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## Short-Term International Sport for Development and Peace Programs: A Retrospective Analysis and Critique Informed by Stakeholders' Perspectives in a Two-Year Follow-Up

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**Short-Term International Sport for Development and Peace  
Programs: A Retrospective Analysis and Critique Informed by  
Stakeholders' Perspectives in a Two-Year Follow-Up**

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Dissertation submitted to the College of Applied Human Sciences at West Virginia University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sport, Exercise,  
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### ABSTRACT

#### Short-Term International Sport for Development and Peace Programs: A Retrospective Analysis and Critique Informed by Stakeholders' Perspectives in a Two-Year Follow-Up

Adam Hansell

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) programs are a popular approach to promoting positive development throughout the world, spanning health, education, peace, and social issues. However, scholars have identified critical shortcomings of SDP work, including the potential to reinforce neoliberalist tendencies and values imposition from the Global North to the Global South. Deporte y Cambio Social was a short-term SDP program established through partnership between American and Mexican constituent groups with aims to empower girls and women through soccer. Through six semi-structured, two-year retrospective interviews, the purpose of the present study was to explore cross-cultural understandings of power and intercultural power relations from the voices of Mexicans and Americans involved in the program to offer reflective critique of, and generate participant-informed strategies for improving, the design and implementation SDP programs broadly. Using thematic analysis from a critical constructivist orientation, the meanings generated from the data showed that Mexican and American participants similarly defined power and acknowledged power imbalances informed by a limiting project framework and a sociocultural-informed deference to Americans as experts. Strong, positive intercultural experiences between Mexican and American constituent groups were reported amid often unseen social biases that can be experienced abroad and perpetuated in SDP programs. Critical reflexivity, prolonged cultural preparation, longer-term engagement, and careful construction of SDP leadership teams and program participants were among the strategies informed by the data that were further interpreted to account for the complex realities of SDP programs.

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## **Short-Term International Sport for Development and Peace Programs: A Retrospective Analysis and Critique Informed by Stakeholders' Perspectives in a Two-Year Follow-Up**

Organized sport has played an integral role in human societies for ages, and it continues to be one of the most popular forms of social interaction and entertainment throughout the world. Experts in public health and exercise science have published an extensive body of literature suggesting participation in organized sport can promote the development of a myriad of positive physical, psychological, and social outcomes for youth, including improved health, social interactions, and the development of essential life skills such as discipline, accountability, teamwork, and responsibility that can be transferred to life outside sport (e.g., Holt, 2016). At the elite level, global sport competitions, such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, attract millions of supporters worldwide to observe sporting phenomena believed to transcend race, religion, socioeconomic status, and politics (Murray, 2012).

Due to the global popularity of sport, researchers, international organizations, and government agencies have increasingly advocated for sport for development and peace (SDP) programs which use sport to promote positive development in non-sport spheres (Schulenkorf et al., 2016), including social cohesion, health promotion, education, livelihoods, peace, gender equality, and disability (Giulianotti et al., 2016; Svensson, Andersson, & Faulk, 2018). Although improvement across these areas is ubiquitously beneficial, scholars have encouraged the use of SDP programs with individuals from underserved communities domestically and internationally (e.g., Coalter, 2010; Kidd, 2008; United Nations, 2003; Whitley, Forneris, & Barker, 2014).

In an integrated literature review, Schulenkorf et al. (2016) found that SDP programs have been most commonly conducted with underserved youth participants, used soccer as the sport of choice, and incorporated either qualitative or mixed method approaches for evaluation.

Among the critical gaps limiting their effectiveness, however, was the use of apolitical and outcome-focused theoretical frameworks, such as positive youth development (PYD) or social capital, within which culture and context are peripheral. While the authors recognized the use of any theoretical framework as a noted strength, they suggested sole reliance on frameworks that neither acknowledge, nor deepen, understanding of the sociopolitical and cultural landscape within which SDP programs occur, is misguided. Schulenkorf et al. further noted a significant gap related to the intentional engagement of multi-level stakeholders in the evaluation of SDP programs. Thus, evaluation is often limited to understanding whether program participants changed according to a predefined outcome, yet other stakeholders with considerable influence in shaping the SDP experience, including funders, researchers, and program developers, are seldom examined.

