power, I am still personally affected by the neoliberal capitalist system, and therefore through constant reflexivity, in this project, I aimed to challenge the ways in which capitalism has socialized my own beliefs and what I deemed as important knowledge.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined my epistemology of constructionism. I then outlined the research design, including the background and context of partnering with LP. I described the participants and the recruitment process, provided justification for the data collection tools and methods used (i.e., semi-structured interviews), and shared details about the data analysis process. I concluded the chapter by describing my approach to reflexivity that I carried through my research project.

Chapter 5 - Results

Four inter-related aggregate themes comprised of thirteen sub-themes emerged from the data, ultimately contextualizing participants’ experiences within a Sport and Livelihood program, with a particular focus on how contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture were shaped through this programming. More specifically, findings offered insights into the two main research questions:

1. *How do participants (current and past) describe and interpret their experiences within a Sport and Livelihood program?*
2. *How are contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture shaped through this programming?*

Table 2 outlines the four aggregate themes identified: (a) program experiences, (b) MLSE LaunchPad community, (c) workplace culture and infrastructure and (d) livelihood. Within each aggregate theme, subthemes were also identified, providing a deeper level of nuance. Pseudonyms are used throughout the results section and certain names are redacted and replaced with gender neutral language to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Table 1. List of Data Analysis Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
Program Experience	Development of Corporate Skills Customized Learning Opportunities Influence of Program Structure
MLSE LanuchPad (LP) Community	Community of Care Prestige Connections
Workplace Culture and Infrastructure	Codeswitching Race & Whiteness Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Theme	Sub-Theme
Livelihoods	Desire for Full-Time Employment Accessing Supports for Employment Opportunities Wages and Cost of Living Challenges

Program Experience

In the first aggregate theme of *program experiences*, participants described their experiences participating in the Sport for Development and Livelihood program. Three subthemes within this theme included: (a) their development of corporate skills, (b) their customized learning opportunities, and (c) the influence of the program structure.

Development of Corporate Skills

All participants shared their desire to improve their corporate skills through the fellowship program - including their organization, time management, communication, and administrative skills. Some suggested they learned new skills, while others suggested they came into the program with professional skills, but had a chance to practice and refine them. Four participants suggested the learning and refining of these skills increased their confidence to work in a professional or business environment.

Some participants described how the fellowship provided them with an opportunity to develop new skills, as they were tasked with developing goals for themselves at the start of the program. For example, Kevin stated that they were tasked to come up with a key performance indicators chart during the first week and that it was something that they had never heard of before. In the chart, they outlined the goals of improving their time management skills as well as their confidence. Another participant, Rose described her desire to develop her professional skills in order to work in a business setting in the future:

I remember also writing down that I wanted to gain a lot more like professional, corporate skills, because I do see myself in the future working in a business setting, similar to up here... Professional communication for sure [is a goal] so how to write and send out professional emails, or there is presentation skills as well, because I had to speak a lot during meetings to present my research study. So just learning how to speak in front of a group of people.

Participants shared several examples of how they felt they improved their professional skills for a corporate setting. For example, Amy explained:

So definitely some skills I took in like for example, being in a corporate setting, for example, how to communicate, how to like set up like just simple things like Outlook is definitely something I learned in my fellowship.

Other participants outlined the value of the administrative responsibilities that they were tasked with. Austin describes, "I feel like mostly just a supporter. I'm helping different aspects of the programming or outreach or ordering things." Similarly, Kevin shared, "A lot of it was like admin work and you know, sending out emails and confirming schedules with people to make sure that they could make our events."

Rose shared her experience of how she felt more confidence in being able to navigate a professional setting:

[I] just feel like, there's not one specific skill [I learned]. I feel like it's just everything that I've learned and earned through the program as a whole. Because it's made me be more confident in my professional life, so I feel more confident applying for other positions, or just being in more professional settings.

Similarly, Kevin described how - from a skill development perspective - he felt he had all the tools that he needed to succeed, but had a chance to challenge himself to use these skills in a real-work setting:

I already knew all the things. I just wanted to see if I could do it. ... I want to try I want to take on this challenge. Right? And I want to learn from it. I remember Diana always asked me like, "Okay, what else do you need? What do you want to get better at?" Like, I feel like I'm pretty good at all these things like, I don't mean to toot my own horn, but I feel like I got this.

Similarly, Josh shared how he felt he already had the certain skills that the program was hoping to develop, but it gave him an opportunity to cultivate those skills and grow in a more professional sense.

In the fellowship I was able to cultivate those skills – presentation skills, being able to talk in a team, being able to present in a team, being able to like organize myself better. ... But also, I feel like I've had those skills, and I'm just cultivating it. It didn't really feel like I learned something new. More like it sort of grew me in a professional sense... That's the new thing, but everything else, like presentation skills, communicating wasn't better enhanced, because I did the fellowship.

Customized Learning Opportunities

Several participants outlined how a key strength of the program was its individualized tone, with the organization and staff working to support fellowship participants as individuals. Austin describes how it felt great to be able to share an interest and then have the opportunity to engage in that work:

Some of the strengths is that I think it's very tailored. You know, you come in here, and they try to find something that you can do that you enjoy, that also helps benefit your professional career. That was kind of hard for me to see at first because, you know, a lot of places in jobs say like, "Oh, yeah, that's what you make it". A lot of the times, that's not particularly the case. Here, it's like, all the work you do really is based around your interests and what you tell them you want to do. I've realized just whenever I say, "Oh, this is cool", or I find this interesting, they find work that I can do that's based around that or centered around that. I feel like that's a huge thing to do.

Rose shared a similar perspective in how she felt the program was curated to meet her needs.

I think a large strength of the program is one, like I stated, how it was very curated to us. So, we could craft out exactly what we wanted to get out of it. Also - that everybody was so welcoming to our ideas because we wouldn't be able to reach those goals if we didn't have the support from everybody else. So, everyone been very supportive.

Influence of Program Structure

While several participants discussed individualized opportunities to learn and refine skills, some participants felt that the program's structure did not always optimally influence their experiences. Specifically, participants suggested that the program often lacked direction and leadership, and that the short duration of the program limited their full engagement at the organization.

For example, Amy described how she particularly experienced a lack of direction and leadership as she transitioned into the fellowship:

I feel like before the fellowship starts, everything should be done. Like for example – deposits - like the manager that's going to be assigned to you should be done way before.

It took basically a month of the fellowship, like transitioning into the fellowship. It was basically like, well this week we're going to meet the team, but I feel like I was meeting the team for like a month. When it really should have been done on a couple of days. Another thing was it just felt like a bit unorganized... I feel like at one point I was my own manager - like trying to like figure out what I wanted to do with the fellowship and organizing meetings - or even like reaching out to people when my manager should have done that. My manager at the beginning did reach out to two people for me, but in the end I felt like I was doing it for myself.

Another challenge that Amy faced was that her preferred focus area was not made available to her as the team did not have the capacity to take on an intern and she was placed within a focus area not of her choosing. Austin shared that he was unsure of what the job entailed when he started, and thus had difficulty reaching out to individuals to look for opportunities:

Instead of just diving straight into my goals... because they asked me my goals and my strengths and weaknesses and then we tried to build what my work would look like around that. Since I didn't understand what the work entailed, I didn't really understand what my goal should be. So, I guess being clearer about what the job is... I guess it's just hard for me to kind of outreach to certain people to ask if they have any work for me, or if there's any resources that can be provided.

