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Reflections and recommendations to be representative of the community in a community-based youth sport program

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Abstract
Conducting research with minoritized groups presents various challenges, such as a lack of trust and skepticism regarding benefits to their community (Yancey et al., 2005). Previous studies have provided evidence-based suggestions on overcoming barriers in collecting data on minority populations (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2002). This reflexive case study examines the effectiveness of using such scholarly recommendations for recruiting minority participants in the design and implementation of a life-skills through sports intervention program. Despite our efforts to reach a representative sample by applying specific recommendations, the obtained sample had a higher proportion of White participants (70% vs. 44.5%) and higher income levels (83.3% paid full lunch vs. 40.6%) than the overall prevalence found within the target community. Reflecting on the authors' position within the study and exploring the methodological implications of existing strategies to enhance minority participation in research, this paper seeks to explicate the difficulties and challenges that can arise when turning theoretical recommendations into practice.

Keywords
Minority research, Diverse recruitment, Youth sports, Intervention program

Introduction

The study that serves as the case study of this paper aimed to develop a sports-based intervention program to teach socio-emotional skills to a community with a high prevalence of ethnic minorities and low socio-economic status families. Its main focus was on teaching socio-emotional skills that are transferrable to a school setting, and increase the likelihood of participants' success at school. Since previous literature has indicated that a sporting environment can be used to teach life skills to children of all ages (Conley et al., 2010), we opted for a sports-based program. As Conley et al. (2010) demonstrate, life skills can enhance competence and foster personal growth as well as help in decision-making – and these can be honed through sports. Given their lower likelihood of educational advancement due to personal and environmental barriers, the study design prioritized youngsters from ethnic and cultural minority groups (Aguirre et al., 2018). Hence, the intervention was intended to help participants acquire the psychological and interpersonal skills that could help them overcome barriers and increase their chances of long-term success (Haack et al., 2014). However, in spite of the application of various recommendations to ensure the participation of minority groups in the intervention, recruitment for the study proved challenging. Hence, instead of repurposing the data, we have taken this opportunity to reframe our original study into a reflexive case study. In this paper, we first address the ambition to create a novel project with a meaningful sample based on the existing strategies developed to secure diverse participation, while subsequently exploring their insufficiency and relating their limitations to dynamics that characterize today's academic landscape.

Contextualizing the intervention

The initiative to pursue a sport intervention study with the aim of researching the transfer of life skills was informed by the principal investigator's (PI; Jana Fogaca) interests and current field of work in sport psychology as an assistant professor. Her passion to create meaningful community change and to support the development of a more socially just society formed the broader context of the project. Additionally, the PI's observations of her daughter, a child of color, interacting with other children, provided her with personal insights into the power dynamics between middle-class white children and minority children, and the inaccurate perceptions of their abilities in comparison to their peers. Hence, the initial ambitions and goals of the projected intervention where very much couched in the PI's academic and personal identities, which served as the context from which the research design was developed. To achieve the research objectives, the PI recruited three research assistants to facilitate the research design and implementation of the intervention workshops. These three undergraduate students from the psychology department shared a common interest in current research on life-skill development for children, community change, and the use of sport psychology interventions. As such, the intervention was built with their collaboration. Sthephany Escandell, the first author of the manuscript, joined the team a semester later and primarily focused on translating English documents into Spanish. She also attended each workshop of the intervention as a life-skills coach with the children. The second author, Kallie Reckner, played a crucial role in the development of the training manual, including the design of drills and exercises for the intervention workshops. Kallie was a research assistant for two semesters and joined due to her extensive sports background. Having played volleyball, basketball, and softball among other sports, along with her father's influence on her as a sport's coach, her passion was ignited early on for teaching others about the value of sports and their contribution to life-skills development. Finally, there was an additional research assistant who participated as a life-skills coach but later withdrew from the study due to personal reasons.

This population was selected in collaboration with the community organization that supported the conduction of the intervention. The decision to work with this population and community organization was influenced by the strict research requirements imposed by local school districts. In addition, we were also interested in working together with the local

community to assist children with low socio-economic backgrounds, who would benefit from a free sport intervention that also supports their life skills development. Previous literature (Hodge et al., 2017) justifies the support of minority children in low socio-economic positions to improve their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This area has been heavily studied, indicating the need for support, both in children's sports involvement and life-skills transfer in various settings, including school and at home (Drummond et al., 2014; Hatfield et al., 2015).