Other scholars have highlighted critical directions for the field (e.g., Darnell et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2019; Welty-Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Spaaj, 2019). Among these recommendations, researchers have been encouraged to move beyond solely outcome-based approaches that measure short-term, transactional ‘impact’ of SDP initiatives on underserved program participants (e.g., pre-posttests), toward critical reflection of how extant SDP approaches, intended to empower participants, may counterintuitively reinforce dominant ideology. International SDP programs, for example, are often conducted in low- and middle-income communities located in the Global South but are typically funded and evaluated by Western stakeholders from the Global North and often rooted in neoliberal beliefs and values (Darnell et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2019; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Neoliberalism is broadly characterized as the belief that disadvantaged nations, most of which are located in the Global South, would benefit from the adoption of Western systems, values, and institutions (Brown,

2019; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). Despite the intention of helping other nations, critics assert a neoliberal approach can reinforce systems of subordination and disempowerment (Svensson & Loat, 2019). Although SDP programs are frequently advertised as meeting the needs of underserved communities, they often entail the imposition of Western expertise and assumed truths about a different culture without the careful and intentional involvement of local voices – an immersive process that would offer the best opportunity for positive change, as defined by the local community, as well as the development of meaningful intercultural relationships (Darnell et al., 2018; Harris, 2018; Hayhurst, 2016; Oatley & Harris, 2020; Welty-Peachey et al., 2019).

Importantly, neoliberalist critiques are not unique to SDP, but are rather reflective of a complex, global sociopolitical and cultural landscape across societal sectors. Nilsen (2016) asserted neoliberalism is one of the primary, yet hidden, drivers of any international development agenda. Similarly, scholars of anthropological phenomena have critiqued monolithic definitions of power within international collaborations and encouraged conceptualizations that increasingly consider complexity, fluidity, and context (Adler & Aycan, 2018). Some evidence, for example, suggests cultural perceptions are influenced by the balance, or imbalance, of power observed between members of the same or different cultural groups such that greater power symmetry may be a primary determinant of positive cultural perceptions (Heijes, 2010).

Collectively, these critiques call into question how SDP programs can be better designed, implemented, and evaluated to prioritize the expertise of local communities and meaningful intercultural relationships that maximize contextual understanding of local culture, values, norms, and long-term aims. The purpose of the present study was to retrospectively critique a short-term international SDP program from the voices of varied stakeholders involved in the program's development and implementation, and related specifically to cross-cultural

understandings of power and intercultural power relations, to generate participant-driven strategies that meaningfully inform future SDP engagement.

### **The Setting: Deporte y Cambio Social**

Deporte y Cambio Social was an international SDP and sport diplomacy initiative developed to promote girls' and women's empowerment and leadership in Mexico using soccer as a platform – a topic selected based upon a sub-award received from a larger grant funded by the U.S. Department of State. Academic professionals and graduate students from two large public universities in the United States (U.S.) and Mexico developed and implemented the program using a train-the-trainer model designed for current and future sport coaches of girls and women based on the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM) – a values-based model that views leadership development and social change as a dynamic process within individual, group, and community domains (HERI, 1996). The program involved two phases with 56 days in-between: the first in Mexico for seven days and the second in the U.S. for 13 days.

