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## Original Research

## The Americanization of sport for development and peace: Examining American SDP intern experiences

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### ABSTRACT

This study expands the Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) research focusing on the impact of national values and ideas on SDP program implementation. As SDP interns are instrumental in implementing many SDP programs, it is important to identify how their national values and ideas affect their work in the field. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Americans who had worked as SDP interns. Through the lens of Americanization, we examine the reproduction and distribution of values and ideas of American SDP interns working abroad. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 11 former American SDP interns to explore their perspectives and reflections on the work they carried out as American SDP interns. Throughout the interviews, American ideas rooted in neoliberalism, capitalism, and education appeared as conceptual influences that were woven into their SDP internship experience. The findings indicated that, in their role as American SDP interns, the participants were at once complicit in and resistant to reproducing inequitable power relations, constantly wrestling with personal ideologies and American sporting values that did not align with cultural and social norms of the host countries. Implications of this study emphasize the continued need for SDP analyses to identify and critically consider nation-specific values and ideas of SDP workers and their impact on the local implementation of SDP programs.

### INTRODUCTION

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) is an international movement encompassing a wide array of initiatives and programs that use sport as a vehicle for change, often with humanitarian and conflict resolution aims in an international development context (Gadai, 2019). SDP actors utilize sport, physical activity, and play to attain specific objectives outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global agenda adopted by the member states of the United Nations in 2015 to address a range of issues linked to political, social, and public health topics such as poverty, educational opportunities, and gender equity (Beutler, 2008; Darnell et al., 2019; Kidd, 2008). Numbers across the Beyond Sport Network and the institutional SDP website, sportanddev.org, indicate over 250 SDP projects originate from America, Canada, and Western Europe that implement activities domestically and have established programs abroad.

Many scholars have critiqued the field of SDP for lack of clarity in its definition, scope, and objectives (Whitley et al., 2019). Further, as SDP projects are established, organized, and implemented globally and involve a host of diverse actors, critiques have also targeted the ways in which SDP actors have imposed their norms, values, and ideas on local populations. Prior research shows the great extent to which ideologies espoused in SDP projects can be laden with sporting norms and beliefs derived from the cultures and

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norms of the countries from which the projects originate (Darnell, 2012; Guest, 2009; Hasselgård & Straume, 2015). With many disparate actors in the field, there is ambiguity in how SDP is organized and implemented (Black, 2010). Specifically, research on SDP workers' experiences includes studies looking at Canadian SDP interns (Darnell, 2012), Norwegian perspectives in the field (Hasselgård, 2015; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014), and the organizational capacity of SDP organization (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Though many SDP programs originate in America, and several studies highlight the impact of Americanization on the flow and transfer of information around the world, few academic studies distinctly concentrate on American SDP interns and their experiences through the lens of Americanization. Thus, using the lens of Americanization, the purpose of this study was to explore how American SDP interns conceptualize and reproduce American (sporting) values while interning in the SDP sector. We also ask to what extent SDP can be a carrier of cultural (sporting) values recognizable as American. Considering the ways in which the interns' work was underpinned by American beliefs and principles, we focused on the challenges the interns faced while negotiating their American-based ideals and values with those based on the local communities' culture and history.

Within the broader context of sport, scholars have examined how American ideals, systems, and corporations have influenced global sport (Galily & Sheard, 2002; Kidd, 1991; Jackson, 1994; Park, 2011). For example, Kidd (1991) illustrates that Americanization of Canadian sport has historically been characterized by the exportation of Canadian nationals to American teams and phrases such as the "American forward pass" and other associations of sporting ways to American innovations. Given the extent that American ideas have transferred into sporting cultures around the world, we find it important to examine this in SDP. We frame our analysis through the concept of Americanization, which is defined as the one-way diffusion of American ideas, customs, and capital around the world (Ritzer & Stillman, 2003). Specific to this study is how American ideas related to sport participation are promoted in the SDP sector by workers who were intimately involved with an SDP project abroad.

Using data collected from in-depth, one-on-one interviews with former SDP interns, we examine the experiences of American SDP interns bringing their beliefs, ideals, and prior knowledge to the SDP sites and the impact on their SDP internship work. We argue that a critical examination of the influence of American SDP interns and their experiences is essential in understanding how American ideals, perceptions, and (sporting) cultural ideologies

influence and become a part of SDP implementation. The importance of this paper is twofold: (1) it critically unpacks American SDP concerning the espousing of ideas and values, and (2) it provides a further yet different insight into SDP practice. We also provide further insight into the internship and volunteer experiences of many young adults in SDP, something that continually needs to be addressed (Chawansky, 2015). Thus, we add to the ongoing discussion that considers how SDP actors influence program implementation.

## AMERICANIZATION

Here, we discuss the subject of Americanization as it underpins this study. It is important to acknowledge that Americanization stems from the broader term globalization (Mendis, 2005; Ritzer & Stillman, 2003). Globalization is a transplanetary process involving a multidirectional flow of people, objects, and information, as well as the structures that create these flows (Ritzer, 2010). Narrowing globalization as a conceptual framework, Americanization is more focused on the processes and ideas formulated in American society and subsequently dispersed throughout the world (Zeitlein, 2000). Popular corporations whose widespread brand production and consumption exemplify the pervasive reach of Americanization include McDonalds and Coca-Cola (Kuisel, 2003).