Using concepts from Patton (2015), we located ourselves as researchers within the research, acknowledging our own identities and contributions to support this specific minority population. However, it is important to note that our identities could not fully align with the majority of the participants due to socioeconomic status, educational level, English fluency, and representation of other ethnic minority groups such as Black and/or Asian individuals. The first author identifies as a first-generation immigrant woman of Hispanic (Colombian-Cuban) background, whose native language is Spanish and second language is English. The second author identifies as a white (non-Hispanic) woman who is monolingual in English and has limited experience working with minority populations. Lastly, the third author, who is the PI of the study, identifies as a Latina woman born in Brazil, whose native language is Portuguese, and second language is English.

Trust and Access in the Community

Community access has always been a crucial consideration in the field, and gaining entry into the community was the first step to initiate the intervention. But aside from general challenges in building trust and securing the willingness of communities to commit to an intervention, ensuring participation of minority groups in research has been an additional challenge. Many studies list problems concerning representativeness as a key limitation, although they rarely address problems that arise due to limited data on these populations. Nevertheless, some demonstrate that historical instances of abusive engagements with minoritized populations in scientific contexts are a crucial reason for the sustained reluctance of minority groups to participate in research studies (Yancey et al., 2005). For example, the Tuskegee Experiment of 1932 created a strong separation between African Americans, research, and the government (Bodewes & Kunst, 2016). As a result of the negative and harmful history of minority research, a lack of trust from the participants is understandable, often informing an apprehension and unwillingness to participate in research conducted by scientific investigators and government institutions (Yancey et al., 2005). To contemporary intervention research, then, recognizing and respecting this historically situated suspicion of exploitative scientific practices requires careful reflection about effective yet ethically sound strategies to include minoritized target populations.

Previous literature has examined possible approaches to enhance minority recruitment for research. For survey studies in particular, various authors have formulated recommendations to ensure sufficient response rates among groups that often remain underrepresented in questionnaire-based research. For example, Aguirre et al. (2018) implemented several measures to reduce barriers for their participants, including having a certified translator present during the time of participant recruitment, translating and offering all material in both English and Spanish (or other primary languages of the participants), offering follow-up options for the researcher such as phone calls or home visits, and understanding the participants' needs prior to the investigation in order to create appealing incentives for the target population. Other research studies suggest recruiting participants through community-based data collection, creating an advisory board with community leaders prior to collecting data, and contacting community organizations (e.g., religious organizations) to help advertise the study (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2002). Collectively, these studies suggest the importance for researchers to learn about the target population, including their culture, beliefs, and community needs to successfully implement a study that participants will want to contribute to and gain direct benefit from (Ngo-Metzger et al., 2004).

Hence, they advise prospective researchers to acknowledge the specificity of minority groups vis-à-vis the 'ideal' population that often underlies survey instruments, and shape their research design accordingly. At the same time, others have suggested another approach which does not necessarily assume a preliminary research phase to explore, analyze and understand target populations, but rather calls for critical attentiveness for the separation between researchers and the communities they engage. Consequently, recognizing the conceptual distinction between insiders versus outsiders within the community becomes a tool to facilitate the participation of minoritized groups in research projects. As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest, researchers should navigate a fine line between being an insider or an outsider of the serving population. An insider researcher is part of the minority group being studied, well-immersed in the community – but potentially predisposed. An outside researcher, conversely, is not part of the minority group and may thus lack extensive knowledge of the group – but might be more prone to analytical distance (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). So where being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a minority population, there is a risk of bias and over-identification with the group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Assuming and safeguarding an outsider perspective, on the other hand, sacrifices firsthand knowledge and insight for critical distancing (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Therefore, researchers should seek a balance between being an insider and outsider of the target community to effectively serve in their role as researcher.