Amy also shared that she felt frustrated in how her time was often used. She felt she was not given the opportunity to be involved in larger team projects, despite spending much time in meetings immersed with staff regarding these projects:

We had meetings weekly, which I think they were pretty useful, but because I was only working with one person and not the whole team, you were kind of only stuck with

whatever that one person was doing... I wouldn't say stuck, but into that realm of work. Every time I would try to reach out to anyone on the team, they were kind of like, "Well, you're working with [redacted]. So we're just gonna keep you on [redacted] stuff", which is fine. I didn't mind it, but it was always just like, "If I'm going to go to all these weekly meetings and sit here and I know nothing that's going on, then I'm just kind of sitting here."

The timing of the internship also seemed to influence participants' experiences. One participant described the challenge – and increased autonomy that came with having their internship during the summer, which was a quieter time at MLSE LP:

So, during the summertime, things were pretty dead. You know, employees were taking Fridays off, so I really liked Fridays, and it was just like, cool, very chill... Then for a couple of weeks, I took a lot of tasks on my own, because there wasn't really much to do. It was very quiet and very summer vacation vibes.

Finally, some of the participants discussed the short duration of the program being problematic or in contrast to the opportunities to accomplish certain program goals (i.e., the program was 12 weeks, 30 hours per week), particularly when projects were tied to specific events. As Josh outlined:

I feel like it should have been longer just because like 12 weeks wasn't long. Because like, I felt that there's not a lot you can do in four weeks with the role like this and sort of like waiting and emails and sort of... like waiting it out and then events. I feel that also one thing is, it could be longer. It could be a year.

Similarly, Frank described how he tried to take initiative to get involved with bigger projects, but felt restricted:

I took initiative, but like the bigger stuff I just couldn't sink my teeth into because you get like this tease. “Okay, help me do this, help that and then you can send it” and it has to go up the chain... By the time it is up the chain, I’m out of the door. So yeah, that was that's probably my only gripe with the fellowship.

MLSE LaunchPad (LP) Community

The second aggregate theme entitled *MLSE LP Community* is an extension of the first theme focused on program experiences; however, this theme describes participants’ experiences within the Sport and Livelihoods that they felt were specific and unique to MLSE LP organization and community, the interactions they had with the facility and those who were involved with MLSE LP. Participants descriptions emerged in three sub-themes: (a) community of care, (b) prestige, and (c) access to connections.

Community of Care

Participants discussed the support that they received from LP and how throughout their experiences they felt the space to be safe, have their needs supported, and feel part of a community. Specifically, Josh shared “I've, like come up in the space and sort of like was also I think this place is a village”. Kevin shared similar feelings on how LP has become a consistent support in his life:

I've struggled with like anxiety and depression and stuff like that in my life. I'm doing really well for like myself as of now like. Things like the fellowship, my job search, like the success that I'm finding - it has improved my confidence. The fellowship and MLSE LP has been like consistent support for like the last five years of my life.

Kevin further described how he felt the program coordinator really cared and helped them to help themselves to succeed:

They care. Like the amount of time I would sit down with Diana and sit down with, like, now they hired [redacted], and all that kind of stuff. It's like, okay, they actually care about you, they want you to succeed, they want to give you... like, I told Diana, one thing in passing, she gave me this whole resource, like here, go look at this, go read this. Go here.

Samantha also shared how MLSE LP fostered a comfortable and safe workplace. She states:

The people here, especially the white people here, they're more understanding of how their presence affects others. That has to do with serving a community here that is predominantly Black, or people of color. Working here is the most comfortable I've ever been in my own skin in a workplace. That is because they really prioritize that, and they really make sure that we're represented and heard.

Prestige

Participants also spoke extensively about the feeling of prestige or status they felt as a result of working for a professional sports organization. As Joshed stated, "I feel like there's a prestige here at MLSE." This sense of status resulting from being associated with Toronto Raptors or the Toronto Maple Leafs was evident as Kevin was eager to share "cool stories" about his experiences. For example, he shared that on one occasion, "We had a whole bunch of NHL people here and it was just like a cool event to be a part of".

Other participants relayed how the sense of prestige carried into their work and specific projects. A participant shared his sense of accomplishment of having certain graphics that they designed being associated with the organization, and his perception that this was something the public would view and scrutinize. "I made on my computer, and I have the file on my computer... that's all going to be public facing. That's all going to be scrutinized by public

discourse.” Another participant described how at one point they felt that they were not getting the most out of their fellowship and wanted to be more connected to the Toronto Raptors. In turn, they crafted an opportunity to support a program for youth to go onto the basketball court to meet and take photos with the referees and players. Another participant highlighted how they had had the opportunity to speak on the jumbotron at Raptors game and the feeling of importance that accompanied that. While there was most often allure and recognition in being part of the MLSE professional sports franchise, one participant expressed how this high-powered space could feel overwhelming.

When I entered this building, it kind of just became like a focus - it was like, always about the program, it was always about the Raptors. I was kind of always just feeling like I was consumed by this place. It's hard to even want to walk away from this. I kind of felt like, consumed and kind of confused [about] what I wanted out of my life. Could it always be here?

Connections

Some of the participants also discussed how the program and organization were able to provide them with access to certain networks and connections. Samantha shared the benefits of having a MLSE LP email and how that opens certain doors for her.

Definitely the connections. I've always had - this was the biggest thing that I've ever noticed because someone else in the internship pointed it out. Having an MLSE Launchpad email was the biggest thing that they were so thankful for. They were like, oh, people will actually email me back and stuff like that.

Amy suggested a strength of program was the provision of access to networks of individuals who were able to support.

Strengths for sure was how polite people were when I reached out to them - to like ask for like a coffee chat and like meetings. Like people were really polite and people were always willing to help. I just realized how strong [of a] community MLSE really is and how everybody knows each other. Everybody knows someone who can actually help you within that. So I guess the connections and the networking were definitely the plus side of working with the fellowship. And I you know, I've made some really good connections that I'm able to use today because of the fellowship, so that would be probably the biggest strength.

Workplace Culture and Infrastructure

The third aggregate theme of *workplace structures* describes the challenges that participants outlined regarding their experiences in engaging with their MLSE LP workplace, and the labour market more broadly. This theme included three subthemes: (a) the notion of code-switching – needing to adjust their language and behaviours to ensure that they fit into their workplace; (b) the concept of race and whiteness and the influence of these constructions on the workplace; and (c) their perceptions of equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives.

Code-Switching

Participants commented on feeling the need to conform to their professional space; they felt the need to adapt how they spoke and presented themselves to fit into certain standards of expectations. Austin and Samantha shared their feelings that they needed to fit a certain mold:

I mean, even the act of code-switching itself is I feel an automatic like, oh, you know, you don't belong here, and everyone else does so as well. So you're gonna change your behavior to do so. I think that happens almost every day. Not every day. I would say, in all of my internships, I definitely code switch, like white girl, nine to five. I would

especially turn on it when I would present slides or meeting people from, 50 Bay, which is our MLSE head office. It's almost constant, really.

Austin also shared a similar experience:

When I come into a lot of settings, like professionally, I feel like, not that I have to put on an act, but that I have to be very cautious and like kind of put on like, my professional cap... You know, I was still being very cautious of what I said, when I first met [redacted] and talking to them, you know, just being very formal. When I was doing that, I noticed that I started to stumble over my words a lot, because I was getting so caught up on saying the right thing that I just didn't know what to say. I was thinking about what the perfect thing would be to say here. I can't say this and then I just stumbled down, and I fumble it.

