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To cite this article: Robyn Smith, Madison Danford, Simon C. Darnell, Maria Joaquina Lima Larrazabal & Mahamat Abdellatif (2021) 'Like, what even is a podcast?' Approaching sport-for-development youth participatory action research through digital methodologies, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13:1, 128-145, DOI: [10.1080/2159676X.2020.1836515](https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2020.1836515)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2020.1836515>



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Published online: 11 Nov 2020.



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‘Like, what even is a podcast?’ Approaching sport-for-development youth participatory action research through digital methodologies

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports findings from a participatory-based study with racialised newcomer youth in Toronto that utilised digital methodologies – specifically the act of podcasting – to explore connections between sport and social development. The paper examines the complex, and sometimes contradictory, relationships between participatory research and digital technologies when examining the social meanings of sport and physical activity for youth. The main argument is that despite important challenges and limitations, employing digital technologies as a form of participatory research can provide specific opportunities to (co)produce knowledge and experiences about sport and social development that may not be available or achievable within a traditional research framework. These findings are used to discuss future issues and questions around the use of participatory research approaches in the field of sport for development.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 July 2020

Accepted 21 September 2020

KEYWORDS

Participatory action research; youth; immigrant; sport for development; podcasts; digital methodologies

Introduction

Sport-for-development (SfD) refers to ‘the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialisation 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 and Welty Peachey 2011, p. 311). Recently, the field of SfD has seen calls to embrace innovative, post-colonial, and/or participatory research methodologies when trying to understand the experiences of participants in SfD programmes, particularly youth (see Darnell and Hayhurst 2011; Hayhurst, Giles, and Whitney 2015; Hayhurst 2017; Spaaij et al. 2018 among others). These calls have sometimes positioned Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a way to involve participants within the design and implementation of SfD research, and to challenge traditional ways of representing participants’ stories (see Darnell and Hayhurst 2011).

Specifically, PAR in SfD has been theorised as a way to enhance understandings of sport within the social lives of young people, challenge hegemonic forms of knowledge production, and increase the relevance of the research findings for participants, as well as for practitioners, policy makers, and even general audiences (see Spaaij et al. 2018; Darnell and Hayhurst 2011). At the same time, PAR in

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SfD has been critiqued for falling short of full participation of all stakeholders, actual shifts in power, or legitimate reflexivity (Spaaij et al. 2018). In turn, despite increased recognition of digital methods in participatory research (see Gubrium 2009; Gubrium and Harper 2013; Gubrium, Harper & Otanez, 2015) to date little attention has been paid to the place of digital technologies or methodologies when using PAR in the specific context of SfD.

Against this backdrop, this paper reports findings from a participatory-based study with 'racialised newcomer youth' in Toronto that utilised digital methodologies – specifically the act of podcasting – to explore connections between sport and social development. We use the term 'racialised newcomer youth' in this paper for several reasons. First and foremost, it reflects how the co-researchers in the project identified themselves throughout the research process. The term also aligns with the Government of Canada's definition of 'newcomers' as any landed immigrants who have been granted permanent residency status and lived in Canada for less than five years (Statistics Canada 2006) as well as fluid understandings of 'youth' as persons aged from 15–24 years old (United Nations 1981). Overall, the term acknowledges that the settlement and immigration experiences of the co-researchers involved in this study were directly shaped by their age and racial identity (among other attributes), and were central to the research process and results.

The remainder of the article proceeds in three parts. The literature review offers an overview of relevant approaches to PAR, followed by a discussion of the place of PAR within sport research – and SfD specifically – as well as the role of digital methods in PAR. This is followed by several reflexive themes that emerged during the deployment of digital methodologies, and podcasting specifically, through this study. Finally, the Discussion considers the implications of these experiences, before concluding with questions for future research. Overall, our main conclusion is that despite challenges and limitations, employing digital technologies as a form of participatory research can facilitate opportunities to (co)produce knowledge and experiences about SfD that may not be available or achievable within a traditional research framework.

Literature review

Participatory action research – overview and approaches

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has a significant history within the social sciences. Action research approaches developed by Kurt Lewin (1946) were some of the first that aimed to bridge the divide between research, theory, and application by engaging in iterative processes of planning, action, and reflection. In turn, foundational liberation scholars like Paulo Freire (1972) used participatory approaches as a means to pursue community-based social justice. Theoretically and methodologically, many PAR projects still tend to be influenced by these perspectives.

PAR projects also tend to follow or progress through stages: establishing relationships with participants; collaboratively deciding on the research issues/questions to be pursued; identifying roles and responsibilities; designing the research process; jointly implementing research and data collection; analysing findings; and sharing findings with participants and community (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007). Key to PAR is that at each of these stages, decisions should be made, and action undertaken, collaboratively, even though the actual stages of the PAR process are often fluid and determined by the capacities and interests of co-researchers.

A subset of PAR involves young people, often referred to as *Youth Participatory Action Research* (YPAR), and born out of concerns that traditional social science research methods may fail to capture the textured realities of young peoples' lives (Cammarota and Fine 2008). YPAR strives to privilege the co-production of knowledge of and with young people, and to emphasise the agency of youth in facilitating social change. An aspiration of YPAR is that young people might transition from participants who are being *researched*, to collaborators who are *researching*. To achieve this, the experiences and knowledge of youth are (re)positioned as essentially valuable, useful for exchange and dissemination, and largely equivalent to academic expertise (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007).

Challenges in PAR include reconciling the diverse types and objectives of stakeholder involvement (Vooberg, Bekkers & Tummers, 2015), while distributing power and control (Frisby, Crawford, and Dorer 1997; Frisby et al. 2005), and establishing a mutual learning process through reflexive and reciprocal exchange (Mansfield 2016). Further, meaningful co-production and execution of the 'action' stage within any PAR project is far from guaranteed (Kesby 2007). Many PAR projects fail to achieve action, due to the time and resources that are required, clashes with institutional priorities, concerns over rigour, uncertain timelines, and the need to navigate multiple roles (Cammarota and Fine 2008; Spaaij et al. 2018). Given these limitations, some participatory researchers have turned to digital methodologies as a way to achieve the goals of PAR and YPAR, discussed further below. Before doing so, a discussion of PAR within the context of sport and physical activity research is provided.