Based on the foregoing suggestions and recommendations, we finally reviewed existing literature to identify potential outcomes reported about the improvement of socio-emotional skills for school success to prepare the intervention's launch. This indicated that the following socio-emotional skills could be taught in a sports environment and were demonstrably beneficial for school success: goal setting, growth mindset, stress management, emotional regulation, teamwork, and self-efficacy. These socio-emotional skills have been shown to bear positive impacts in previous youth development programs (Conley et al., 2010; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008), although their combined use in a sport intervention that aims to improve academic outcomes for low socioeconomic status participants is a novel approach. In recognition of the body of literature that suggests conducting a preliminary analysis of the community and target populations (e.g. Escobar-Chavez et al., 2002; Ngo-Metzger et al., 2004) a needs assessment survey first was created to identify the specific needs and desires of the community regarding the implementation of the program.

Implementing the Intervention

To gain information about the community's needs, sports interests, children's current socio-emotional skills, and what could be a beneficial service for them, we first developed a needs assessment survey. This survey combined some of the questions from established measures such as the Youth Experience Survey 2.0 (YES 2.0; Hansen & Larson, 2005), Youth Experience Survey for Sport (YES-S; MacDonald et al., 2012), and Life Skills Transfer Survey (LSTS; Weiss et al., 2014). It included questions about the child's age, gender, interest in sports, and parental perceptions of their child's life skills pertaining to problem-solving, feedback, effort, emotions, and goals. In addition, we included questions about the specific sports that they were interested in playing.

Following the advice of Lillie-Blanton and Hoffman (1995), we partnered with a local community organization to gain entry into the community. Through the assistance of our *insider* (Wigginton & Setchell, 2016), the organization coordinator, we were able to initiate the data collection. First, we visited the organization equipped with our research tools including printed surveys, iPads, and QR codes so that families could complete the initial needs assessment in a manner that best suited their own schedules and habits. This survey data was collected from the parents of children who attended the community organization and expressed an interest in participating in a sport intervention program. The needs assessment served as an invitation for families to participate in the broader intervention, by

showing them our commitment to *serve* rather than *investigate* their children and the community (Yancey et al., 2005). But despite our sustained attempts to communicate and build a relationship with the members of the community, we obtained only three completed surveys. One possible reason for this small turnout is that even though we had a community member helping us collect data, the research project itself remained relatively unknown in the community. Many parents were busy dropping off or picking up their children moreover, making it challenging to find the motivation or time to complete the survey for unfamiliar individuals such as us. Recognizing the limitations of our in-person data collection strategy, we attempted to gather more data by sending surveys via email. The organization coordinator facilitated this by sending a survey link to the organization members, and a follow-up reminder after a week. Due to this revised recruitment method, we received a more substantial response, with 42 completed surveys received between the two emails sent. This approach yielded a much larger sample size of the needs assessment responses, 14 times greater than the initial data collection. This shift in recruitment strategy exemplifies the importance of trust and recognition within a community to gain access (Yancey et al., 2005), but also demonstrates how a well-meant attempt at a personal approach – addressing potential participants directly – might overlook practical hurdles. Were direct interpersonal interactions might seem like a considerate strategy to build trust and rapport, it can also suffer from being all too demanding for intended respondents' daily routines.

Our final pre-launch initiative consisted of a pilot study of the intervention in a local inner-city school. This was facilitated by the fact that our community partner managed an afterschool program in this particular school, and again demonstrates the benefits of collaborating with community members to facilitate interventions (Escobar-Chavez et al., 2002). It enabled us to test the program and make potential adjustments to its future implementation, resulting in a final revisiting of the research design. A cursory demographic analysis of the school's population revealed that 21% of the students were White, and 83% qualified for free lunch – providing a good indication of the likely composition of the community participating in the actual intervention. During the pilot study itself, we noticed that, at first, most participants had difficulty listening to instructions, respecting the rules, and contributing meaningfully to discussions on socio-emotional skills. This experience allowed us to gain insights and make valuable adjustments to the program, such as reducing the frequency of discussion breaks to maintain participants' attention, augmenting the modeling of socio-emotional skills to provide clearer guidance, implementing more strict interaction rules to create a more supportive environment, and reducing the size of group activities to enhance participant engagement and communal senses.