Race and Whiteness

The subtheme of race and whiteness was discussed primarily in relation to participants' broader experiences within the labour market, but also mentioned occasionally in the context of MLSE LP. Specifically, participants shared their experiences joining the workforce, and feeling out of place due to their race. Samantha described: "So I've never really felt out of place until I went to my part time jobs and my full-time jobs during internships in the summer, where a lot of my colleagues or places would be majority white." Kevin expressed his concerns that race could negatively influence employment opportunities for youth facing barriers.

My name vs. your name on a resume. Doesn't matter what I make. But it's like they're already going to look at me like I'm not worth it. Nowadays, we're getting to better things. This isn't the 50s, I'm not trying to say we are in Jim Crow era America, or Canada.

Frank shared a similar perspective:

That's sad because I can put my resume anywhere and I could get an interview. My buddy who has an African sounding name, maybe doesn't get the interview. You know, it sucks. It sucks because my buddy who has an African sounding name, he's more qualified for the job than I am. But he likely won't get it just because of his name.

Samantha discussed the MLSE LP workplace specifically, suggesting that whiteness was a visible majority among the staff, but there were differences in race within different positions on the staff. “Seeing even here, it's, you know, the people from upstairs, a lot of them are still majority white, but there's a big group of people that are also people of color.” Rose commented similarly on her perception of employee whiteness among prestigious employers:

A lot of prestigious organizations, they have a lot of white employees. A lot of white people leading the institutions. A lot of white employers. So, it's hard to be more inclusive, and change those places when they already have a specific ideology from the inside. And they might not want other people of color, and our viewpoints and our opinions within their space.

Rose further extended this concern, expressing her belief that many institutions and workplaces are discriminating against people of colour, limiting their ability to live a good life.

So they [organizations] may do the best that they can to stop us from getting jobs in those types of organizations. Because when it comes to people of color, especially young people of color, there are so many stigmas surrounding them. A lot of institutions and workplaces that discriminate against them – [then] they might not have a fair chance at getting a good job, so that they can live a good life. Providing opportunities, like the

fellowship [is important], where youth such as myself can go and gain the relevant skills that they may need to succeed in life.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Participants also spoke about EDI initiatives that workplaces were undertaking to help bridge the gap of providing opportunities to those who might not historically or otherwise have them. Several participants highlighted the value of diverse representation of employees within a workplace. For example, Josh expressed:

I want to know there's more Black youth - or Black people - that work in those areas that I want to work in. So I'm able to like break in - my foot in the door - and not, again, be that token person.

Samantha echoed this perspective, expressing how diverse representation could lead others to have more opportunities to succeed in the future.

I am where I am today because I've seen people of color in in leadership. That's really important to me. Seeing even here, it's, you know, the people from upstairs, a lot of them are still majority white, but there's a big group of people that are also people of color.

Despite optimism around diverse representation in the workplace, participants also discussed how EDI initiatives often seemed like surface level adjustments and a form of tokenization. Josh shared:

A lot of EDI stuff, a lot of like diversity projects, and all the stuff - want to be able to check boxes off for the company - on behalf [of the company]. So hiring like a, like a BIPOC staff in order just to check boxes - or the EDI people like staff are Black, or are Indigenous, right? Because you want to like show the poster like, "Hey, this is what we have. Come work with us." Right? So, I feel like they want [to] check boxes.

Samantha also expressed that she felt complex emotions when answering questions around her racial identity that employers ask.

I do always want to answer it and things like that, but I'm always wondering, like, how we're using this information. Are you doing anything with this information or you're kind of just like ticking a box from, you know, what government mandates you to do? I always have a weird relationship with labels, like.

Livelihoods

The final aggregate theme emerging from the data related to participants' livelihoods. While this research focused on participants' experiences within a sport and livelihood program, the ultimate outcome of 'livelihood' was nonetheless central to participants' recounting of their experiences. The three sub-themes surrounding livelihoods related to: (a) participants' desires and ambitions for full time employment with MLSE LP following the conclusion of the program; (b) the lack of structural supports for youth facing barriers to gain experiences and opportunities to develop careers; and (c) participants' challenges related to the cost of living in Toronto.

Desire for Full-Time Employment

More than half of the participants shared their desire for the fellowship to provide them with full-time employment upon its conclusion. Almost all of the participants were previously employed by the organization, and almost all of them returned to their previous part-time roles at the conclusion of the fellowship, with only one person not being employed by LP upon the program completion in any capacity. There was a desire for the fellowship to allow them to "transition into [their] career in a corporate level." as described by Amy. Josh clearly stated his primary goal for the fellowship: "I think the biggest thing immediately was - I want to get a full-time job here. Any fellowship or internship, you want to work full-time in the space. So that was

what my big goal was.” Kevin shared a similar desire: “I obviously wanted, like a full-time job in some capacity.” Amy also described a desire to secure employment upon completion of the fellowship, but felt a lack of continued supports upon completion:

So I was really, really hoping that I would secure employment after my fellowship. And I did apply to places like, like during my fellowship to like secure employment, for example, like MLSE had internships. And I had applied to a lot of them and got like referrals and stuff. After the fellowship, I feel like it just stopped. Like, all that support that I was receiving at one point was just gone...But it kind of felt like they were just moving on to the next cycle of people in the fellowship.

Accessing Supports for Employment Opportunities

Amy’s experience feeling of being supported throughout the fellowship – and then unsupported upon conclusion of the fellowship - was not unique. Several participants highlighted the importance of better supporting youth that are facing barriers, with resources and opportunities, as they seek out (permanent, full-time) employment. As Rose shared:

There's not a lot of resources out there that ... either like employment opportunities for marginalized youth to gain skills, but also there's not a lot of resources letting us know - this is where you can go to gain those skills - because there are some of them [opportunities and resources] out there. It's just learning about them and figuring out how to access them. At least in my experience, growing up, I didn't have a lot of people telling me, “This is what you can do,” and “This is where you can go.”... I feel like for the people who come from, like successful, powerful families, they already know...they have all of these resources available to them. They have a huge network of other successful powerful people, so it makes it a lot easier for them.

Samantha also shared:

I think continuing that cycle of you know, hiring from the neighborhood, and then having them be part-time staff, and that turn into full-time staff... especially at bigger organizations like this, where it makes a staple in your resume. That can mean a lot to a person of color. Especially when they're, you know, trying to make it to like sports and business an [environment] highly filled with white men. I think, you know, opening up those opportunities, and those little gaps for others who want to go into that space.

Kevin shared how he felt the fellowship served as a critical opportunity among too few existing opportunities: “Truthfully, there's, there's a lot of work that can be done in terms of like getting kids that don't have opportunities, these opportunities. The fellowship is one of them.”

Wage and Cost of Living Challenges

Finally, in the last subtheme, participants speak about their challenges to engage in a healthy livelihood, even with the supportive employment opportunities of MLSE, due to the very low minimum wage and high costs of living. Katie described her challenges as a student without financial support from her family, outlining that she is dependent upon student loans to be able to afford her basic needs:

I live on my own right now. I don't get any financial help from my parents, so I have to pay for groceries, I have to pay for my degree, phone bill, internet bill, rent - everything by myself. And it doesn't help that I only make minimum wage here. And I only work here three days a week. So, a large part of it is me relying on OSAP [Ontario Student Assistance Program – a government loan]. But I know that OSAP is not always going to be there.