Donnelly (1996) critically explains that "Americanization tends to be viewed as a one-way process in which American cultural forms, products, and meanings are imposed on other cultures at the expense of the domestic culture" (p. 242). Thus, there tends to be an element of cultural hegemony in which American products and ideas are both forced onto and consumed by locales around the world. The cultural hegemony leads to a critical examination of how American beliefs and products are transmitted around the world. As well, Americanization should be understood not as an abstract idea but rather an ongoing historical project that has promoted American characteristics, practice, and knowledge that foreign nations have adopted into their domestic activities (Zeitlein, 2000). The process of Americanization is not only concerned with tangible objects but also has stakes in the acculturation of people (Yoseloff, 1999). Hoffman (2007) argues that the process of Americanization also encompasses how people or groups adopt American culture, values, or habits. Through the process of Americanization, then, American ideals, ways of life, and social processes have the potential to transform the lives of people abroad. Broadly, American ideals have perpetuated education rooted in a capitalist and neoliberal reality (Zeitlein, 2000).

Jackson (1994) details that Americanization creates terrains of ideological struggle between American culture and particular domestic cultures, resulting in cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism involves importation processes that diffuse cultural practices, such as sport, around the world (Guttmann, 1991). Americanization can thus be understood as a form of cultural imperialism in that it involves the diffusion of American ideas and values into non-American locales and is regarded as “the semantic transformations that attend the dissemination of American cultural messages across the world” (Kroes, 1999, p. 463).

Americanization is supported by the extent to which local cultures passively absorb powerful cultural images, beliefs, and traditions linked to American social life (Giulianotti, 2005). Houlihan (1994) argues that the problem with Americanization occurs when companies (i.e., sport teams/organizations) lead other cultures to assimilate to outside (American) influences. As a result, Americanization is implicated in modernization and development processes by which American-centric ideologies permeate or blend into the international landscape (Wagner, 1990). The influence of the practices and ideologies of American sports, whether through sport business practices or style of play, has had an impact on sporting cultures abroad.

Americanization imposes the promotion and utilization of American knowledge and ideals in sport cultures. Sport, specifically, can be seen as more Americanized than areas like music and film due to how sport is presented through products, services, and ideas (Donnelly, 1996). That is, sport is a significant cultural vehicle by which the impact of Americanization is evident in the diffusion of American experiences, ideas, and values in sport cultures around the world. Darnell et al. (2019) acknowledge that American interventions and programs have dominated an SDP narrative from colonial movements to current day practice. Hence, SDP can be a place where American ideas may be transferred and dispersed. In turn, critical attention is needed to what these ideas are, how they are transferred, and if they are accepted or resisted during implementation.

### **Americanization in Sport**

From a theoretical perspective, there has been little research applying an Americanization framework to SDP. However, there has been substantial research analyzing the American influences on sporting cultures worldwide, including, for example, Canada (Kidd, 1991) and Australia (McKay & Miller, 1991).

Americanization in global sporting contexts can be viewed as a process that creates and reproduces American-centric

ideologies that have the potential to overtake and eclipse local sporting ideas. In recent years, the Americanization thesis has been used to critically examine the current space of English Premier League soccer, focusing, for example, on the negative impact of corporate businesses on the ways the game is played and the movement of bodies across global borders (Williams & Hopkins, 2011). Moreover, Hoehn et al. (1999) acknowledge how European football leagues have examined and compared their systems to that of American sports leagues. Conflict emerges as European leagues shift their organizational practices to adapt to an American professional sports model. The organization and presentation of American sports continue to influence sport systems around the world. Recently, Backman and Carlsson (2020) unpacked Americanization in Swedish Hockey culture and commercial production. Through a historical analysis, the authors acknowledged how the conceptualization, practice, and presentation of Swedish Hockey were influenced by an “American Way” of commercialization. What becomes apparent from their depiction is that Swedish hockey can be Americanized through the manifestation of market-driven commercial efforts and initiatives. In turn, the domestic Swedish Hockey League becomes more culturally aligned and resembles the American-dominated National Hockey League. Thus, examining the American sport system and its values, such as individual governing bodies and commercial profit, provides insight into American influence in global sport.

The influence of American cultural and political practice has the potential to shape international sporting dynamics. Park (2011) argues that the teaching of American baseball to the citizens of Puerto Rico created space for aspects of American sport and physical activity (e.g., YMCA creation) to enter and influence Puerto Ricans during the early 1900s. The introduction of American sports was not merely constrained to ideological processes of Americanization, but the coaches and teachers who brought sport with them were complicit agents of colonialism (Park, 2011). In this instance, Americanization becomes a colonial practice in sport that influences, and unevenly transforms, local sporting practices.

Americanization also represents and reproduces “American capitalist hegemony” within sport (Kidd, 1991; Jackson, 1994). Americanization of sport ideologies occurs when ideologies intertwined with American political, social, and cultural life take form in other nations. In response to the widespread influence of American sporting ideologies on the global sporting landscape, Kidd (1991) asks, “How can sports foster socially responsible personal growth and community when outsiders determine the dominant

meanings and forms of activities?" (p. 179). In other words, it is important to consider that imposing American sporting ideologies (and their corollary, capitalist hegemony) on other nations, shifts the global power dynamics, reducing the voice and authority of local communities (Kidd, 1991).