Building on insights from existing literature, the preliminary needs assessment data, and observations from the pilot study, we subsequently launched a free community-based program. This program was modeled as an intervention study that taught socio-emotional skills through basketball over a seven-week period. To assess the impact of the program, pre- and post-intervention data was set to be collected from the participating children on the first and last days of the program. Considering the previous research and community demographics, the surveys to assess pre- and post-intervention competences were translated into Spanish – ensuring inclusivity and to accommodating a diverse population (Aguirre et al., 2018). In addition, the same surveys were also completed by individuals who were not participating in the basketball-based program, but attended other branches or initiatives of the community organization in order to gather control group data. This match-control group was included because previous evidence suggests that extracurricular activities may improve academic outcomes in general, even without intentional socio-emotional skill instruction (Mahoney et al., 2003). A comparison of the results of the intervention group with those of the control group would then allow us to assess possible benefits of integrating socio-emotional lessons alongside sports beyond merely teaching a sport as such. To maximally ensure positive outcomes, our program also considered the literature when setting rules for promoting a safe environment and belonging among the participants – in line with the

recommendations of existing literature (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Gould & Carson, 2008). Our guidelines aimed to promote a supportive atmosphere on a collective level, while simultaneously ensuring the well-being of individual participants throughout the program.

Through basketball training techniques, drills, and games, we taught participants how to actively use each socioemotional skill. For example, we would first teach them to set goals and to foster a growth mindset, before encouraging them to set realistic and challenging goals for their drills with an emphasis on self-improvement. In addition, the instructors would provide positive feedback about the participants' improvement in the program itself, and discuss with them how they could apply these goal-setting skills in their schoolwork during the following week at school. These debrief sessions served as short discussions about the use of socio-emotional skills in the basketball drills and their transferability to the school setting in particular. This approach, in which program collaborators explicitly discuss the applicability of competences learned in a primary context to secondary settings, was shown by previous research to be more effective than expecting children to independently recognize the transferability of socio-emotional skills acquired via sport participation (Pierce et al., 2017). Our primary goal was to help the participants to clearly recognize how the skills they learned while playing basketball (e.g., goal setting) could be effectively transferred into their school environment. The daily sessions of the program followed a similar structure. We would begin each session with a deep breathing exercise and stretching routine. Then, we followed with a basketball-themed warm-up. The core of each session consisted of teaching the participants a life skill (e.g. mindfulness, goal setting, or positive self-talk), alongside teaching them a basketball skill (e.g. passing, bouncing, or shooting). These components were carefully integrated to provide a comprehensive learning experience. In addition, each session included small group drills with 2-3 short breaks for debriefing. These breaks were designed to reduce boredom during the discussions while also providing sufficient time for meaningful socio-emotional skill development (Pierce et al., 2017). As the sessions drew to a close, we typically ended them with a cool-down activity (e.g. mindful walking, stretching, deep breathing) to help the participants transition into a state of calmness, and a debriefing (e.g. what is one thing that you improved on today?) to reflect on the day's progress and accomplishments.

But despite our efforts to implement various strategies to reach a representative sample from the community, our results indicate that we have not achieved the desired level of representation in both the intervention and control groups. Although our intervention design was maximally tailored to the recommendations others have formulated to ensure diverse participation and a respondent sample largely representative of the community the intervention took place in, we mostly failed to reflect its demographic composition. Undeterred by the intents of the program, the intervention and control groups did not accurately reflect the diversity and socio-economic status of the community: 70% of the participants identified as White and 16.7% had free or reduced lunch at school. Meanwhile, the community's school district population is 44.5% White and 59.4% are on free or reduced lunch. This discrepancy raises questions about the effectiveness of the above-mentioned measures and strategies to recruit minority and low socio-economic status participants. We consciously chose to develop the program in collaboration with the community (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), made it free of charge (Haack et al., 2014) to increase access (Escobar-Chavez, 2002), and collaborated with an established community partner to build a meaningful relationship with the target community (Escobar-Chavez, 2002), hence facilitating entry into said community. Additionally, we also recognized the importance of being an *insider* (Wigginton & Setchell, 2016), provided surveys in both Spanish and English (Aguirre et al., 2018), and considered the perspectives of the target group when developing research tools (Escobar-Chavez, 2002). Nevertheless, these efforts proved ineffective in gathering appropriate data that is representative of the community.