It highlights the need for well-paying jobs for youth that are above minimum wage and closer to Samantha similarly shared how many necessities were out of reach:

I do think, especially in a neighborhood, like this one, you know, money and time are no joke. There are people I know in this company that have had to ask for raises, beg for them, really, just to make enough to go about their days or have groceries at night or have food on the table that night. So it is very, I would say, in spaces like these, it is it is very important, especially when you employ people from this neighborhood that really, really need that money every day. Their time is very scarce and valuable. I think places like this could use a higher pay for especially for their part-time staff, and the students that are here as well.

Austin shared similar sentiments – emphasizing the mismatch between available jobs (i.e., low paying, part-time, entry level), cost of living, and future challenges that youth will face due to the cost-of-living.

I mean, there's now more than ever, like a lot more opportunities for jobs. There's so many more positions available, but I feel like [it's] for entry level stuff for youth. It's a lot of like underpaid stuff. ...It's really not possible to live down here [downtown Toronto] comfortably as a youth without, exceptional experience in work or in school. I feel like it's a big problem to try and find a financially stable job as a youth. The competition is so much higher, but there's so many more jobs available, but those jobs just don't pay as well as I think they should. It's just hard to find a comfortable living, if you don't have good supports from family or from friends to you know, kind of grow. I don't feel like you can live in Toronto, just growing up independently.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I synthesized the findings from the semi-structured interviews to respond to the guiding research questions of this project. Findings were presented in four aggregate themes: Program Experience, MLSE LaunchPad Community, Workplace Culture and Infrastructure and Livelihoods.

Chapter 6 – Discussion, Recommendations, Strengths, Limitations and Conclusion

In this section, I place the findings of this project in conversation with relevant literature. In Chapter 1, I outlined how my two research questions guided my empirical work into the study of Sport and Livelihoods as follows:

1. *How do participants (current and past) describe and interpret their experiences within a Sport and Livelihood program?*
2. *How are contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture shaped through this programming?*

In the previous chapter (i.e., Results) these questions were addressed through the data collected through semi-structured interviews shaped the findings of this study. In the sections below, I provide an overview of the overall findings of this study, providing brief summaries of the themes that came into focus throughout the research at hand. I then draw upon the Capabilities Approach in conjunction with Marxist perspectives to discuss how SfD and more specifically, livelihood programming, can (re)produce social structures of violence and inequality in their current form. More specifically, I engage in an exploration of how SfD and livelihood programming can (re)produce precarious working environments that do not provide youth that are facing barriers with the required resources to be able to effectively overcome the challenges that they face. Subsequently, I discuss some recommendations and I provide rationale

for how these approaches can lead to increases in support and capabilities of participants involved in SfD and livelihood programming.

Fellowship Experiences and Constructions

In addressing research question 1, participants described their experiences participating in a SfD and livelihood programming as one that they were extremely grateful for, given the lack of resources and supports that they could rely on elsewhere. They saw this program as providing them with an opportunity to improve their capabilities, such as improving their communication skills by teaching them how to set up an Outlook email account. Through their employment, they experienced an organization that aimed to support “youth and children that were facing barriers, and to support them to their full potential” (Warner et al., 2019 p. 4). Of the seven participants that were interviewed, six were previously employed by the organization, meaning that participants already had experience with LP and other colleagues, senior staff, and participants within the space. The majority of the participants shared their desire to secure full-time employment from their participation in the program. They shared their desire to develop corporate skills to be better equipped for the labour market. LP was described by the participants as a family or community and not necessarily as a corporatized NGO. Fellowship recipients were simultaneously attracted to the prestige and power of the organizational brand and being associated with the largest professional sports teams in Toronto, potentially Canada. This association formed a powerful identity and bond, as one of the participants described losing their sense of self when engaged in the space: as Kevin said, “everything is about the Raptors”.

At the same time participants described structural challenges that they faced within in the program. For example, participants discussed the need to codeswitch, ensuring that their language and behaviours fit within the expected norms of this corporate environment. Many

participants further described their experience as short and lacking direction at times, as they were unable to see projects to their conclusion, or to explore varied and diverse opportunities within the organization outside their immediate responsibilities tied to specific projects. At times participants were tasked with repetitive tasks that did not provide flexibility in terms of project ownership. Participants also shared disappointment in that the fellowship was not able to lead to full-time employment for them within the organization - something very important to most of the participants, as they highlighted the cost-of-living crises in the City of Toronto.

In addressing research question 2, findings suggest SfD and livelihood programming influenced and shaped the constructions of poverty, race, and culture through the underlying assumptions that guided the fellowship work. For example, and somewhat paradoxically, it is possible the very core structure of the fellowship program may be indirectly influencing cultural understandings of (un)employment. Generally speaking, employment programs are directed at youth facing barriers to address their lack of skills, while ignoring individuals that have historically benefited from the oppression of the youth facing barriers. This developmental approach of developing skills for employment places responsibility on those facing barriers to focus on their personal self-improvement to ensure their skills aligned within the inherently discriminatory spaces. It ignores the historical-materialist perspectives of the challenges that the youth faced, while also overlooking the unearned privilege that youth that are in positions of power or privilege have. Participants were able to describe the inherently discriminatory space they engaged in through their discussion of the theme of race and whiteness in the workplace and their need to codeswitch to be able to fit into workplace structures. Similarly, participants explored the role of poverty within the program, as they spoke about the lack of structural supports that existed for youth facing barriers, when compared to youth who had financial

support from friends and family involved in professional spaces. In their discussions related to the cost of living, participants drew attention to the constructions of poverty within the program, as their employment did not foster their ability to enjoy a livelihood that met their needs.

Fellowship Experiences Through the Capabilities Approach

While SfD programming has been recognized as an approach that can help address micro-level challenges by promoting real opportunities, these programs do not necessarily result in enhanced long-term outcomes or change among the communities they are serving or society more broadly (Sanders, 2016). Recent literature has encouraged the use of the CA when exploring and examining SfD programming (Darnell & Dao, 2017; Svensson & Levine, 2017, Zipp, 2019). Similarly, I drew upon the CA to interpret the findings of this study. Supporting capabilities requires the elimination of coercion and interference (negative freedoms) and the promotion of real opportunities (positive freedoms) (Sen, 1990). In short, CA encourages SfD practitioners to explore their work and efforts not through a outcomes-based approach (e.g., employed vs unemployed), but one that explores the experiences that participants have (e.g., customized learning opportunities). The fellowship program provided a supportive environment for participants and valuable practical experience within a workplace. Nevertheless, there were still barriers and challenges that participants experienced through their engagement in the program.

The structural challenges (e.g., program duration or availability of focus area) outlined by participants of the MLSE LP program could be described as conversion factors within the CA approach. These factors specifically influenced the freedom of participants to achieve a certain doing. Many of the participants spoke about the challenges they faced in their ability to achieve a livelihood. While participants underlined their desire to improve their communication to be more

prepared for a professional working environment, they also explained the importance of codeswitching while in the workplace, ensuring that they were meeting the social norms (e.g., sticking to assigned tasks and promotion of the organizations professional sport teams) that had been historically established for the brand's professional space. Conversion factors could also be understood in the behaviour of participants' co-workers. For example, one participant spoke of a desire to explore new projects to expand their scope of work and was directed not to take on more responsibility or additional projects, but instead to focus on the work that was provided by their manager. These experiences highlight the way the behaviour of others influenced the experiences that individuals may have had within a program.