Approaching PAR within studies of sport and physical activity

PAR holds an important place within the social and managerial study of sport and physical activity. In the 1990s, Wendy Frisby and her colleagues engaged with a community women's organisation near Vancouver, British Columbia, using Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) to examine the physical activity experiences of women living on low-income (see Frisby, Crawford, and Dorer 1997; Frisby and Millar 2002; Frisby et al. 2005). Based on this work, Frisby, Crawford and Dorer (1997, p. 10) argued that FPAR can 'challenge sport [and recreation] management researchers to examine: (a) how knowledge in our field is constructed, (b) how relationships with research subjects are formed, and (c) how research does or does not benefit those being researched.' Their efforts helped to establish that PAR in the study of sport was not only possible, but that it could also be significantly productive and beneficial if based on sound theoretical and methodological conceptualisations, authentic collaboration with stakeholders throughout the research process, and supported by critical reflection on reciprocity, reflexivity, and power.

Following the work of Frisby and colleagues, a host of other scholars have since used PAR approaches to varying degrees within sport and physical activity (e.g. Bundon 2017; Hayhurst, Giles, and Whitney 2015; Hayhurst 2017; Holt et al. 2013; Meir and Fletcher 2019; Robinson et al. 2019; Rosso & Grath, 2017; Rich and Misener 2019; Spaaij et al. 2018, among others). Some recent studies have utilised PAR to design, implement, and evaluate Sfd programming for marginalised populations. This body of work has tended to conclude that PAR can facilitate the design and delivery of needs-based Sfd programming for specific populations (see Holt et al. 2013; Rosso and McGrath 2017; Robinson et al. 2019), yet also expressed caution about the sustainability and impact of Sfd programming particularly after the research team exits the field and funding expires (Holt et al. 2013; Rich and Misener 2019). As a result, Rich and Misener (2019) highlighted the importance of PAR research that progresses from community interaction to community capacity building, so that researchers can ultimately exit while ensuring sustainability of Sfd programming. This necessarily requires long(er)-term community involvement (Banks, Herrington, and Carter 2017; Pain and Francis 2003).

Overall, the effective use of participatory approaches in Sfd remains contested. Spaaij et al. (2018) in particular have argued that most Sfd research using PAR falls short of successful implementation at three inter-related points including the degree of local participation, power-shifting, and reflexivity. Regarding the first point, there is often a low level of authentic engagement in participatory Sfd research because it is difficult to collaborate authentically with co-researchers, or to engage them beyond the data collection stages. Such issues of participation are linked to power in and control over research; 'power shifting and reflexivity are inextricably intertwined' and effective PAR research within Sfd requires that researchers be prepared '... to probe more deeply into their objectives in Sfd research and methodological and theoretical approaches they take' (Spaaij et al. 2018, p. 31/32). This is, of course, easier said than done but nonetheless serves as an important reminder of the importance of critical self-reflection

throughout the PAR process. As such, a key question for this research project was whether, or at least to what extent, employing digital methodologies encouraged reflexivity or helped to overcome the challenges of PAR-based SfD research.

Considering the digital in participatory action research

Due in part to the fact that conducting Y/PAR is challenging and successful implementation far from guaranteed, digital methods have increasingly been utilised. More than ten years ago, Gubrium and Harper (2009, p. 2) wrote that 'Participatory digital methodologies are proliferating in the human sciences, as well as in applied fields such as public health, education, nursing, and social work.' These methods include photovoice, as well as techniques like digital storytelling, '... 3- to 5-min visual narratives that ... create compelling accounts of experience' (Gubrium 2009, p. 186), or blogging, an easy-to-create set of interactive pages with information posted in chronological order (Bundon 2017). Across participatory digital methods, the overarching 'goal is to listen to the generative themes or collective issues of community members to create a dialogue' (Gubrium 2009, p. 186).

Some previous studies have employed digital technologies within participatory research into sport and the lives of young people. For example, Hayhurst, Giles, and Whitney (2015) used photovoice to explore the intersections of sport programmes for young urban Indigenous women in Vancouver; participants took photos that represented their experiences within a sport programme and shared these with wider audiences through talking circles, collages, and presentations. Hayhurst (2017) suggests that photovoice can provide an effective means of engaging youth in processes of knowledge production and translation, as well as contesting presumptions about the lives of youth participants within the SfD sector.

While introducing digital methods into PAR has the potential to illuminate individual and group identities, flatten the hierarchy of the researcher/participant relationship, and support participants to become better researchers, it also brings its own set of challenges. First and foremost, access to and experiences with digital technologies are not equal or equitable, but instead mediated by intersectional relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Gubrium, Harper and Otanez (2015, p. 21) also suggest that ethical and political challenges are 'accentuated by digital and visual methods that call for the active participation of community members to document their experiences.' For example, while the use of technology can potentially facilitate more democratic and meaningful participation in PAR, it also can create a digital divide based on inequitable access to digital resources and equipment (Gubrium 2009). In turn, advocates of participatory digital methods are often forced to negotiate means vs ends and how best to balance the storytelling benefits of digital methods with imposing or disrupting participants' experiences (Gubrium, Hill, and Flicker 2014). Also, participatory digital methods raise significant ethical issues, related to confidentiality and anonymity, but also the vulnerability of communities in which PAR projects typically take place (Wilson, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift 2018) and the emotional and physical burden that can be placed on co-researchers (Banks et al. 2013).