Limitations and barriers of the intervention

Notably, the demographics of our program did not truly represent the population when comparing the baseline socio-emotional skills of the participants in the pilot program (i.e., from the inner-city school) to those in the actual program. Although we did not systematically collect pre- and post-intervention data for the pilot program, our interactions with the participants did suggest that their baseline socio-emotional skills were less developed (e.g., at first, they had difficulty in listening, following the rules, and respecting each other) compared to the participants in the actual intervention program. The fact that the pilot's population showed a substantial exigency for interpersonal skill training reinforces the importance of the program including participants who represent the community and would truly benefit from it. While the original intention of the intervention program was to help such participants, the actual program resulted in a pool of participants with fewer skill deficiencies than those observed in the pilot study. Hence, and perhaps ironically so, the pilot study intended to ensure diverse participation in the actual intervention ultimately proved more successful in reaching the target population of the community-based sports program – with considerably less recourse to the recommendations found in the literature. A critical recognition of this discrepancy subsequently stimulated us to reflect on the overall process and outcomes of the intervention.

Assumptions of the Research Team

A first element that surfaced when reflecting on the limitations of the study, was the assumptions held by the research team even before the initiation of the preliminary phase. Prior to designing, preparing and implementing the life-skills intervention, the research team relied on several assumptions that may have contributed to the study's overall failure and the failure to attain the desired population. A key assumption here concerned the intervention's allure to participants. Perhaps naively, we assumed that the target group would enthusiastically participate in a program that provides valuable life skills while incorporating sports and social interaction with peers. We believed that by providing free access to this intervention and supplying free nutritional snacks during each session, would sufficiently motivate parents and families to enroll their children – aside from our conviction that the children themselves would be enthusiastic about participating. Additionally, we made incorrect assessments regarding the level of community acceptance of us as an institutional entity working with minority individuals. There was a lack of rapport-building between the research team and the target group, in that the research facilitators arrived at the community site without proper introduction of ourselves beyond our association with the organization providing the service. Retrospectively, it would have been more valuable to engage with the community in their neighborhoods, building rapport and gaining insight into the population's desires and needs, while clarifying the research team's objectives before initiating the intervention. By integrating certain recommendations about collaborating with community actors too superficially, we relegated the responsibility to explain the program and motivate potential participants to community representatives, instead of engaging them in a discussion on how to effectively pitch the program to parents and children.

Early Scholar Pressures and Barriers

But the study's limited results are not exclusively informed by incorrect assumptions held by the research team. Although the program's design followed validated suggestions from the literature, implementing them encountered several barriers related to early career scholar pressures. In particular, the limited 'soft power' early career scholars have at their disposal proved detrimental. A first obstacle was the burdensome process to acquire authorization to implement the program in a local school – for which the program could not rely on the authority of a long-established and extensively networked academic. While we were allowed to run a pilot study, we faced limitations on data collection, as its long authorization process is known for its high rejection rate. Additionally, the program had to operate on a shoestring

budget, relying on a $450 small community outreach grant that covered only basic expenses such as t-shirts and snacks for the participants. Other resources had to be free of charge: the research assistants volunteered to conduct the intervention, and the community partner provided the space and materials at no cost. Due to our modest budget and time limitations, in turn, the community partner had to limit the program to seven weeks; shorter than initially planned, but the only feasible way to complete the study. Despite these challenges, we persevered to deliver the program within the available timeframe and with the support we had secured from our community partner. Some of the implementation issues of the program furthermore stemmed from the pressures faced by the PI as an early career professional on track for tenure. The PI had to maintain a stable publication record while teaching multiple courses per semester alongside implementing a robust intervention program that involved extensive preparation and complex data collection procedures. As such, the PI decided not to pursue an authorization to implement this project in a local school, as it could have taken approximately two years to be approved, with a high likelihood of it being rejected altogether. The goal was to collect pilot data and demonstrate the program's efficacy before requesting to implement it inside the local school system. The results from this study would then support future implementation of the intervention and attract additional sources of funding for the research project, which would strengthen the PIs tenure application. However, to achieve this goal, the PI had to make several compromises. The duration of the program was shortened, the community partner was adjusted, and the research team had to find volunteer research assistants to help with program management and data collection.