In much the same way as the American sporting industry has infiltrated other nations' sporting culture, American SDP volunteers and interns abroad may import and infuse American ideals into local communities. For example, historically, American ambitions in using sport culturally and politically have played a significant role in driving Americanization in countries such as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam (Darnell et al., 2019). With a focus on Americanization in general and American values and ideas that shape SDP work in particular, in this study we bring attention to the experiences of Americans who had worked as SDP interns in order to continue a nuanced discussion of SDP practitioners.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study is situated in literature that critically examines how SDP practice is influenced by experiences and values of SDP interns from global North countries (see Darnell, 2012). Scholars have explored how interns and volunteers encountered SDP spaces (see Darnell 2011, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). The field of SDP, and thus the related literature, does not include a standard set of terms and labels; rather, there are many different labels that researchers and practitioners employ, such as sport-for-development (SFD) or sport-and-development (Black, 2010; Hartman & Kwauk, 2011). For this study we chose to use SDP, which is often employed as an umbrella term within research and scholarship in this area. Exploring how SDP practitioners engage with the field, we discuss the findings, limitations, and gaps in prior research below.

### Postcolonial Tendencies in SDP

Critical scholars have examined SDP through a postcolonial framework, drawing on discussions that position SDP as an extension of colonial legacies (Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Hayhurst, 2014; Mwaanga & Banda, 2014; Tiessen, 2011) as well as how these legacies espouse neoliberal ideals and values (Forde, 2014; Hayhurst, 2009; Kwauk, 2014; Samie et al., 2015). Hayhurst (2009) explains that postcolonialism in SDP refers to the continued effect of colonial practices in developing nations. Complementary research by Darnell (2010) exemplifies how neoliberal discourse perpetuated by SDP workers from the Global North engenders their ideas about how sport can best serve participants. Scholars have thus been highly critical of SDP

programs, which often result in the displacement of domestic knowledge with development practices and ideologies derived from Global North countries, while placing the onus of development on the host country. Concerning program implementation, for example, Mwaanga and Banda (2014) identify the postcolonial tendencies of SDP, whereby SDP workers disempower local communities while privileging the imported practices and associated values and ideas of the SDP organizations. Black (2010) and Levermore (2011) argue that doing SDP work in this way is a top-down process, whereby outsiders enter what they consider marginalized areas to enforce programs for intended beneficiaries.

An examination of SDP through a postcolonial framework shows that though SDP participants may gain valuable experiences and skills, these are often aligned with neoliberal ideologies that direct participants to be more self-manageable and reliant (Hayhurst, 2014). The institution of SDP often enables and promotes the social reproduction of neocolonial morals, neoliberal ideologies, and the privilege and dominance of SDP workers (Darnell, 2014). Thus, what resonates in SDP implementation, mainly when organized by Global North actors, is a societal discourse espousing goals and ideals dictated by SDP organizations. For example, Hasselgård (2015) and Hasselgård and Straume (2015) analyzed how Norwegian SDP narratives permeated Africa-focused projects, often emphasizing Norwegian development discourses. These practices can be harmful on many accounts, especially when the project is viewed as what Tiessen (2011) describes as a "civilizing mission," in which SDP actors impose their knowledge on local communities, believing that their intentions are good willed.

A postcolonial framework has been especially instructive for scholars that have interviewed SFD workers (Darnell, 2010; Hayhurst, 2014) and drawn out the inherent, though at times inadvertent, ways staff members produce postcolonial knowledge (Darnell, 2010, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014). More attention is needed to identify further how SDP projects are adopting colonizing approaches, as this will provide further insight into the global flows of ideas, values, and practices (Kay, 2009). In the current study, we acknowledge the critical discourse in SDP and further critique the field by elaborating on the intersections of American values, ideas and practices in SDP implementation.

### Volunteering in the Sport for Development and Peace Sector

As the field of SDP has expanded, so has the critical academic research on SDP, focusing on its impact, actors,

practices, and outcomes (Gadais, 2019). While there is a substantial body of research focused on the implementation and outcomes of SDP programs (see, in particular, Darnell, 2012; Hayhurst et al., 2016; Schulenkorf et al., 2014), there is a dearth of research on the experiences of SDP workers, including SDP managers, volunteers, and interns (Chawansky, 2015; Manley et al. 2014, Svennson et al., 2016). Understanding the experiences of SDP workers is vital in so far as the social and cultural impact of SDP programs cannot be separated from the perspectives and beliefs of the workers who develop, implement, and assess the programs (Darnell, 2012; Hasselgård, 2015; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014).

With many SDP institutions hailing from the Global North, a major criticism of these programs targets the people involved in the delivery of SDP, ranging from organizational leaders and government officers to interns (Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2007; Darnell, 2010, 2012; Giulianotti et al, 2016; Hayhurst, 2009; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010; Jackson & Haigh, 2008). A common issue is that having been raised and educated in the Global North, a person originating from America or Canada often assumes an element of privilege and knowledge (Darnell, 2007; Forde, 2013).

When young people from countries such as America and Canada embark on SDP volunteer and internship opportunities, they assume influential roles as practitioners and points of knowledge for these programs in developing countries (Darnell, 2012; Welty-Peachey et al., 2014, 2015). As these groups of SDP workers enter countries that are less developed compared to their homes, preconceived knowledge can negatively affect the implementation of SDP programs. Though the hierarchal positioning of ideas and beliefs is often unintentional, it nonetheless has the power to significantly shape one's experiences. For example, previous research on SDP volunteers and interns found problematic elements related to racial ideologies (Darnell, 2007, 2010), power relationships (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), and ethical challenges (Darnell, 2012), and further, that SDP often reinforced a dominant approach, wherein sport reproduced and socialized unequal power relationships and social hierarchy (Hartman & Kwauk, 2011).