The focus of this project was podcasts – audio, video and/or text files made digitally available, often in a series, for access on the internet using various downloadable platforms (see Brown 2011; Cartney 2013; Nesi 2016) – which have emerged as a popular broadcasting platform since the early 2000s (Bottomley 2015; Bradbury 2006). With the rise of mobile devices, podcasts have become increasingly accessible, and inclusive of diverse topic areas and languages (Ferrer, Lorenzetti, and Shaw 2019). Podcasters (the people who make podcasts) range from hobbyists to storytellers to investigative journalists, and podcast content has exploded in recent years (Mchugh 2016).¹ For these reasons, and as discussed below, podcasts were determined by the research team to be an appropriate research method for this project.

However, critical analyses of podcasting as a platform have also pointed to its grounding in 'sonic whiteness' (Joshi Brekke 2020), with podcast hosts and producers being predominantly white and male (Locke 2015). Podcasts may therefore 'perpetuate the aural preferences of their chiefly white

male creator' (Joshi Brekke 2020, p. 173). That said, while white male voices predominate within the field of podcasting (Stoever 2016) traditionally marginalised listeners are becoming active participants in the coproduction of audio storytelling and digital technologies in ways that may challenge the hegemony of whiteness (Joshi Brekke 2020). This has not led to a 'utopian democratisation of the media landscape' (Joshi Brekke 2020, p.174), but does suggest opportunities for social change or resistance and the importance of research frameworks that analyse the relationship between racialised production, listening practices and audio storytelling in the new digital age (Joshi Brekke 2020).

It is also important to recognise that podcasting is now utilised in education as a pedagogical tool, particularly for translating and disseminating complex ideas to students (Alpay and Gulati 2010; Armstrong, Tucker, and Massad 2009; Cartney 2013; Cooper, Dale, and Spencer 2009; Dale 2007; Dale and Hassanien 2008; Hew 2008). Education researchers have explored the evolving functions of podcasting (i.e. beyond simply mobile knowledge translation) (Crawford 2007), and the benefits of student-led podcasts as a form of co-producing knowledge (Armstrong, Tucker, and Massad 2009). Germane for this paper are the learning processes and experiences when students or youth develop their own podcasts (Forbes 2011). In these instances, podcasting may support creativity and enhance the development of literacy, dissemination, and communication skills (Armstrong, Tucker, and Massad 2009; Rajpal and Devi 2011). However, little work has yet examined the place of podcasts, or digital methodologies more broadly, within a PAR approach to SfD research, despite the attention paid to PAR in the study of sport and SfD. It is against this backdrop that the research team used podcasts within the PAR framework.

The research process – reflecting on PAR through podcasts

This paper emerged from a five-year participatory research project conducted in Toronto, Ontario aimed at developing a better understanding of the role of sport and physical activity in the social lives and development (broadly defined) of young people (aged 15–24). In this project, youth participants were recruited from five Toronto-based community organisations, each of which engage in an institutional partnership with Hart House – the centre of co-curricular activity on the campus of the University of Toronto – in order to provide opportunities for engagement in sport and physical activity. The partner organisations include a public community centre, a Boys & Girls Club, an Indigenous support centre, a community centre serving the LGBTQ community, and the focus of this paper, a settlement services agency supporting young people newly arrived to Canada. For this paper, this agency is referred to as SettleU.²

In this partnership, youth from the five community organisations regularly participate in physical activity and recreation programming both at Hart House and in their community spaces. Programmes are supported by University of Toronto staff and offerings include diverse activities that might not be available to the youth participants otherwise. The overall partnership is informed by an understanding and desire on the part of all stakeholders to support social and community development through sport, physical activity, and recreation.

The result was that over a span of ten months, the research team³ (led initially by Author 1, then later Author 2) collaborated with four youth co-researchers⁴ who were newcomer youth, as well as with a team of podcasting experts from Hart House to design, create, edit, and launch a series of podcast episodes documenting the role of sport in relation to their personal health and wellbeing. The podcasting project proceeded through six main stages. The first stage focused on partnership development with community organisations and building rapport with the youth co-researchers prior to their involvement in the research project. This was achieved in part because Author 1 had conducted a previous research study at SettleU. Stage 2 was the delivery of an information session, again led by Author 1, that explained the goals of the larger research project and introduced the participatory research approach. In Stage 3, Author 1 conducted a traditional social science focus group with potential co-researchers, in which themes of sport and social development were

explored and considered in relation to the lives of newcomer youth. In Stage 4, Author 1 (and later Author 2), worked alongside the youth-researchers to co-design the project. The team engaged in project planning and developed knowledge of various qualitative methods before deciding that the participatory research study would focus on podcasting as a way to explore the question of sport, mental health, and wellbeing among newcomer youth. In Stage 5, Author 2 assumed leadership of the project,⁵ and this stage focused on the partnership development with the podcasting team at Hart House, learning podcasting techniques, and producing the podcasts themselves. Lastly, Stage 6 was based around reflections on the project and the dissemination of results to diverse audiences. It is important to acknowledge that due to the dynamic, collaborative nature of participatory research, this project, as with many others (see Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007) did not always progress through stages in a concurrent or linear fashion. Rather, there was significant overlap between the stages, especially Stages 4 and 5.

The remainder of this section offers critical reflections on the methodological importance, challenges, and implications of exploring SfD through the act of podcasting. These themes illustrate the processes undertaken in conducting the PAR-based podcasting project, and provide reflexive accounts and insights learned about conducting PAR based research in the context of SfD with digital methods. The more traditional 'results' of the research – i.e. the answer(s) to the project's main research question – are addressed and discussed in the podcasts themselves, which are available via the following link(<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/newcomer-youth-sport/id1471690259>) or QR code. This article is intended, therefore, to provide a methodological accompaniment to the podcasts.