Reflections on the Failure to Be Representative

Reflecting upon the sports science and health research suggestions to reach representative samples and the present study's efforts, several suggestions were incorporated into our intervention program to maximally reach minority populations. First, preparing a needs assessment before designing the intervention allowed our research team to learn about the community we hoped to serve (De Las Nueces et al., 2012). In addition, acknowledging the importance of a relationship with a reliable partner within the community aimed to improve the research design and recruitment outcomes (Wigginton & Setchell, 2016). Although the incorporation of these suggestions has helped in previous research, it was shown to not be as effective in our socioemotional skills intervention program. Despite drawing from the advice formulated by previous literature, the present study was not able to attain a participant pool that accurately reflected the diversity of the community we sought to help.

Upon reflecting on our research assumptions and recruitment efforts targeting minority and low socioeconomic children, it is possible that our implementation of previous recommendations was poorly conducted. For example, for our needs assessment we relied on the community partner director to distribute the questionnaires to families via email, which eventually proved ineffective in reaching our target group. This method overlooked families who lack internet access, technology devices, or familiarity with the community organization, thereby hindering their possibility to even receive, let alone participate in the needs assessment. Furthermore, our reliance on a well-known community partner located in the heart of the city harbored the assumption that nearby neighborhood children would utilize this organization or attend the free intervention sessions. However, there seems to be a level of unawareness among minority children about community interventions. The children we attempted to recruit would not attend the community organization due to their preconceived knowledge about the luxury or privilege of having a gym membership, or about not "fitting in" with others who attend extracurricular sports and events. Our assumption may have impacted the outcomes in proper recruitment of the focused population given our biases. Our biased perspectives limited us from recognizing the true gap in the use of community organizations among minority, low-income children.

The most beneficial asset of this study was the use of our own *insider* (Wigginton & Setchell, 2016) to gain trust from and facilitate access to the community. An *insider* is

someone who is well-inserted into the community under study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Our community partner, being an insider, had a good understanding of the community and actively helped to recruit participants. However, despite the help of our *insider*, we were unable to attract the desired amount of minority participants. Literature indicates the advantages of creating partnerships with local community programs to promote research and provide a positive connotation for the study (Ross et al., 2010). In the present study, while we initially felt that we had carefully selected a strong and well-connected community partner, we only realized upon reflection that this partner's membership was not sufficiently representative either. Although we advertised the program in local schools and emphasized its accessibility to all, regardless of membership status and at no cost, these efforts were to no avail. Therefore, even though our intervention program was easily accessible to anyone from the community, it is possible individuals within the community may have been unaware of the program or perceived it as not specifically targeted towards them. The attempted recruitment of minority participants, especially in studies like ours that focus on minority youth, gives rise to another challenge related to the parents' apprehension about involving their children in institutional studies. Adult minorities experience high anxiety about participating in research, which is heightened when their children are recruited as subjects. In our study, we hoped to teach children socio-emotional skills because they are developmentally capable of understanding and applying socioemotional skills to various settings, and are receptive to learning new skills. But we did not prioritize building a relationship with the families prior to data collection, expecting that the relationship with our community partner would suffice to give us entry into the community. To attain success in recruiting youth minorities, future studies should consider working on building rapport with parents long before introducing the idea of a research study.

Furthermore, upon reflection our pilot study revealed closer demographics to the target population than we had in the actual program, which had implications for the program's implementation. Research studies frequently acknowledge the lack of representativity but simply state this issue as a limitation (Islam et al., 2010). For example, in the pilot study, we found that the targeted socio-emotional skills were less developed among the participants who had difficulties in following instructions and engaging in active communication with other participants in the actual program. This difference resulted adjustments to the program including fewer discussions, the incorporation of more behavioral rules, and the use of more small group basketball drills. Recognizing this issue is important as it highlights the program's need to be adapted to the participating sample. Conducting the pilot study provided valuable insights that allowed us to move beyond publishing generic guidelines while stating that the nonrepresentative sample was a limitation as an afterthought.

Finally, it is important to analyze the recommendations that were not implemented in our study, such as the suggestion of using focus groups including members of the community who are prospective targets to inform the study design (Escobar-Chaves et al., 2002) – instead of or as complementary to the survey-based approach followed here. A focus group that bridges the gap between the community and the research team allows for strong discussions on the research design to take place, and for community input to be incorporated throughout the research process while facilitating quicker establishment of connections with the community. To enable efficient communication with the target population, the research team could attend community gatherings or schools, presenting the research goals briefly and accessible, in terms that are easily understood. This approach would provide the focus group with the opportunity to develop their needs and express their feelings about the research, while simultaneously equipping the researchers with a better understanding of the community's expectations in creating the intervention program.