Darnell et al. (2018) argue that more attention needs to be paid to analyses of socialization and the production of SDP. The majority of the SDP workers, including program staff, volunteers, and donors, are often trained in Global North countries before traveling to the host locations where SDP projects are implemented. Consequently, much SDP work is heavily influenced by beliefs and value systems that stem

from Global North countries such as America, Canada, and Norway (Darnell, 2012; Guest, 2009; Straume & Hasselgård, 2014). As the number of SDP programs continues to grow and the influence of the SDP sector expands, it would be instructive to examine and learn more about how SDP is delivered through projects established in the Global North (Hasselgård, 2015) and to contextualize and understand the work of SDP from the perspectives of those who implement the programs.

Volunteers and interns fill many roles and provide a significant amount of labor in order to run SDP programs. As an integral part of SDP organization and implementation, their actions have the potential to greatly impact the communities they are charged to work in; yet, the extent and the nature of the impact depends on their ability to recognize and negotiate tensions that arise from cultural differences with the host communities. Educational backgrounds and positions of privilege influence and infiltrate the experiences of Global North interns who espouse their sporting ideologies and experiences within their SDP work (Darnell, 2010; Tiessen, 2011; Welty-Peachey et al., 2018). Thus, just as studies on SDP discourses from Canadian and Norwegian contexts have been examined by Darnell (2012) and Hasselgård (2015) and Straume & Hasselgård (2014), respectively, we engage in a theoretical exploration of SDP from an American context, and more specifically as it is embedded in Americanization processes, to provide further critical insight into how SDP actors are implementing programs.

## METHODS

In the current study, we use the lens of Americanization to examine the ways in which SDP interns acted as carriers of American-influenced practices, beliefs, and values to their host countries. To investigate the experiences of Americans who had formerly interned for an SDP organization, the primary researcher (first author) conducted a basic qualitative inquiry (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) utilizing semistructured interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) consider basic qualitative inquiry as an approach to research that does not have a direct type of theoretical underpinning (i.e., ethnography or phenomenology) but rather is rooted in a constructivist paradigm where researchers are concerned with how people understand their experiences in a particular setting. Below we provide further details of our methodological process.

## SDP Organizations and Participants

Participants were recruited from two American SDP organizations. Institutional Review Board (Ethics

Committee) approval was obtained by the authors' academic institution. To protect the participants' confidentiality, we assigned each participant a pseudonym and likewise used fictional names for the organizations. The fictional names represent the focus of the organization and are used here to make a distinction between the two. African Education and Sport (AES) primarily aims to address HIV/AIDS education in African countries (e.g., South Africa), while Youth Development and Sport (YDS) focuses on fostering youth development in populations that are underserved in developing countries in Africa and Latin America (e.g., Uganda and Nicaragua). Both organizations use soccer (Association Football) as the vehicle by which they implement their educational program.

A total of 11 former American SDP interns participated in the research. Out of the 11 interns interviewed, five were female and six were male. All participants in the research characterized themselves as White American. Although a more ethnically or racially diverse group was preferred and would have provided an important point of comparison, these were the only participants who responded to the call for participants. The whiteness of the participants is not insignificant, particularly as they all were assigned to locations where their whiteness would stand out. The participants' lack of diversity is also particularly relevant and telling of their socioeconomic status because they all had to be financially independent during their time as interns. The financial commitment is significant and thus creates a barrier to entry for those of lower socioeconomic status who may not be able to afford the cost. For example, some SDP organizations suggest that interns should be able to support themselves with an estimated \$10,000 USD to cover living expenses. While it was beyond the scope of this study to explicitly unpack the racialized or gendered positions of the participants, we acknowledge that intersections of race, class, and gender would have influenced how the participants behaved in the field, and perhaps more significant, how the local communities reacted to them. This is a limitation to the current study and warrants further investigation.

All 11 participants had graduated from a four-year university, and one participant had a graduate degree. Four participants had worked professionally before their internship, whereas the other seven started their SDP internships the summer immediately following university graduation. The time the participants interned abroad ranged from eight months to 14 months. Moreover, of the 11 participants, at the time of the interviews, 10 were one year removed from their internship experience, while one was two years removed. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 32 years old. All the participants either grew up

playing soccer or grew up highly interested in the sport and continued involvement in the sport as adults; eight played soccer on their respective university teams, while the other three played recreationally. Of note, out of all 11 participants, 10 did not know about the field of SDP before their internship experience.

### Data Collection

The primary investigator initially sent emails to the AES and YDS internship coordinators, describing the study purpose and seeking permission to interview former interns. Once permission was granted, the internship coordinators spoke with former interns and collected email contacts for those willing to participate. The coordinator shared the list of interested participants with the researchers. An email was then sent to the potential participants to request an interview and 11 responded. This email exchange also allowed the primary investigator to build rapport with each participant via email correspondence by introducing himself, gauging participants' willingness to be interviewed, and laying a foundation for eventual one-on-one interviews.