1.1 Partnership development, rapport building, and insight work

In September 2018, Author 1 invited youth from SettleU, whom she had known for two years, to attend an information session about the project and the PAR approach. As in all PAR studies, rapport building was key during this initial stage. While the project benefited from relationships already in place, it also confirmed the importance of long-term relationships, trust, and reciprocity in PAR, while highlighting the challenges of building relationships in the context of race, class, and gender hierarchies. The four co-researchers, Maria, Mahamat, Angelo, and Theresa were newcomer youth, aged 18 to 24 years old, from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds. They each held permanent residency status and had immigrated to Canada with their families in the previous three years. The lead university researchers (Authors 1 and 2), by contrast, were White, female graduate students, from England and Canada respectively. While the similarity in age between the co-researchers and researchers, the previously established rapport, and Author 1's 'immigrant' status, helped in navigating such hierarchies, there is little doubt that the Whiteness of the university researchers, and the associated cultural and social capital, served to sustain power differentials throughout the research. In this sense, the explicit purpose of doing PAR – to unsettle power relations – was at the same time framed and constrained by those same relations of power.

Acknowledging, processing, and reflecting upon the ethics of these power relations became an ongoing theme of the research. Heeding the advice of scholars such as Frisby et al. (2005), Mansfield (2016), and Spaaij et al. (2018) the university researchers strove to implement feminist understandings of reflexivity, meaning 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher' (England 1994, p. 244). Authors 1 and 2 continuously and critically reflected on the purpose of the research, how their identities and power were influencing the research process, and whether participatory and inclusive interactions with the co-researchers and other stakeholders were taking place. To do this, the university researchers kept detailed reflexivity journals and engaged in critical and often uncomfortable discussions, the results of which helped to inform this article.

With these considerations in mind, in order to develop initial insight around sport and the lives of newcomer youth, during Stage 3 the university researchers held a focus group with the four

potential co-researchers. The focus group was informal, relatively unstructured, and drew on shared experiences of participation. Key themes emerged in the focus group, including newcomer youth mental health and belonging, the opportunities and complexities of Canadian multiculturalism, and the relationship between social inclusion and sport. Upon reflection, the focus group helped to establish a participatory praxis; after the focus group, Author 1 invited the youth to join the project as paid co-researchers.

1.2 Project planning and capacity building

Co-designing the project as a full research team was of central importance. Subsequently, the research team (four co-researchers, Author 1, and later Author 2) engaged in project planning for three full months (between October and December 2018) through participation in weekly or bi-weekly meetings at Hart House. It was during these sessions that the team began to negotiate roles and levels of engagement for different researchers, and to discuss desired outcomes for both individuals and groups. As discussed in Mansfield (2016), ensuring transparency in these early conversations was crucial in establishing a democratic culture. It was at this stage that negotiations occurred with co-researchers regarding the extent to which they wished to be involved in the project and the level of autonomy or independence with which they felt comfortable. Through this dialogue, it became clear that co-researchers looked to the university researchers to take on a mentoring role, and to act as project facilitators (as seen in Cammarota and Fine 2008) but that all subsequent decisions on the project were to be made collectively. It was also here that the team worked to establish the desired outcomes of the project. As described in other PAR projects (See Cammarota and Fine 2008; Banks, Herrington, and Carter 2017), it became clear at this point that the co-researchers wanted to use this research experience as a way to develop skills for further education and improve their confidence, while also producing something that would be accessible and impactful for other newcomer youth.

These decisions about designing the project were themselves made through participatory techniques. Exercises such as mind mapping, printed discussion cards, and narratives to explore topics of interest around sport and social development were all used. Authors 1 and 2 recorded all ideas on chart paper and white boards, assisting to establish connectivity between their ideas. Through these processes, mental health and wellbeing emerged as a topic of primary importance. The co-researchers expressed a desire to raise awareness of newcomer youth mental health, communicate to others that they are not alone in their struggles, and remind people that there are resources available.

It was also at this stage that the research team made a decision to try and co-design and implement a new programme at SettleU for newcomer youth focused on sport and mental health. The research team spent one month preparing a proposal and were disappointed and frustrated when this idea fell through. Simultaneously, it was at this stage that Author 1 and 2 designed and delivered a series ($n = 8$) of workshops on qualitative research methods. These were designed to offer co-researchers information with which they could make informed decisions about how to approach and pursue their research. The workshops covered the following topics: the research process and designing good research questions; ethics; designing interview guides; conducting interviews; crafting self-narratives; ethnography; photovoice; and participatory video. Upon reflection, the workshops were an important step in the overall project because the co-researchers had very little prior experience with research methods. In an exit interview with Author 1 and Author 2, Maria reflected on her experience during these workshops:

“Previously I had a bit of info on like how to conduct research but never actually [applied it]. So that was kind of cool. Like (Authors 1 and 2) talked about ethics and interviews and it’s like things professors and teachers like throw at you but you never really remember it because you never have to do the work. But here we got to like actually use it and it was cool to see how it works ...”

The workshops helped to guide the direction of the project and facilitated the development of the research question: *What role does sport and physical activity play in newcomer youths' mental health and wellbeing?* This was, clearly, a personal question and topic for the co-researchers. Mahamat expressed:

My experiences as an immigrant and a person who doesn't speak well English, I've struggled with connect and be part of the community, but through SettleU and specifically soccer, I have managed to help the stress, depression and feelings of loneliness with making so many friends ... so we all decided to study how sport impacts the immigrant's life to settle in and engage in their community and help mental health.

In hindsight, the significance of these research workshops was two-fold. On the one hand, designing and hosting the workshops meant that the university researchers strongly influenced the possible directions of the project, at least in methodological terms. However, it was also at this stage that the project took a digital turn. While the research team was exploring methods such as photovoice and blogging, a chance meeting with the technology and digital media coordinators at Hart House led to a connection with Hart House's podcast team, who described their expertise in assisting social justice projects through the production of podcasts. Acknowledging the overrepresentation of whiteness and male producers within traditional podcasts, the university researchers then brought the podcasting idea to the co-researchers, who initially expressed uncertainty; they had little experience with podcasts, were hesitant about the skills and training required to make a podcast, and worried that the impact might be limited. Indeed, as Angelo stated: "Like what even is a podcast?"