Future Directions

After following various recommendations from the literature to recruit participants for both the needs assessment survey and the intervention program, the question still remains: what

other strategies can be employed if following these recommendations is ineffective? A possible answer lies in using participatory research.

Participatory research has gained popularity in recent years as an alternative approach to traditional research methods, such as the ones described in the present study (Ross et al., 2010). While traditional methods tend to impose research topics and plans on participants, participatory research instead actively involves community members as partners rather than mere participants (De Las Nueces et al., 2012). In most cases, this approach includes engaging the community in multiple stages of the research process, from identifying the study question to developing an intervention, recruiting participants, and collecting data (De Las Nueces et al., 2012). One of the main goals in using a participatory method is to foster a better understanding of the community, allowing for better research design and an improved overall outcome (Ross et al., 2010). This strategy can be particularly beneficial in research studies using participants from minority racial and ethnic groups, as it encourages participation rather than deterring involvement (De Las Nueces et al., 2012).

As such, participatory research could be the best option for integrating cultural minority groups in the development and execution of a community-based intervention program. However, the extensive time commitment required for participatory research limits researchers' ability to use this design, especially for untenured faculty. Nyden (2003) argues that the tenure and promotion systems in universities often prioritize academic pursuits and are hence not conducive to pursuing innovative social programs. In general, these promotion rules focus on academics' rather than the community's needs (Nyden, 2003). Additionally, community-based research is often seen as politically motivated or biased by some academics, and its impact is typically not adequately considered in the tenure process aside from published manuscripts and funded grants (Nyden, 2003). Besides the barriers related to tenure and promotion evaluations, a survey conducted by Savan et al. (2009) revealed that community-based researchers identified limited funding, time constraints, and lack of institutional support as the three highest-rated obstacles preventing their engagement in more community-based participatory research. These limitations create difficulties for researchers in reaching the community and in developing culturally inclusive programs, similar to the present study. However, Lowry and Ford-Paz (2013) have developed a series of strategies to support early career academic professionals in implementing their community-based participatory research programs, including an online resource which includes a list of journals supportive of this type of publications and research. They also offer mentorship resources to help early scholars build a tenure portfolio. Additionally, Horowitz et al. (2009) offer potential solutions to address the challenges in implementing participatory research. Ultimately, it is important that universities and funding agencies increase their support for this type of research, as it has been deemed necessary for decades (Savan et al., 2009).

Conclusion

At this point, it is exceedingly evident that further research is needed regarding effective methods for minority recruitment in the social sciences. First, we recommend conducting additional preliminary research that aims to obtain representative samples of the population so that more effective methods of minority recruitment may come to light. We also propose that researchers who encounter challenges in reaching representative samples of a diverse community, as in our program, critically reflect on their efforts and continue to work towards achieving accurate representation. This can be accomplished by explicitly sharing both successful and unsuccessful strategies as limitations. In addition, researchers should consider their initial assumptions in relation to their research objectives. While their extensive knowledge from existing literature may be valuable, incorrect assumptions can have a detrimental impact on the study's outcomes, as was showcased in our reflections on the current study. Finally, we recommend researchers who encounter limited representation to not simply view this as a limitation of the study but to strive to improve their research designs and reflect upon the practical consequences in future studies.

Both previous research and our study have shown that recruiting minority groups for research purposes is not only difficult but also requires extra efforts from the researchers, especially in establishing rapport and identifying the needs of the targeted group. Even with references to previous literature, program leaders often find themselves investing copious hours to develop and implement a program that aligns with both the community and its needs (Savan et al., 2009). This additional workload possibly creates difficulty in reached the desired minority groups, especially given the fact that many times researchers also bear heavy teaching responsibilities within their university. As a result, many studies encounter limitations in terms of inadequate representation of minority groups within a large sample size (Islam et al., 2010), without resolving the issue. Without sufficient time, money, support, training, and overall desire to be fully invested in a participatory study such as ours, it is nearly impossible to obtain the desired results and accomplish the initial research goals.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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