Sen (1990) described how an achievement pertains to what individuals are able to accomplish while freedom refers to the actual opportunities available to pursue. This concept can be visualized by the actual achievement and the freedom to achieve. As participants aimed to navigate these ingrained systems and structures (e.g., race and whiteness in the workplace), they were forced to make constrained choices (e.g., codeswitching) to fit within these systems. To reduce the impact of negative freedoms and long-standing systemic challenges, participants shared how other organizations they were familiar with took an EDI approach to help address these challenges. They also spoke of limits to these efforts by describing them as a tool for a positive narrative more so than transformative steps towards structural change.

In turn, and throughout interviews, participants explored how representation, having people of colour in managerial roles in the workplace demonstrated that there was space for them, and that this was encouraging to see – demonstrating that even within structures that oppress, there is space for individuals who face barriers. I would contend, an important question to ask is, “Inclusion into what?” Interviewees described workplace structures that did not support

the freedoms of individuals, and thus limited their capabilities. If that is the reality of workplace structures is this something that individuals who already face barriers should be included in? I suggest, then, that there is need to transform these workplace cultures, structural constraints and inequalities that – in this case – interviewees face(d), instead of simply including those who have been excluded in the past and hoping for a different outcome. Further, participants described their concern that these positions that are focused on EDI can be tokenizing and act as a checkbox so organizations can demonstrate they are doing their part (i.e., a bare minimum).

Several participants explicitly stated that they wished they had more time in their role so they could continue with their development, many of whom were disappointed to not be able to see their projects to fruition, as their fellowships ended. One of the participants described their desire to keep working on a project to ensure they felt successful in the program – so much so that they continued working without compensation. Another participant felt disappointment and distrust, as LP had initially stated their intention to provide continued part-time opportunities within the organization, but that opportunity never materialized.

Drawing upon the CA to understand the experiences of individuals within the MLSE LP fellowship program allowed for an exploratory focus away from exclusive quantitative metrics. One of the challenges that SfD organizations face is the consistent calls for enhancing monitoring and evaluation frameworks (Sanders, 2016). For example, Sanders states that monitoring and evaluation provide quantifiable data, which is valuable to organizations to support their fundraising efforts. Sanders further argued, the need to ensure high quality program outcomes has limited the understanding of SfD participant experiences. Indeed, participant experiences are also crucial to ensuring high quality SfD programming. Drawing upon a CA thus holds the potential to ensure SfD organizations prioritize more varied types of positive

outcomes, rather than simply those that are currently measured and capitalized on for fundraising. In the case of this study, participants highlighted some less than optimal experiences within the MLSE LP fellowship program. Given the elimination of negative behaviours is much more difficult to demonstrate and measure, by focusing on exclusively on measuring positive outcomes, SfD livelihood programs typically do not acknowledge the existence of any less positive outcomes. Consequentially, research in this area has largely led to a narrative where responsibility is placed on individual participants within program to pull themselves up to create better opportunities for themselves - ignoring the wider systems of oppression.

Collectively, findings of this study suggest that when working with youth and those that face barriers, SfD organizations must be acutely aware of the environments within which programs and individuals exist and operate. SfD organizations must ensure that participants who engage in their programs are provided with consistent resources that can support the development of their capabilities by not exploring root causes of youth unemployment, there become limits on what SfD programming can accomplish. As such, it is of utmost importance to continue exploring the systems and structures that create and produce power, namely the neoliberal capitalist system. The challenges that SfD organizations in the global North face are tremendous. There is a large gap in the freedoms had by those who are privileged and those that are oppressed. In an effort to better understand the challenges that youth face with respect to (un)employment in the next section I provide a discussion on precarious employment and the impact that it has on the freedoms of youth.

Precarious Employment and SfD Livelihood Programming

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has developed a framework to better organize the characteristics of precarious work and they fall into three broad

dimensions (Hauben et al, 2020): income, security, and opportunity. The Canadian Library of Parliament, states that precarious working conditions can be described as work that has limited to no benefits, fewer worker protections such as permanent employment, and lower pay (Cahil, 2022).

When considering income (the first characteristic of precarious work), participants in the MLSE LP fellowship program spoke about how their compensation did not allow them to meet the cost-of-living challenges in Toronto. Specially looking at monetary compensation, participants received an honorarium for their enrollment in the program. Breaking down honorarium into an hourly wage I am able to gather, that participants were provided an hourly wage of \$17.00 CAD per hour. There was one exception as one participant stated they were part of a secondary employment program that supports Indigenous individuals which provides a \$5.00 top. At the time of data collection, minimum wage in Ontario was \$15.50 per hour, while on October 1, 2023 it will increase to \$16.55 per hour (Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skill Development, 2023). While participants did receive a wage above the minimum requirement, this wage did not provide enough income to adequately support their livelihoods of the participants. For a wage to be able to provide the adequate support, they would require a living wage. A living wage reflects what people need to earn to cover the actual costs of living in their community including food, clothing, shelter, childcare, transportation, medical expenses, recreation, and a modest vacation; it does not include retirement savings, debt repayment, home ownership or savings for children's education (Ontario Living Wage, n.d.). Most recent figures from November 2022 put the living wage in Toronto, Canada at \$23.15 (Ontario Living Wage, 2022).

By compensating participants via an honorarium, LP ensured employees did not qualify for full-time work, and in turn limiting LP's responsibility towards their employees. This structure releases LP of any responsibilities to provide protections and benefits to employees such as health, dental and drug coverage, as well as insurable hours through employment insurance. By paying employees through honorariums, participants remained in precarious positions and the employer retained all power with respect to the professional relationship. From a Marxist orientation this exploitative compensation aligns with the profit driven narratives of the global capitalist system. This system requires a flexible and weak labour power which is undercompensated to minimize costs and increase profits.

Participants discussed how the compensation that they were provided through the fellowship were insufficient to sustain a livelihood in the City of Toronto. The average cost to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Toronto at the time of data collection was \$2,474 (TRREB, 2023), while homeownership had become out of reach for almost every individual unless they receive significant financial support from their families as the average price of a home in Toronto at \$1,196,101 (TRREB, 2023). One participant in particular discussed how their employment did not provide them with enough resources for a to be able to afford, rent, food, housing, and education, so they took on student loans in order to be able to meet their needs. Another participant described, how their co-worker had to beg for a raise to be able to make enough to go about their day and have groceries at night. Participants also spoke about the increasing costs of food that they have experienced recently. Recent data shows that in September 2022, yearly price increases for food purchased in stores rose by 11.4% (Fradella, 2022). Another participant shared how the current employment opportunities that were available to youth were low-wage work with unpredictable working hours and limited benefits, if any.

This reality that youth faced within the program and outside was unsustainable in meeting the needs of youth living in the City of Toronto and (re)produces challenges that they face.

Hauben et al., (2020) propose that a second characteristic dimension of precarious work is security – stable employment that provides opportunities into the future. Participants discussed how they were unable to gain secure and stable employment through their participation in the fellowship program. Several of the participants in the research study returned to the part-time employment they had had with LP prior to the fellowship program, while one transitioned into part-time employment within a partner organization of LP. The fellowship itself did not provide the participating youth that were facing barriers with any long-term security. While participants shared a desire to keep working on projects after the 3-month fellowship had ended, this was not an option; one participant continued to do so uncompensated, and another expressed disappointment when previously discussed ongoing work did not materialize. This insecurity restricted participants' ability to consider their long-term needs, as they focused on making a positive impression during their 3-month, with the hope that they might have potentially received full-time employment in the organization. This lack of security reinforces the idea that the work they are doing is precarious.