The primary investigator conducted one-on-one interviews with nine participants via Skype and two in person. An interview guide was created focusing on the experiences of American SDP experiences while they were in the field. Specifically, we drew on the work of Darnell (2010, 2011, 2012) and Tiessen (2011), whose research focuses on the volunteer SDP experience. For this study, we were concerned about narratives and language that delves into the American SDP internship experience. The guide was specific to the values and experiences of working as an American SDP intern. Using this interview guide, the primary researcher conducted all 11 interviews, which lasted between 45 to 120 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The primary investigator transcribed the interviews verbatim and, using thematic analysis, coded the data to inductively determine common themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Gratton and Jones (2004) define the act of coding data to be "the organization of raw data into conceptual categories" (p. 219). The steps described by Cote et al. (1993) include a coding system that systematically identifies themes from the data by creating tags, which "aims to produce a set of concepts which adequately represent the information included in the interview transcripts" (p. 130). Following the steps outlined by Gratton and Jones (2004) and Cote et al. (1993), transcripts were coded in a step-by-step process as follows: (1) carefully read the data thoroughly; (2) assign statements

relevant to the research question a code; (3) add on other relevant statements to each respected code; (4) look for patterns of relevance; (5) read through raw data that help detail the coded themes (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

The research team worked together to help ensure the credibility of the data using member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each participant was provided a copy of their interview transcript and was invited to provide feedback. This process allowed the participants to provide clarification or comments on their responses. The primary investigator also employed the process of peer debriefing with the second author to enhance the credibility of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define peer debriefing as a process where a researcher works with a peer established in research and is impartial to the present study. The purpose of peer debriefing is to help check for inconsistencies in the study, including in the data analysis, identify areas possibly impacted by bias, and ensure conclusions are sufficiently and appropriately supported by the data. Throughout the research process, the primary investigator worked closely with the second author in the peer debrief process to review potential alternate viewpoints and interpretations, points of bias, and thematic possibilities.

## RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine how SDP can be a place where interns carry, and subsequently diffuse, American ideas and values to the locales in which they are stationed. The responses of the SDP interns showed how cultural and social influences contributed to various forms of Americanization in the implementation of SDP programs. From the interview data, we identified three major themes: (1) cultural tensions in the SDP field, (2) American values and ideas in SDP, and (3) how the idea of sustainability was possibly laden with American values and ideas. While these themes speak to the participants' cultural ideals in SDP, we also highlight instances whereby the participants learned valuable lessons from the tensions they encountered and subsequently attempted to adjust their approach in the field.

### Cultural Tensions in the SDP Field

As the participants worked to implement SDP programs in the host country, they ran into many difficulties that stemmed from cultural tensions with the local communities. A common source of tension for the American interns was the challenge of entering a foreign country without having

had much, if any, cultural, historical, or political education about that area or the local customs, ideals, or practices. The participants explained that differences between American culture and their host country's culture created tensions when they tried to implement programs; the tensions became most evident when they attempted to incorporate American ideas into the local reality. The cultural exchange pitted American culture against the local culture, and the lack of adequate knowledge about local understandings and customs created more challenges for the interns (and the local population). Daniel gave a vivid account of his experience dealing with cultural tensions, commenting on the difficulties he encountered at the beginning of his internship. Specifically, Daniel tried to establish a youth center, an American-specific institution, for children to attend after school in Uganda, where the norm was for children to return home after school. He explained,

*It was difficult because we would try to, you know, respect the cultural differences as much as possible, but to an extent, it's almost that the cultural differences were the reasons for, you know, we are trying to break the cultural differences. So, trying to, you know go up against the idea that kids should be at home doing work all the time. Which, I mean obviously they need it, the culture within the family, they need it there, but we were trying to give the idea that kids were more than just work hands and should be able to go to you know, an after school program, which is a concept that nobody has any idea. The whole idea of a youth center and being somewhere after school as opposed to going straight home and doing work right away, like that concept, just did not make sense to a lot of the locals.*

Daniel believed that establishing a youth center, a concept he learned through his American upbringing, would be a valuable space for children to be active and creative. Similar to Park's (2011) analysis of how the American influence of a YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in Puerto Rico was an act of implementing American ideology, Daniel's desire to create a youth center was based on producing and enforcing an American cultural product. Since he had had positive experiences in youth centers during his American childhood, he brought those memories to his internship placement. He thought establishing a youth center would be a great way to create a space for youth development. However, Daniel encountered tension with local values where young people may need to assist with familial duties. The idea of having children go to a youth center after school instead of going home seemed absurd to the local community and was challenged, which, as a result, created this cultural tension.



Rachel also expressed the pushback she experienced when she tried to bring in certain cultural ideologies that were not compatible with the local culture:

*There were definitely times in meetings with our coaches when we were trying to figure out how to go about things, and they'd be like, no, we don't do it like that here, that's not the way we do it. And so, we would have to kind of be like, well, what if we just tried it or think about it and be like maybe this isn't going to work here right now. Or this, there was definitely a lot of trial and error. There was a lot of conversation, communication, and a lot of times, we had to try it differently or not try it all and, so yeah, it was definitely challenging to balance.*

Illustrated in the quote is how Rachel, when meeting with coaches, possibly did not perceive how her ideas created friction. Similar to Darnell's (2011) study, which found that participants' positive sport histories and knowledge of sport motivated their SDP experience, Rachel seemed to rely on her skills and knowledge when working in SDP settings. In turn, a negotiation occurs where trial and error of ideas and practices underpins SDP practices. That is, Rachel "trying it differently" was rooted in ideals that were not compatible with the local way of life. This tension, however, indicates a degree of ideological or cultural naivety that she brought with her from her background.