However, the co-researchers were curious to learn more about podcasting. They drafted questions to take into a meeting with the podcasting team while also discussing the values that they deemed to be non-negotiable in deciding whether to work with a partner. The co-researchers stated they would only work with a partner if they felt comfortable, trusted, supported, and represented. This made the work with the podcast team an essential part of the project moving forward.

Partnership development with the podcast team

The co-researchers were initially hesitant about forming a partnership with the podcast team and were nervous prior to the first meeting. Ultimately, the experience turned out to be a positive one in part because Corine,⁶ the co-ordinator of the podcast team, opened the meeting by positioning it as an opportunity to explore potential collaboration. Recognising the importance of trust and openness in early partnership work, Corine and the other team members spoke candidly about their background, and shared their own stories. Following their lead, each co-researcher in turn shared intimate details about their lives and their personal stories around identity, belonging, and language. The space transformed from an initially tense and nervous one, into a place that felt open and inviting.

After the introductions, the podcast team described their work and shared some examples of podcasts they had produced. They then listened to and answered the co-researcher's questions. There is no doubt that the openness of the podcast team, the representation on the podcasting team, and their desire to embed social justice in their work, were fundamental to the co-researchers' decision to choose podcasting as their preferred method in conducting research, especially considering the whiteness of podcasting. Maria described the experience this way:

"... our first meeting (with the podcast team) was something different. I thought I would be shy and that I didn't want to talk but they were like so open and without any shield and I think that made me open up ... Remember when we talked about imposters and always like putting on different masks, well we didn't feel that with them. That's why we chose [to work with them] I feel. The group was very supportive and even like Angelo when he said "I don't know what I'm doing" Colin was immediately like "and that's okay, it's okay that you don't know what you're doing. Don't be ashamed of feeling like that" and listening to that was like welcoming and non-judgmental in that way."

It was also at this stage that it became clearer to the co-researchers that podcasting held potential for meeting their research goals. As the podcast team shared stories about using the medium to help others through sharing their struggles via podcast, Theresa stated that ‘even if one person hears the podcast and can relate to feelings they are having, then maybe it’s helpful.’

Following the meeting, the co-researchers were noticeably happy, smiling, and laughing. They expressed excited anticipation about starting the podcasting experience (‘We are really going to make podcasts!?’) and asked Author 2 to contact the podcast team and confirm their interest. This was documented in the following fieldnotes:

We walked into the hallway after saying goodbye and I told Corine I’d be in touch. I looked at the co-researchers and asked them what they thought. Immediately, Theresa, Angelo and Maria started to laugh and all started to say “that’s it, that’s it, we’re working with them!” Amongst laughter and giggles, in the middle of a busy hallway, we didn’t even discuss it further. We are making podcasts. (Author 2 fieldnotes)

At this stage, the co-researchers had firmly decided to create their own podcast series around newcomer mental health and wellbeing as related to sport and physical activity. It is important to recognise that this decision was based not only on the prospects of podcasting, but the welcoming, supportive, and non-judgemental environment that the podcast team offered, which paved the way for collaboration in line with PAR values.

Storytelling and story-sharing

In addition to learning the technical components of creating podcasts, the primary learning task set for the researchers by the podcast team was ‘storytelling and story-sharing.’ The researchers were asked by the podcast team to produce a 2-minute self-interview on any topic, a task that proved more challenging than anticipated. For Author 2, for example, it provoked insecurities around hearing her own voice out loud, and Angelo hesitated for several weeks before sharing his self-interview with the group. In fact, while Angelo’s self-interview was playing, he sat covering his face with his hands, staring at the ground, shaking his head, and often laughing at himself. Following this recording, the group applauded and congratulated Angelo for the candid piece of work that he had created and shared.

For the co-researchers, much of this anxiety stemmed from their perceived difficulty in commanding the English language, and the sense that their accents would make their stories difficult for an audience to understand. Indeed, this discomfort was one that the co-researchers expressed throughout the entirety of the podcasting process, in many ways confirming that language and accents are constructs through which ‘othering’ occurs and racialised power relations are created and maintained (Creese and Kambere 2003). In response, the podcast team shared examples of podcasts that incorporated multiple languages, and offered suggestions about how to use this as an asset in their own podcasts. In turn, the co-researchers decided to incorporate their respective first languages into the introductions of their podcasts.

In turn, the co-researchers decided to conduct self-interviews as well as semi-structured interviews with other members of the team and newcomer youth. The research team collaboratively developed an interview guide; each of the co-researchers designed 10 questions, which were then collectively narrowed down to the core questions. For practice, the co-researchers recorded and listened back to their mock interviews. Maria shared that ‘if we couldn’t answer that question or felt comfortable answering that question then how would our participants feel?’ The podcast team also offered further guidance on tactics and best practices for conducting interviewing suitable for podcasts. Mahamat expressed: ‘One thing that I took away from the project was to be careful with the way I put my questions not making anybody uncomfortable to share their stories and feelings’.

The podcast team also encouraged the research team to consider the editing process that was still to come. Thus, the research team practiced limiting the number of filler words and being aware of background noises that might be difficult to edit out later. The research team was also taught that, in

contrast to traditional research interviews or other forms of storytelling, the sequencing of questions was not as important and that interviews could be restructured subsequently when editing the podcasts. The podcast team further stressed the importance of keeping potential listeners in mind throughout data collection, which was a novel practice for the entire research team; while Authors 1 and 2 had experience conducting recorded interviews, they had most often only been concerned with their own listening for the purposes of transcribing and analysing.