The final characteristic dimension described by Hauben et al. (2020) is opportunity. Participants shared their desire to have the opportunity to engage in meaningful employment, and to work in a sports related field. They expressed a sense of purpose and enjoyment working in the SfD sector. While they were proud to be associated with the Toronto Raptors or the Toronto Maple Leafs and the prestige of the MLSE organization, they were challenged to gain full-time employment. Given participants' eagerness to work in the highly competitive professional sports industry, when given the opportunity, they were willing to accept poorer working conditions

rather than lose out on the opportunity that *might* lead them to permanent employment in a highly desirable profession. This highlights the paradox of working for a brand that pays professional athletes millions of dollars, yet the same organization avoids economic responsibilities towards its employees as they can't adequately support their livelihoods.

Building on the lack of stable employment within the SfD sector, there was no clear or direct career path for participants for future employment. Since the early 2000s, the academic discipline of sport management has been described as one of the fastest growing areas of study in North America (Weese, 2002). Within the sports industry, the use of internships is a common practice (Hawzen et al, 2018). It could be argued that fellowship program differs from an internship only in name. Similarly, there is fixed-time commitment to program participants to gain employment experience for future employment opportunities with no guarantee of continued employment within the organization. Hawzen et al (2018) describe that the growth of sport management has contributed to a surplus of labour supply, by graduating more job-seeking students than the industry requires. With an abundance of supply in the market, this leads to the reduction in the value of entry-level workers and student interns. This over supply of labour can be referred to as a reserve army of labour (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887). Given the high level of interested individuals wanting to work in the industry, there was no need to improve working conditions, as workers were willing to take on any opportunity to just get a foot in the door. It thus feels ironic that, on the one hand, LP appears to offer work experience with poor working conditions, while on the other, it simultaneously (c)aims to support youth that are facing these same economic barriers.

As fellowship program participants continue to graduate, I contend that the precarious working conditions that are produced within this MLSE LP program is not meeting the needs of

participants. As an organization, LP aims to support youth facing barriers to achieve their full potentials (MLSE LaunchPad, n.d,a). Their communication tagline for fundraising efforts state they are aiming to “Change the Game” (MLSE Launchpad, n.d.b). Participants of the program are working in a facility that is aiming to address the challenges and barriers that youth and children face – yet the program itself does not provide the participants nor the other part-time staff of the organization with the necessary capabilities to strive. It thus is difficult to comprehend how individuals who are already facing barriers are then employed in precarious working conditions; and, in turn, are then expected to create an environment where those barriers are not present. This is where the paradox of the SfD and livelihood program lies. The fellowship program places the majority of the burden on the individual to be able to overcome the challenges that they are facing, without recognizing how the fellowship itself may be (re)producing the same systems that they are aiming to help youth facing barrier overcome.

The concerning conclusions of this study are consistent with the conclusions of other scholars such as Moustakis et al. (2022) and Spaaij et al. (2013). who found that similar programming provided valuable experience as well as qualifications, but many participants still found themselves in precarious working condition. These conclusions also support Theeboom and colleagues’ (2020) claim that there is limited evidence of programs successfully developing job skills and employability through sport. SfD and livelihoods remain problematic, especially with regards to quality and longevity of employment. It must be recognized that this issue is historically rooted, and currently following a larger societal trend of the growth of precarious employment for individuals facing barriers (Cahil, 2022). As such, these issues are not exclusive to LP, but rather highlights that there are certainly limits to what individual programs are able to achieve within the wider context of the systemic challenges that face youth. Nonetheless, if SfD

programs are claiming to be supporting the livelihoods of youth that are facing barriers, they should not be reproducing the same systems and structures.

Recommendations

A famous quote from Karl Marx comes from his *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach* (1969), where he states “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it”. It is my desire and intention to be able to provide insights and recommendations to aid in the process of changing the world. As Sanders (2016) discussed, there is a need for SfD organizations to re-examine their operations and strive for greater impact. He argued that if SfD organizations keep operating within the same frameworks, they can often (re)enforce the very systemic problems that they are trying to solve. Sanders also emphasized the need for stronger coalitions, and more coordinated and informed policy and advocacy work. Based on the findings and interpretations emerging from this research project, the following recommendations could be implemented to strengthen the LP fellowship program, potentially providing improved opportunities for participants to in engage in an effective SfD livelihood program.

Living Wage

A key recommendation for MLSE LaunchPad would be to explore becoming a living wage employer. A living wage can be an effective tool to combat working poverty by making sure that employees can make ends meet where they live. By incorporating expenses that a worker must cover, such as shelter, food, transportation and more, living wages are much closer to reality than a politically set minimum wage (Ontario Living Wage, 2023). According to the Ontario Living Wage Network (2023), there are 770 organizations in Ontario that are living wage employers. LP could join this growing list of organizations who ensure that their staff and employees are paid a wage that could sustain a livelihood in their respective regions. Currently,

LP partners with a living wage employer (i.e., Foodshare) which supports their food literacy programming; aligning operations with the living-wage supporting partners could allow for more coordinated policy efforts. Further, there is a precedent for professional sporting organizations to become a living wage employer, as Everton Football Club became one of the first professional sports teams to announce their living wage policy in 2016 (Everton FC, 2022). In doing so, Everton provided a raise to over 1,000 individuals within the club's community. The then Deputy Chief Executive, Denise Barrett-Baxendale stated, "Supporting the accredited living wage is quite simply the right thing to do; it improves our employees' quality of life but also benefits our business and society as a whole" (Scott, 2016). Given that LP's mission is to help build communities and help youth reach their full potential (MLSE LP, n.d.c), a living wage should be explored.

Organized Labour Power

There is a need to increase the power of the participants who are involved within the SfD and livelihood programming given the precarious working conditions within which they operate. Historically, employers have not been willing to meet the needs of their workers, resulting in the emergence of organized labour unions. Therefore, it may be in the interest of the participants within the fellowship program to explore the possibility of unionization to be able to organize their labour power to improve their working conditions. The case could be made that not only the participants of the fellowship program should be organized, but also other staff within the organization outside of senior directors and managers. When workers are able to collectively organize, it leads to collective bargaining (i.e., to gain improvements in working conditions) which can in turn increase the labour-power of the participants. As discussed above, given the existing over supply of labour in this field, there is potential that the LP management would not

be willing to support these efforts. However, there is a need for LP and other SfD organizations to re-examine operations, to ensure that programs and organizational efforts are not (re)producing the same systemic problems they are trying to eliminate.

While unionization within SfD organizations such as LP may initially appear unlikely, it is worthwhile noting that unions are not uncommon within the sporting industry, especially in North America. MLSE, the parent corporation of LP, currently owns and operates four professional sports teams, with each of the players on these teams represented by its players union. The players' union exist to support the efforts of the players to ensure that they have safe working conditions, such as appropriate rest in between games, and that their compensation meets the value of what they produce. Ensuring fair conditions and compensation is not only important for professional athletes, but for all workers hired by MLSE.