When discussing her experience dealing with the way of life in South Africa, Amanda was understanding of the culture. However, she was still conflicted about what she experienced, as the local community's lifestyle was so different from what she had experienced in her American upbringing. In particular, Amanda was shocked by the gendered behavior that she saw during her internship experience. She commented,

*But I mean, it's also completely cultural, you know what I mean? Like a lot the stuff we preach is based off of American values that we're trying to adapt because they are, in my opinion correct. Like you shouldn't be with someone who is still in high school if you're a grown up. Right. Like we know that. And that's so common there that at first I was like what do you mean you're dating a 16-year-old? You're 25! But I got very desensitized after a while because that's, I mean, that's what happens.*

Amanda expressed her surprise and disapproval of the age difference between two people who were dating. Even more, she situated her disapproval in her American values regarding dating where she believes it is not appropriate for a 16-year-old to date a 25-year-old. From this quote, analysis yields insight into what Kidd (1991) would portray

as American cultural values shaped Amanda's perceptions of dating. Importantly and critically, it was Amanda's cultural values that needed to shift about how the body is seen for her to be "desensitized" and continue her SDP work (see also Darnell, 2010).

The interns consistently relayed their concern about how the local culture and ideas needed to change and how their own American ideas mostly determined their efforts toward change. Thus, as the interns entered South Africa, Uganda, or Nicaragua and tried to implement their SDP projects, they were faced with many challenging instances of cultural tension where they had to negotiate the differences between their own values and beliefs and those of the host community. The cultural tensions that the interns faced stemmed from their lack of understanding not only of the host country and the people they were working with but also of their own lived experiences in America. The clash of cultures was pivotal in how the participants were treated and how they reacted to the various situations they encountered throughout their internship.

### American Ideas and Values in SDP

When drawing on American perspectives that influenced their experiences, the participants stated that they often faced conflict in how their values correlated to the values of the people in locale where they worked. For example, the participants commonly expressed throughout the interviews that they felt American ideas of youth development or HIV/AIDS education could work if the local community would allow it; however, the participants spoke to how their ideas were not openly received. In prioritizing their own ideas ahead of those of the local cultures, the interns were enforcing processes of Americanization in the local communities. Through their American education, they had learned that HIV/AIDS was a serious issue, and as a result, they knew it was important to take measures to protect oneself to prevent contracting the virus. However, in their view, the severity of the issue was not always shared by members of the local community. Natalie elaborated on how she was challenged in this situation:

*I think coming from an American perspective it's very easy to be like, "I don't understand why you wouldn't avoid HIV. Like, I wouldn't understand why it would be that hard for you to avoid HIV?" Whereas I think that local implementers see every day the pressures that the people have on them and can identify.*

Natalie's understanding of HIV/AIDS as an issue that needed to be prevented was widespread, but that was due to her American cultural ideas about the issue. She had never

experienced HIV/AIDS education in a different culture and did not know how people in Uganda approached the issue. Thus, the dominant understanding of HIV/AIDS education guides how Natalie sees responsible growth through an American perspective (see Kidd, 1991).

Rachel also acknowledged that American ideas differed from those where she interned. When Rachel first started to implement a girls' soccer program in Nicaragua, it became apparent that the way she learned to value soccer was not applicable in her host community. For example, though she was afforded many resources in America as a female soccer player, those same resources were not afforded to the young girls of Nicaragua. In Rachel's interview, she spoke of how an American neoliberal idea that hard work will lead to reaching high levels of sport was not the same in Nicaragua:

*I guess the culture of working hard in America and that striving because you have the opportunity to play in college, to play professional. You have these avenues. There, you don't have those outlets, so it's hard to push girls the same way that you were pushed knowing that that final goal or that goal to strive for anyway doesn't exactly exist in terms of logistics and, you know, availability.*

Rachel's experience playing soccer in America taught her that if she worked hard, she could excel and reach her goal of playing collegiate soccer. Rachel's experience of hard work in sport reflected a neoliberal value that she learned in America, but this was not a value that was easily reproduced in the culture of her SDP internship where a lack of resources was a real barrier to development in the local context (Darnell, 2010). This is similar to Hayhurst's findings (2014), which suggests that emphasizing the hard work required to be a scholarship college athlete reinforces a neoliberal value that does not resonate with many cultures, partly because athletic scholarships do not exist globally. Rachel's experiences as a young girl playing soccer in America afforded her many opportunities, but for her to teach the young girls in Uganda using that mindset invoked a level of Americanization that was incompatible with local values, as opposed to allowing the young girls to create their own ideas and meanings of playing sport (Kidd, 1991).

The SDP interns also expressed how their American values and ideas never seemed to translate into SDP program implementation. Similar to Rachel, Amanda expressed that the fast-paced and efficient American work ethic was not necessarily appropriate for the YDS program implementation. Instead, Amanda revealed that it might have been more helpful to take a step back and go with the

flow:

*A lot of issues come when, like, were really—like, Americans are like super efficient and work really hard, especially unpaid interns that want to do the best, but sometimes kind of like going with the flow and taking a back seat and can be more helpful than rewriting the entire system and I'm speaking—I'm being very vague, but I think that's a huge problem that a lot of interns have they're trying to do too much instead of just being there to help.*

The idea of hard work and pushing oneself that is represented in American culture as expressed by Rachel and Amanda was different in the Latin American and African cultures in which their SDP internships took place. That is not to say the concept of hard work did not exist, but the value of hard work and what it represents may differ and may not resonate with the values of the participants. Therefore, American conceptions such as hard work as it is defined explicitly within American sport may contrast significantly with conceptions of hard work found in other cultural contexts.