Finally, for the data collection strategy, the co-researchers decided to recruit two/three participants each, to create a total of a six to nine-episode podcast series; however, there were numerous challenges when navigating informed consent with participants. The research team initially revisited the workshop on research ethics and informed consent to ensure that each co-researcher felt comfortable with the forms and informed consent processes. However, in hindsight, the decision not to include co-researchers in designing these consent documents was a mistake, or at least a missed opportunity. The research team could have explored alternative or more youth-friendly informed consent tools such as videos or cartoons. Instead, the use of traditional consent methods resulted in some potential participants either declining to participate in an interview, or withdrawing their consent after an interview was conducted. Author 2 recalled a time where seeking informed consent came into question. This was documented in her field notes:

Angelo was conducting an interview today and pulled out the consent form for the participant to sign it. Angelo went over the basics of the form and asked the participant if he had any questions and if he didn't mind signing it. The participant did not understand the point of the form, why he needed to sign it, why his name had to be on it and who was going to be seeing the form with his name on it.

At issue here was the hegemony of language, and the power relations associated with English and formalised written information. At subsequent meetings, the research team discussed the informed consent process, and the challenges of using English-language forms with participants who were still learning English. As well, it became clear that many racialised newcomer youth did not want their names on a legal document or to be subject to the institutional power associated with this.

In turn, and despite the theoretical promise of digital methods as a form of storytelling, the co-researchers found that many of the potential participants were hesitant about telling their stories on a public platform such as a podcast. Maria reflected on one interview she conducted which was not used in the end:

... I really liked his interview. But his English was so limited that sometimes it was like redundant but I knew that other people would be able to connect to him. But in the end, he didn't sign the waiver so I couldn't use his.

In the end, each of the co-researchers created a self-interview, Maria interviewed two participants, and Angelo and Theresa both interviewed one participant each, resulting in a final research sample of seven interviews total.

Editing

Once the co-researchers had conducted the interviews, the research team turned its attention to the editing process. This involved working one-on-one with a member of the podcasting team to learn practical skills such as how to use editing software, the characteristics of effective editing, and use of special effects. The primary challenge at this stage was assisting co-researchers in accessing computer equipment. Some were able to share a family-owned computer, but the quality of this equipment and access to new and current software was often a challenge. These challenges reduced the amount of time that co-researchers could work on the project and led to an uneven distribution of work amongst members of the research team, thus reinforcing concerns around the inaccessibility of digital methods (Gubrium 2009).

As discussed above, the primary message from the podcast team in guiding the research team through the editing process was to maintain focus on the needs of the listener. This commitment to

the digital format had significant implications and impact on the data itself. The podcast team encouraged removing content that might have been deemed relevant in terms of traditional data, but that was unlikely to be of interest to podcast listeners, especially digressions, tangents or other topics. For the co-researchers, this was generally a positive aspect of podcasting as a research tool.

The other significant experience of the editing process was the emergent feeling of responsibility for peoples' stories. Sharing the stories of other newcomer youth, who had experienced similar settlement challenges, became very important for the co-researchers and constituted a source of emotional and physical labour for the co-researchers. Maria explained it as follows:

... I feel like my responsibility was to make their story really, I don't know, like matter to them. It wasn't only because it was my job, or that I wanted an answer for this research question, but how they felt and how their story can connect with other people, like with other youth ... it was very tricky and difficult to edit and make sure it flowed and made sense from questions. But that's like the beauty of podcasting I guess is that you can edit it to shape it.

That said, tensions emerged between telling stories in a genuine way and producing a podcast suitable for listeners. This sometimes resulted in differences of opinion between what the co-researchers desired and what the podcast team recommended. Therefore, during the editing process, there were often negotiations between the podcasting team and the co-researchers over whose vision of the final podcast product should prevail. The result was a balance between the co-researcher's deferral to the expertise of the podcast team, and the podcast team's respect for and understanding of the PAR process, which often required them to relinquish some creative control.

Overall, the editing process was time consuming. Maria concluded that editing was 'very hard, so hard. You have to listen so closely'; these difficulties were often amplified for her due to the disproportionate time she committed to the project. Indeed, at times, and particularly towards the end of the editing process, Maria and Angelo were the only co-researchers attending research team meetings regularly. Outside of this role and completing high school, they also worked part-time jobs. Angelo reflected on this:

I have work, I have school, I have research project, gym, and anything else ... the originally group was 4 and then it came down to 2. So, all the work was on me and my friend, we were doubled up.

The decreased engagement by other co-researchers towards the end of the process and the desired timelines of the podcasting team, meant that members of both the podcast and research teams took on greater responsibilities to meet the project's goals and deadlines. For example, Author 2 wrote the script for the introductions and closing segments of the podcasts, and the members of the podcasting team made several of the final edits. This led to feelings of discomfort for the university researcher around the distribution of power and the lack of shared decision making towards the end of the project (as discussed also in Wilson, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift 2018) and led the research team to ask Maria about negotiating control and whether she ever felt like the project was no longer hers:

Like our research question and the interviews that I wanted to do, I did them as I wanted too. But at times, it did not feel like it was our project. Like we followed the hands sometimes. Like if [the other co-researchers] continued to come because sometimes it was just me, then maybe we would plan more on our own. But because it was mostly me, I didn't mind that [Author 2] made the plans. Like I felt like it was still our project, but the others left [laughs]

Maria's reflections indicate the ongoing negotiations regarding power and control that were required to see a digital PAR project through to the end. It forced the university researchers to question their perceptions of what counts as participation, the benefits to co-researchers, and to reflect on whether the project placed additional emotional and physical labour on Maria and Angelo and took away from valuable leisure time at a pivotal time in their lives. Angelo shared:

The challenging part with this project was that I have a lot of school work and I have my priorities on that. I need to get my 85 mark, so I think at times I let myself focus more on my school than this research project.

These reflections confirmed for us Minkler's (2004) claims about the inherently unstable notion of participatory research and the need for constant negotiation and flexibility when considering the interests and values of research collaborators and stakeholders.

3.6 Reflection and Dissemination

Finally, as a means to showcase the podcasts, share the work of the research team, and celebrate the stories collected through the podcasts, Author 2 proposed, and then organised, a listening party in June 2019. The co-researchers agreed to the plan and collaboratively organised the event structure, identified podcast segments to share with audience members, and wrote and delivered short speeches. At the listening party, clips of the podcasts were played for audience members; additionally, the co-researchers and a member of the podcast team offered reflections on the research partnership and process. Audience members then asked questions, (and offered congratulations!)