Direct Pathways to Stable Employment

A final key recommendation is that LP foster a direct pathway to stable employment. The majority of participants expressed their appeal to increase the duration of the program to allow them to get a more in-depth experience within the organization. While increasing the program duration would have several benefits, consideration should be given to other means to provide more job security to fellowship participants along their journeys. Specifically, LP could look to provide fellowship opportunities to enhance their programming to match the support that is provided through the Toronto Raptors fellowship and Toronto Maple Leafs coaching development programs respectfully. For example, the Toronto Maple Leafs provide a Management and Coaching Development Program where one of the goals of the program is to “prepare candidates for a future long-term role within the organization” (Maple Leafs, 2021). Similarly, the Toronto Raptors provide the Wayne Embry fellowship which provides an

opportunity to gain firsthand experience in a professional basketball environment over the course of a full NBA season as well as a \$40,000 stipend for the season. Both of these opportunities have provided youth with significant working experience, as well as access to networks that have led to full-time, stable employment opportunities based on my review of publicly available information on LinkedIn.

Finally, there may be space for LP to revitalize previous programs that aimed to facilitate stable full-time employment for youth facing barriers in the community. As previously outlined, MLSE LP's Ready for Work programs such as N-Power and Cooking for Life were recently removed from programming. Despite this, in 2020, LP published a study in the *Journal of Sport for Development* about their comprehensive strategy to facilitate youth employment through collaboration, describing a direct pathway to employment through the Ready for Work programming. As such, there may be a benefit to gain a deeper understanding of the successes and challenges of these programs.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Given livelihood programming makes up a significant portion of the SfD sector but has been recognized as an understudied field of research (Svensson & Woods, 2017), one of the key strengths of this research is that it adds to this limited field of study on sport and livelihoods. There has also been a call to explore how programs' development initiatives are experienced rather than restricting the focus of understanding to specific outcomes (Zipp et al, 2019). Utilizing the Capabilities Approach (1992, 1999) as a guiding framework allowed me to better understand the experiences of the participants in one livelihoods program. As such, this research advances work in SfD and livelihoods to move past the quantitative inquiries of past livelihoods research. Further, the use of a Marxist philosophical approach allowed me to critically explore

the structures and systems within the neoliberal capitalist environment that this livelihood program operates within. Specifically, using the reserve army of labour as well as theories of value, allowed for the critique of workplace cultures and infrastructure (Marx, 1992, as cited in 1887). Additionally, I was able to develop a positive relationship with the partner organizations (LP), helping facilitate recruitment for the project. The positive relationship allows for my continued engagement with the research partner to be able to facilitate knowledge mobilization efforts, hopefully leading to enhancements in program delivery. Through the use of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) thematic analysis process, I engaged in critical reflection as well as collaborated with a critical friend (Schuck & Russell, 2005). My reflection allowed me to develop a positive rapport with participants that allowed them to share openly and with transparency. Working with a critical friend allowed for on-going reviewing and reshaping of my analysis to best capture the voice of the participants.

While the study had many strengths, it was not without some challenges and limitations as well. First, the utilization of a Marxist perspective was challenging given the broad nature of political economy. While I was able to utilize components of Marxist analysis, I gave less attention to the role of capital within SfD organizations (e.g., corporatized non-governmental organizations). Further, the CA has been criticized as supporting neoliberal institutions and ideologies, given that it focuses on the individual experiences. This led me to utilize Marxist concepts to be able to make connections between individual experiences and larger systemic challenges. I also experienced challenges in applying the CA to my research, in that there were operational challenges that I encountered, such as defining key components of the CA, such as resources, capabilities, and functionings, for participants. With this in mind, as a researcher, my aim is to position this work as only one part of what can be understood and translated, keeping in

mind that human perspectives do not provide a full picture of how objects interact with and influence other beings. Additionally, there are challenges in engaging with gaining a complete understanding of the programming as I was unable to observe the program. My position of privilege and being an outsider may have limited whether participants truly opened up, despite my efforts to mitigate these efforts. Finally, the generalizability of this study's findings must be considered, as this research is situated in the global North in a large urban metropolis, at one SfD facility, studying one specific livelihoods fellowship program. While the focus of this study was bounded by these parameters, it is important that I do not over-generalize the findings to all SfD programming taking place across the globe.

Future research should continue to explore the role of capital within the SfD sector, in order to bring attention to the political economy that SfD and livelihood programs operate within. First, given this research was conducted at one time point during or shortly after participants had completed their LP fellowship, and particularly given their concerns for their long term employment and livelihood security, there is a need to explore programming from a longitudinal perspective, to gain better understanding of if and how programming impacts the livelihoods of participants over a longer time periods (e.g., 1, 3 and 5 years from their engagement in the program). Additionally, given some of the structural and operational programming concerns expressed by participants, there is value in understanding the experiences of individuals in other sport and livelihood programs, to understand key elements of successful and effective programming, while also considering how LP's program may be modified to enhance experiences and outcomes. More broadly, there is a need to continue critical research that explores the contradictions of 21st century neoliberal capitalism, while also exploring alternative ideas and lenses. Specifically, there is a need to utilize interdisciplinary, if not

transdisciplinary (Whitley et al, 2022), research within SfD and livelihoods if we want to understand the variety of forces—economic, political, cultural, psychological—that (re)shape social organizations and human action.

Conclusion

This project provided an exploration of the experiences of youth facing barriers who were enrolled in a SfD and livelihood program as well as contemporary constructions of class, race, gender, poverty, (dis)ability and culture shaped through this programming. Loosely guided by the CA as well as a Marxist perspective, findings suggested that there were significant challenges and barriers that participants faced. Participants were able to gain skills that they felt were important to the development of the careers and livelihoods, but they were unable to gain stable and well-paid employment post program. This research extends findings suggesting there are limits to what Sport and Livelihood programs can do in terms of social development, specifically employability (Spaaij, 2013; Moustakas, 2021). In summary, findings offer several notable contributions, including but not limited to: (a) experiences of participants within programming, (b) precarious employment faced by youth within the SfD sector, and (c) how SfD programming may be (re)producing the same systemic structures that they are trying to solve.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the main findings of this project through the lens of relevant literature, theory, and practical implications. Specifically, I provided an overview of the overall findings of this study, providing brief summaries of the major themes that came into focus throughout the research. I also provided recommendations for to the participants of the fellowship program as well as for the LP itself. I discussed the scholarly implications and key contributions of this study, including how it contributes to the contemporary field of SfD more

broadly. I then identify some of the challenges and limitations involved in this study and suggest ideas for future research and further methodological approaches.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Script

My name is Natan Levi. I am a master's candidate in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science at York University. I am completing a research project focused on the experiences of participants of Sport and Livelihood (Ready for Work) programming under the supervision of Dr. Fraser-Thomas, an Associate Professor in the School. This research will advance knowledge on the topic, and support practitioners, researchers and policy makers better implement and understand sport and livelihood programs.

I would like to conduct an interview with you to learn about your experiences participating in the Ready for Work program at MSLE Launchpad. The interview would take place at the MLSE Launchpad facility. The interview would be recorded and remain confidential. You would not be required to share any experiences that are uncomfortable, and you would be able to withdraw from the study at any time. Further, there would be no identifiers (name, organization, age, years involved), so you could remain anonymous, and your information would remain confidential.

I hope that you will consider participating in this study. An honorarium of \$50 will be provided to those who complete interview process. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to participate in the research, please feel free to contact me via phone at (xxx) xxx - xxxx or email at xxxxxxx@yorku.ca.

Thank you very much for your time, and for considering this request.

In solidarity,

Natan Levi

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Introduction: Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. As we get started, I want to make clear that you are not required to answer any question that you do not wish and if you would like to end the interview at any point please do not hesitate to ask.