In this study, the interns brought preconceived American ideas to their internship sites and into their internship duties. Though perhaps not intentional, the interns' initial lack of awareness and reflection of their personal ideas opened the door for Americanization discourse to infiltrate their experiences unchecked. To further support this point, Elizabeth described her experience of how an American idea of making money differed from the local perspective of monetary support for everyday costs. She commented,

*I mean the experience really spoke to the human condition that people are so resilient and do what they need to do to get to a goal. So, in America, it's blown up to an extreme. Right? I got to make the most money and do what I got to do, however. Whereas in the countries, or the countries we were, in Uganda, it's you know, maybe the goal is to make money to have dinner for that night which a lot of times wasn't achievable, so it's the most humbling experience to look back on.*

In line with findings of Darnell's (2010) bio-pedagogy focused study on SDP interns, Elizabeth's quote highlights how her experiences were shaped by having to negotiate her ideas with the cultural and political landscape of Uganda. For example, Elizabeth contrasts the American ideals centered on making money to live a luxurious life to the view of making money in Uganda, which was about having enough to survive day by day. Even as Elizabeth may have contemplated these differences, her values still resonated in her experience during her time as an intern.

While the participants considered how their experiences may not have aligned with the realities of their host communities, the American values and ideas played a significant role in guiding their outlook. Hence, exploring the values and ideas that the participants carried with them provides insight into how the participants viewed themselves in relation to their SDP host sites.

### **Sustainability: Local Involvement and Buy-in**

The complex relationship that resulted from the meeting of American culture and local culture led to a critical discussion about which culture's ideas were needed most to create a sustainable SDP program. In time, the interns realized the importance of appreciating the local people and acknowledging local culture in their SDP internships. Eventually, they realized that the viability and sustainability of the program were going to depend on both outside American ideals as well as much-needed local recognition.

Daniel was one of the first to implement an SDP program for YDS, a relatively new organization in Uganda. Due to the relative newness of the SDP organization, he had difficulty convincing the local community to participate in the program. In order for Daniel to get his SDP program started, he had to convince a few locals to buy into his program so that they could reach out to the rest of the community. It was only when local coaches and staff were brought in that community involvement improved. Daniel expressed his experience of having local staff and coaches involved in programming:

*Oh, yea for sure, I mean, if you don't . . . you can't have long term, you can't support having just foreign volunteers coming and doing all the work because, like I said, if you don't get any help from the outside and if you get the people that can try to convince the locals. Like, I can try and tell the locals whatever I want. They're not going to believe me though unless a local person or another Ugandan person was saying, "No, he's right, this will work, try this, this is why he's doing it, your kids will help out or this will help your kids out this way."*

All of the participants spoke about how it was necessary to implement programs that incorporated people from the community in order to achieve sustainability. However, from a critical perspective, when discussing sustainability as a fundamental goal, one must be aware of how various ideas, such as American ones, can potentially spread and be implicated in colonial practices. Much like Straume and Steen-Johnsen (2012), who discussed SDP sustainability in Tanzania, caution must be paid to how external practitioners may control projects and prevent local

ownership. Thus, if sustainability does occur, it may occur with lineages to external ideas, values, and practices.

In Ian's interview, he spoke at great length about the importance of sustainability and how the future of SDP programs lies entirely with the people of the local community. Ian explained his reason for involving the local community in establishing sustainability in two straightforward ways:

*Then as we were there longer, we realized that it's more important for the future of the program if the local staff were the ones that are leading the trainings everyday and picking up these skills of different skills to use and how to engage with the kids, give the kids positive reinforcement. . . I think this goes back to what we were saying when we were talking about the training of local coaches. I think however much you do that and work with local people that are, you're not just the youth participants, but local partners that are going to carry on your program; however much you do that and successfully you train and work with these people is going to determine the success of the program.*

During his internship experience, Ian came to realize the significant role local staff played in programming. Yet it seems Ian, along with other interns, did not acknowledge their part in the implicit diffusion of American cultural practices into the programs. When discussing sustainability as an important goal, the interns did not show much, if any, awareness of how foreign (i.e., American) ideas can spread to achieve this idea of sustainability. By acknowledging this nuance regarding sustainability, and returning to the diffusion of American values and practices, caution is warranted to how sustainability is defined and influenced by the participants' values (Straume & Steen-Johnsen, 2012).

Connecting to Darnell's (2011) finding that Canadian SDP interns relied on their knowledge and skills in their SDP relations, the participants believed their knowledge was important to share to help the program; however, it was staff from the local community who were actually teaching the community. Thus, the local coaches were in charge of teaching the local communities the ideas taught to them by the American SDP interns. In this manner, Americanization can be seen as part of the community sustainability plans as the SDP interns reproduced and disseminated American teachings throughout the local community. For example, values related to the outcomes guaranteed by hard work, negative perceptions about age gaps in dating, and the potential possibilities that come with creating a youth center can be seen as values that the participants in this study carried. As the SDP workers carried out sustainability

plans, they reproduced American ideals and values, participating in processes of cultural imperialism by way of Americanization (Donnelly, 1996). The SDP interns felt a result of their program implementation needed to be the development of a self-sustaining program led by the local leaders despite the annual turnover of interns. Nevertheless, even in a sustained program, the lasting impact of the American SDP workers, with their American teachings and ideas, could leave a lasting impact.