Overall, the listening party provided an opportunity to reflect on the strengths and challenges of the digital PAR process. Tony from the podcast team suggested that the event was important for showcasing the successes and future possibilities of podcasting as a research approach, but also in supporting the growth of newcomer youth participatory researchers:

The podcast launch day [long sigh] – I think hearing them all go up and seeing the growth that has happened throughout the process and to see them be so like vulnerable in sharing their experiences and sharing the experiences from folks within their community. I think that was a huge success and also was seeing them have fun, be[ing] joyful. Like, I think that was so heart-warming.

After the launch party, to reach academic audiences, a conference presentation was delivered by the members of the research team in collaboration with the co-researchers. For the latter, the co-researchers were unable to attend in person, so digital sound clips were recorded and shared during the presentation, this continued the integration of the digital through PAR. At this stage, the co-researchers did not express further interest in academic dissemination; instead, they began their summer holidays and moved on to other full-time employment or higher education. The partnership with the podcast team also concluded. It was then left to the university researchers to continue disseminating the results, to both non-academic and academic audiences. To reach the general public, the podcasts were posted on SoundCloud and iTunes. Author 2 transcribed the interviews, created cover art (which the co-researchers voted on), and uploaded the podcasts. Here, it became clear that the dissemination phase, particularly among academic audiences, was a priority primarily for the university researchers, as the co-researchers saw little to be gained from it. This corroborates the argument that given the specific and limited benefits of academic writing, the publishing of participatory research findings may still be the responsibility of academics (Gosin et al. 2003; Nind 2008).

Discussion

As discussed above, the results that speak to the project's main research question can be heard by listening to the podcasts. From our perspectives as members of a participatory research team, attempting to (re)present these results here would be to undermine the efforts and choices that went into producing podcasts through the research process. Further, as Gubrium, Harper, and Otañez (2015) argue, in digital participatory methods, means become as important as ends. Thus, while the reflections in this paper are an accompaniment to the podcasts, they are themselves important results of the study.

With that in mind, several implications can be gleaned from these experiences. First and foremost, this project suggests that the use of digital methodologies can help to overcome some of the areas

where PAR has been found wanting in SfD (see Spaaij et al. 2018). Specifically, the choice to use podcasts helped to encourage: a) the participation of all stakeholders, b) some notable shifts in power when designing and conducting research, and c) processes of ongoing reflexivity. A crucial aspect of this success was that prior to the research study, neither the university researchers or co-researchers knew how to produce a podcast. In this respect, the relative novelty of podcasting served to level hierarchies of expertise and was itself new enough to serve or act as a form of reflexivity. Specifically, the university researchers could not claim ownership or expertise over the research process or results because they had no experience making podcasts. Thus, one of our primary findings is that the promise of the digital in PAR and SfD may be that it challenges expertise in a productive manner. Following the argument that ethical/political issues are accentuated in digital PAR methods (see Gubrium, Harper & Otanez. 2015), podcasting required collaboration, humility, and reflexivity to see the project through challenging times. In this case, reflexivity specifically meant that the University researchers had to consistently check-in *with themselves* to see if their interests, desires and expectations for the study were reasonable, and/or in alignment with those of the co-researchers. While this alignment was not always present, there is little doubt that the act of reflexivity was more frequent and meaningful in the context of digital PAR as compared to traditional research approaches.

Beyond the benefits of collective inexperience with podcasting, digital methods also shaped this research study in participatory ways. Specifically, the process of designing and producing a podcasting series became itself a process of knowledge production within the framework of this research. That is, the research had to be designed with the digital in mind and nearly all aspects of the study design (interview questions, data collection, dissemination) were conducted to meet the needs of the digital format. This also increased the collaborative process undertaken and pushed us towards fulfilling a PAR approach. In addition, the collective efforts of the research team produced something tangible for which all members of the group could feel some ownership. This aligns with Hayhurst's (2017) conclusion that participatory methods that incorporate digital technology can enable engagement with SfD's socially diverse stakeholders, facilitate authentic relationships, and encourage alternative or even counterhegemonic voices.

Overall, using podcasts meant that the co-researchers decided what stories to tell, and in comparison to traditional social science methods, they had more ownership over how to tell them, a hallmark of digital participatory methods (Gubrium, Harper & Otanez 2015). Throughout the process, stories were collected and represented in order to make them accessible and informative for podcast listeners. This had a positive impact on the authenticity of the stories told or, in more traditional research terms, led to more rigorous qualitative data. In this way, the act of podcasting led to better qualitative research results because stories had to be collected and told in ways that fit the demands of the podcast format and structure. There was also, therefore, a productive overlap or blurring between the podcasts as media product and research process.

That said, the podcast project was not achieved or completed because of any inherent characteristics of podcasts, but rather because of the quality and reciprocal nature of the relationships that were built during the process (see Maiter et al. 2008 & Mansfield 2016). Notably, this insight applies to the specific field of SfD as well, particularly considering critiques of instrumental approaches to SfD that presume or seek ends through sport (like empowerment, peace, or social mobility) while subjugating knowledge, subjectivity and agency (see Kay 2009; Nicholls, Giles, and Sethna 2011).

At the same time, the study raised a number of critical issues and cautions. For example, achieving ethics in practice with racialised newcomer youth was far more complicated than meeting institutional ethics (see Minkler 2004; Banks et al. 2013). The lengthy, official-looking informed consent documents used, all of which were written in English, were not necessarily accessible or appropriate for participants, and did not consider diverse means of providing consent across cultures (Gubrium, Hill, and Flicker 2014). As such, these documents could be interpreted as tools of colonialism (Flicker 2008). Furthermore, compared to images or transcripts, the podcasts posed challenges for maintaining confidentiality, and the inability in the research process to ensure complete confidentiality of

co-researchers and participants was never fully reconciled. Overall, this study confirms the importance of challenging the 'commodification of ends' in participatory research (Gubrium & Hill, 2013), striving to ensure that co-researchers maintain autonomy over how, when, and where their stories are disseminated, and continuously negotiating informed consent, even after the project concludes (Gubrium, Hill, and Flicker 2014).