As you would have read in the letter of information, this study is focused on experiences of participants that are involved in sport and livelihood programming. Sport and Livelihoods or Ready for Work programs have been described in various ways - but essentially, they are focused on providing employment opportunities, while using sport as a hook. As you may be aware, the MLSE Launchpad Fellowship Program is an example of one such program. As such, this interview is focused in three sections. First, we will explore your self-identity, second we will discuss the fellowship program, and finally we will explore your future aspirations and perspectives.

When we present quotes from you in our work, we do not use any identifiers. Instead of using your name, we usually use a pseudonym. Is there a particular pseudonym you would like us to use for you? (If not, we will simply develop one ourselves or you can provide one at a later date).

Following our interview, I will reach out in a couple of weeks by sending you a transcript of our discussion today. I encourage you to review it to assure that you feel it accurately reflects that nature of our conversation today. Please feel free to reach out at any time if you have questions or further thoughts you'd like to share. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Section 1: Self Identity

1. First, I was hoping you could share a bit about yourself and your identity.

- a. Can you tell me about your family heritage that you are aware of? Can you tell me about your life journey? Were you born in Canada? What about your parents?
2. What motivates you and provides you with a sense of purpose or meaning?
 - a. Are there certain things that you wish to accomplish in your life, that you would be comfortable sharing?
 - b. What do you feel motivates you and provides you with purpose to accomplish those things?
3. Can you tell me a little bit more about the community and environment that you grew up in?
 - a. What were some of your experiences that you specifically remember that influenced your environment?
 - b. Can you describe any challenges that you, your family, or community faced that influenced your environment?

Section 2: Ready for Work | Fellowship Program

As I mentioned, in this second part of the interview I'm going to switch gears a bit and ask some questions more focused on the Sport and Livelihood / Ready for Work programming.

4. What does the fellowship program look like for a participant?
 - a. What are some of the strengths of the program?
 - b. Is there something you wish was included in the program, but wasn't?
5. In your opinion what does the word livelihood mean?
 - a. Can you please describe to me what does 'sport and livelihoods' (Ready for Work) mean to you?
6. Have you participated in other "employment / ready for work" programs in the past?
 - a. Can you tell me more about that/those program(s)?

- b. In your opinion was the program successful or beneficial for your future goals?
7. Why did you choose to participate in the MLSE Fellowship program?
- a. Would you have enrolled in this program or something similar if it was not sports or MLSE related? Why?
 - b. What were you looking to gain or learn as part of the Fellowship program?
8. Do you feel that your experiences in the Fellowship program have helped you be more prepared to find and succeed in work?
- a. If so, what skills do you think you have developed through the program to promote your livelihood?
 - a. Can you provide specific examples of each of these?
 - b. If not, why do you think that is?
9. Consider if your compensation was \$23 per hour, would you feel more successful?
- a. Do you consider compensation as a measure of “success in work”?
 - a. Can you elaborate to your reasoning behind that response?

Section 3: Future

In this final section we will explore some topics related to your future as well as your perspectives on social change.

10. In your opinion, what is needed to live a healthy, meaningful, and purposeful life in society?
11. Looking towards the future, in your opinion, what do you perceive to be some key challenges that youth and young adults face?
- a. Do you have any ideas for how we can address these challenges?
12. Government programs are often put in place to support “marginalized communities”. What does the word marginalization mean to you?

- a. From your perspective how does marginalization occur?
- b. Do you feel that unemployment is a primary barrier for participation in society?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, what barriers do you see towards inclusive participation in society?
- c. What barriers have you faced when seeking employment?

13. We are almost at the end of our interview. I'm wondering if there's anything else you would like to add or talk about that we have not discussed today?

- a. Is there anything you would like to elaborate on or clarify?
- b. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I will follow up in a couple of weeks by sending you a transcript of our discussion today. I encourage you to review it to assure that you feel it accurately reflects that nature of our conversation today. Please feel free to reach out at any time if you have questions or further thoughts you'd like to share.

Appendix C: Letter of Permission from MLSE LaunchPad



November 18, 2022

To the Research Ethics Board of York University,

This letter is to confirm the support and collaboration of MLSE LaunchPad with Natan Levi on the research study investigating the impact of a sport and livelihood program at MLSE LaunchPad, and exploring the experiences of young people participating in the program.

The study topic and design have been developed collaboratively with MLSE LaunchPad, and we have approved the proposed study design. As such, MLSE LaunchPad will provide the facility, participants, and other agreed upon data collection materials including any human resources to complete this study.

We are aware of and fully support the application for ethics approval sought by Natan Levi. If you have any questions or require any further documentation from our organization, please feel free to contact me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jackie Robinson".

Jackie Robinson

MANAGER, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

259 Jarvis St. | Toronto, ON M5C 2B2

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM – APPENDIX A

Date: December 8th, 2022 – December 8th, 2023

Study Name: Sport and Livelihood Programming: From Outcomes to Experiences

Researchers:

Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas, .
Co-Principal Investigator: Natan Levi, .

Purpose of the Research: This research aims to explore how a programs’ development initiatives are experienced rather than restricting the focus of understanding to specific outcomes. More specifically, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the use of sport for livelihood programming in supporting the needs of “marginalized” youth.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You are invited to participate in this study because you are or were a Ready for Work participant at Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment (MLSE) LaunchPad. Your participation will consist of one semi-structured interview that will be in-person (at MLSE LaunchPad) and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Specifically, questions will prompt you to reflect upon and share your perceptions and experiences. The interview questions will mainly include questions to better understand how you describe your participation in Ready for Work programming, your heritage and your desired future. You will be asked for your permission to audio-record the interview and will be provided a \$50 honourium for your participation in the study.

Risks and Discomforts: Although we do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research, we would like you to know that you are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or upset, and you may decline to answer or respond to any question, stop the interview, or remove yourself from the study at any time. Due to the nature of the study, interview questions will offer you space to discuss your own views and experiences with marginalization. In exercising caution, should you become agitated or upset during the interview, we will remind you of their rights, ask if you need a compassionate witness, supportive silence, talking about what’s upsetting them, taking a break and offer the option of ending the interview.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: You will be provided with a \$50 honourium for your participation in the study. You may enjoy engaging in a positive reflection process about your coaching experiences; this process may enhance your knowledge about yourself, your growth, and your life skill development through ready for work programming. This research advances understanding of ready for work programing from the perspectives of participant experiences and their future desires. The study aims to offer deeper insights into the benefits, limitations or opportunities for Sport and Livelihood programming.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher(s) or York University, nor with

Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment LaunchPad, either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Participant data is strictly confidential and will be safely stored on a password-encrypted hard drive in a locked facility, and only research team members identified above will have access to this information. All information you provide during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Data from this study will be stored for 5 years, after which point all hard copies of the data will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted from relevant hard drives. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Natan Levi _____ Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, ore@yorku.ca.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in the study, Sport and Livelihood Programming: From Outcomes to Experiences conducted by Natan Levi and Dr. Jessica Fraser-Thomas. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____

Date _____

Participant:

Signature _____

Date _____

Principal Investigator:

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. Audio recording
 - I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

Signature _____

Date _____

Participant Name:

Check this box if you would like to receive a summary of the study findings (and please print your contact information in the space below).

If you do not check any of these boxes, you can still participate in the current study. You can also check these boxes off but decide in the future that you do not want to participate.

E-mail Address (please print): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Telephone # (or where we can leave a message): _____