### Summary

Ultimately, the data presented highlight that the participants were likely culpable in their diffusion of American ideals, values and experiences. That is, as we unpack the data, attention is warranted to if or how the participants were aware of their culpability in reinforcing certain American ideals and neoliberal ethics. It is difficult to ascertain such a direct connection; however, the data illustrates the ways in which the participants referred to American ideals and values. Moreover, in relation to the Americanized neoliberal work ethic presented, we recognize that the participants possibly embarked on their SDP internships as ways to build their resumes to build their sociocultural profiles with peers and potential employers. Considering this sociocultural currency, there is an underpinning of neoliberalism and American approach to life that permeated the participants' initiation, participation, and obligation toward SDP work. Thus, it is important to consider that while the participants may not have sought to dominate their internships with their ideas and experiences, their experiences working in the field were likely underpinned by them.

Whether it was negotiating cultural tensions, attempting to bring American concepts into the local culture, or convincing local people how to transform regarding SDP sustainability, the expectations of culture were pivotal in how the SDP workers approached their internship. Although, despite the influence of the SDP interns on the host communities, the interviews still showcased their appreciation of local culture. It was apparent that there was conflict when the participants wanted or believed a situation should be handled a certain way, such as HIV/AIDS education, but they understood that they had to adjust to the cultural context. Of note, the SDP interns showed they were able to learn and comprehend the importance of local knowledge and life during their SDP experience. However, in line with Darnell (2010, 2011), their work in SDP implementation was still guided by a moral imperative that conflicted with their host communities' approach to life.

### DISCUSSION

Applying the framework of Americanization, critically acknowledging the one-way influence of American values and practices in sport (Donnelly, 1996), this study highlights the problematic situations American interns introduced as they attempted to carry out their SDP work guided by American-learned values and beliefs that often conflicted with those of the host populations. The experiences of the participants who carried American sporting ideas and practices to their internship sites resemble the descriptions presented in the historical SDP analysis by Darnell et al. (2019). For example, in the current study, pursuing the goal of creating a youth center and relying on American perspectives of education when implementing SDP programs, draw similarities to how sport was used to bring American influence in the Philippines or Guam in the early 1900s. The conception of SDP through an American lens produced an American narrative that influenced implementation. Critical attention to such processes in SDP sheds light on the American expansionism rooted in sporting practices.

Aligned with Darnell (2012) and Straume and Hasselgård (2014), this study exposes various similarities. In particular, American sporting discourses dominated how the participants thought about and approached their internships. For example, it became clear that American ideas and institutions such as youth centers and hard work resembled neoliberal practice (see Darnell, 2014; Hayhurst, 2014). An important point is that neoliberalism, and the idea that hard work and being resilient yields desired outcomes, is reinforced as an appropriate approach to overcome obstacles. This is problematic because reinforcing and attempting to reproduce this neoliberal value fails to account for broader social, political, and cultural implications that create inequitable spaces (Hayhurst, 2014).

Another concern is the uncertainty regarding who has the power to define SDP and the goals, values, and policies that go along with a project's implementation of SDP (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012). For example, both Straume and Steen-Johnsen (2012) and Straume and Hasselgård (2014) highlight that SDP was viewed through a Norwegian Sports for All model, neglecting any other knowledge of SDP (e.g., from Zimbabwe) in the application of SDP activities and programs. Considering the difference between Norwegian sports and American sports, what arises is the divergent and conflicting ideas and values that permeate SDP (and these are only two countries). Guest (2009) described that SDP is rooted in the different views, expectations, and practices people have of sport and

physical activity. In many ways, findings from this study extend the needed conversations of knowledge and power in SDP implementation, and perhaps more important, it considers different values and ideas that complement and diverge from previous research.

It would be of particular interest to further elaborate on the values and ideas that are globally transferred. Specifically, moving way from Global North implementation toward more continental or South to South SDP exploration (Darnell & Huish, 2015). For example, research on Korean SDP work in Southeast Asia may be promising to compare, contextualize, and understand further the various cultural (sporting) practices in SDP implementation (see Na & Dallaire, 2016).

Practically, while organizations continue to send volunteers or interns that are young, recent university graduates, and, often come from privileged backgrounds, program managers and workers would benefit from identifying and considering the impact of their individual background and prior experiences while working to attract a more diverse pool of applicants. Thus, a future research suggestion we recommend is to examine directly if former SDP interns or volunteers are actually aware of their role in reproducing and reinforcing certain values and ideals. For example, understanding that interns may embark on their placements shortly after university, they may be intrigued by SDP work as a way to have global experiences without considering their role in producing relations of power. The importance of engaging in research that critically examines the use of interns or volunteers in SDP work is especially important for education and training. If volunteers and interns from the Global North continue to offer their services in SDP programs around the world, SDP organizations need to develop ways to educate their interns better to be reflective about their biases and culturally ingrained ideas. These sorts of opportunities could potentially open avenues for productive, reflexive, critical conversations between all actors in the SDP context.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we examined the experiences of former American SDP interns, revealing how processes of Americanization are embedded in the implementation of American SDP programs. Extending postcolonial and neoliberal critique of SDP practice, this study provides a critical examination of the role and impact of American SDP interns, providing insight into how young adults from America work within the context of SDP. SDP is a space that is not immune to processes of Americanization, which can have a far-reaching impact on target communities. In

this study, we observed specific ways in which participants tried to incorporate American ideas and beliefs into their SDP internship work, and further, how they variably considered the ideas and the culture of the local community once they ran into program implementation issues. But, overall, even as they negotiated the cultural conflicts, the interns were complicit in reproducing and disseminating American teachings throughout the local community, thus becoming key players in the broader problems associated with Americanization. If SDP projects continue to emerge, nondomestic practitioners will need to consider what knowledge they bring and how they implement their values. In turn, critical SDP research and workers in the field have an opportunity to meet and discuss this tension.

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