Next, it is important to note how the research relationships and rapport building processes were mediated by race. PAR scholars, often or stereotypically white female academics, tend to disproportionately work with racialised people; as such opportunities for real or perceived racism are often substantial (Minkler 2004) and power hierarchies are typically reproduced. The white university researchers in this project invited the co-researchers to participate, led the training on research methods, and mentored the co-researchers, thus the normativity of whiteness likely shaped the scope and direction of the project and infiltrated true reciprocity with the co-researchers. The podcasting team from Hart House were predominately from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds which helped to challenge the whiteness of podcasts and the co-researchers sought comfort in this representation. In future research, we would aim to diversify the team of University researchers.

Additionally, this project illustrates that significant material resources, time, and expertise are needed when using digital methods (Gubrium, Harper, and Otañez 2015) As members of a highly-resourced university in the global North, the research team could access such resources, both material and human, but this need, along with the dominance of English in many digital storytelling formats, likely still limits who can generate and access knowledge through digital methods, reproducing the 'sonic whiteness' which has defined digital technologies such as podcasting (Joshi Brekke 2020). As well, there were significant demands placed on co-researchers, particularly the time required for editing, that in hindsight should have been explained in detail much earlier in the research process.

There are also critical issues related to the impact or action of digital approaches to PAR. On the one hand, the act of racialised co-researchers and the podcasting team creating content for a medium still largely dominated by white male producers and listeners, may have gone some way towards challenging the hegemony of whiteness and positively disrupting who holds the ability to tell the stories of the other (Joshi Brekke 2020). On the other hand, given the technology required and the use of English, the podcasts produced in this project may be inaccessible to many within the global South, including the countries from which the co-researchers immigrated. Here, as with broader criticisms of SfD, the inaccessibility of research knowledge outside of the global North likely reinforces hegemonic processes of knowledge production.

In turn, a question that many are left asking at the end of both PAR and SfD projects, is what was the intended 'action' or impact of the research, and was this achieved in practice? Here, we suggest that it is important to differentiate between the research 'actions' that are taken up in a PAR project and their perceived importance to diverse stakeholder groups, particularly co-researchers. For the co-researchers in this project, the primary 'action' was understood to be the production of podcasts that would be listened to by people, as opposed to academic audiences. The co-researchers were initially apprehensive about the reachability of podcasts, especially among young people, but through guidance with the podcasting team, they created the podcast series in order to share their stories and struggles with other newcomer youth, or as Maria said, 'to help them feel less alone,' as well as to provide insight to general audiences about the challenges that newcomer youth experience in Canada. Through our listening party, and then more informally, the co-researchers shared the podcasts widely among their friends, family, and communities. Thus, in terms of dissemination, the podcasts were not created with academic audiences in mind; it was primarily after the project had wrapped up that complementary forms of academic dissemination (such as this article) were pursued and led by the University researchers.

There is still potential for both SfD programming and participatory research approaches to overstate functional impact, in terms of the presumed benefits derived to participants (Banks, Herrington, and Carter 2017) or through the presumption that micro-level changes lead to macro-level ones, what Coalter (2013) refers to as 'displacement of scope'. While the changes experienced

by the research team in this study are genuine, and the resulting podcast series has the potential to create a positive impact, amidst the massive global challenges of migration and inequality and the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment and policy, this project admittedly offers a very small contribution.

Finally, three main questions emerge that call for ongoing attention in the use of digital participatory approaches to SfD research. The first is: if and when the novelty of digital methods dissipates, or the accessibility to digital technology improves, will the utility and applicability of digital methods in PAR change? In this case, if the co-researchers or university researchers had possessed experience in producing podcasts, then the research process would have been much different. Given that it is possible to imagine a future where increasing numbers of people know how to make podcasts, the question is how this may affect podcasts' role in research. Second, while storytelling through podcasts was an effective means of addressing the research question in this study, the embodiment, physicality, and corporeality of sport means that digital methods may need to expand if the goal is to capture the range of experiences under the heading of sport for development. As a research team, we are not fully convinced that embodiment was captured in this research process or that it can be captured in and through digital methods. Finally, many of the challenges raised in Spaaij et al's (2018) previous analysis of PAR in SfD were situated in the context of global north-south relations and the historical legacy of empire and colonisation. While this project achieved some success in meeting the mandate of PAR by using podcasts, it was also limited to urban Toronto and the Whiteness of the university researchers notwithstanding, was not subject to all of the international forces of inequality that are exacerbated when global North researchers study SfD activity in the global South. Whether or not PAR approaches to SfD can successfully contribute to overcoming these massive socio-political issues remains an ongoing question for critical sport researchers.

Notes

1. The Podcast Consumer 2019, conducted by the Edison Research Group (2019) recently documented more than 700,000 active podcasts and more than 29 million podcast episodes in over 100 languages.
2. SettleU is a pseudonym.
3. In this paper, the term 'research team' is used to refer to everyone involved in the project from the University of Toronto and SettleU; 'co-researchers' refers to the four youth participants from SettleU; 'university researchers' refers to the University of Toronto researchers; and 'podcast team' refers to staff from Hart House that provided training in podcasting.
4. 'Co-Researcher Group' was made up of the four co-researchers, who were Maria Joaquina Lima Larrazabal, Mahamat Abdellatif (who both consented for their real names to be used), and Angelo and Theresa (both pseudonyms).
5. At this point, Author 1 had completed the Master's programme in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education at the University of Toronto and moved away from Toronto to begin a PhD programme.
6. Corine is a pseudonym.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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