The American constituent group included faculty members, graduate students, and community coaches who were native U.S. citizens or originally from regions of the Global South, including Mexico. Collectively, this group selected the guiding theoretical framework, managed the budget, coordinated the international travel, designed the program in consultation with members of the partnering institution in Mexico, and facilitated the workshops. The Mexican constituent group included faculty members who were native to Mexico. Together, they recruited participants (e.g., community coaches, college and graduate students, and girl youth soccer players from the community), procured facilities and supplies, and facilitated the workshops in a supporting role (e.g., providing directions, explaining activities) for the



programming in Mexico. Program participants were current and future sport coaches of girls and women who were predominantly Mexican in addition to a small sample of Americans in similar coaching or student roles. In addition to outcomes-based assessment of the program (i.e., quantitative and qualitative examination of learning relative to the program's content; España-Pérez et al., 2021), Hansell et al. (under review) explored a subsample of Mexican participants' impressions of the U.S. and Americans immediately following their program participation via focus groups. Participants reported feeling connected to Americans in realizing they experience some of the same struggles and shared optimism in forming future intercultural partnerships. Interestingly, participants also described considerable deference to Americans as 'experts' in sport-related professions and idealized sport training and resources in the U.S. Hansell et al. purported it is possible the mere structure of the program reinforced a perceived imbalance of power, in what was meant to be a shared intercultural exchange, which inspired the present study.

## **Method**

### **Research Design & Positionality**

A critical constructivist epistemological framework was used to frame the present study, which acknowledges the influential role of culture, context, and power, both hidden and overt, across human social interactions as individuals navigate, and make meaning of, their experiences (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Bentley, 2003; Hopf, 1998; Levers, 2013; Price & Reus-Smit, 1998; Stetsenko & Arievitch, 1997). Within qualitative research, assuming a critical constructivist lens entails the co-creation of meaningful information through interactions between researchers and participants to promote transformation, critique, and the generation of novel ideas (McCabe & Holmes, 2009). Scholars have highlighted the importance of adopting a critical lens to challenge

existing societal status quos by questioning, untangling, and constantly reevaluating entrenched ideologies, beliefs, values, and assumptions (Denzin & Giardina, 2016). From this perspective, a critical lens not only welcomes diversity, disagreement, and dissent, but views them as essential components of the research process to garner new theoretical insights, possibilities, and explanations. Qualitative researchers have highlighted the philosophical similarities between constructivism and critical theory (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998). Both are rooted in ontological relativism, which posits that reality is constructed through an individual's unique interpretation of their environment, context, and identity, and therefore multiple realities can exist simultaneously (De Ronde & Mouján, 2019). From this orientation, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to provide participants with opportunities to respond to the same questions within a flexible framework and, in turn, promote rapport building, depth of responses, exploration of unique insights, and co-construction of meaning with participants through elaborative discussion (Dearnley, 2005). The present study was informed by a seven-person research team with various roles to include two interviewers and two critical friends whose respective roles are discussed herein as well as an auditor who oversaw the project with the consultative support of a dissertation committee representing experience in SDP, PYD, intercultural collaboration, girls' and women's leadership, and the youth sport experience and who offered insights iteratively through the writing process.

### **Participants**

Participants ( $n = 6$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.5$  years;  $SD = 10.4$  years) were a purposive sample of Mexican and American citizens ( $n = 3$  self-identified women;  $n = 3$  self-identified men) involved in both phases of Deporte y Cambio Social in Mexico and in the U.S., respectively. Using maximum variation sampling methods, participants were selected according to select

variables that influence, or are influenced by, power (i.e., nationality, gender, professional role, role in the program). The participant sample included two Mexican university students training to become sport coaches and/or physical activity teachers of girls and women at the time of their program participation; two Mexican faculty members and one American faculty member from the collaborating universities who were involved in the design and implementation of both program phases; and an American coach of girls and women involved in the program's implementation.

### **Procedures**

Following IRB approval for this study, eligible participants (i.e., involved in design, implementation, and/or participation in both phases of *Deporte y Cambio Social*; 18 years or older) were contacted via email, text message, or private social media message with invitation to participate in the study. This communication described the purpose and nature of the study, the tasks involved in participating, and invited them to further discuss the study via video call. Participants were also provided informed consent and a background questionnaire asking them their name, age, hometown, place of residence, current occupation, and occupation at the time they were involved in *Deporte y Cambio Social*. All eligible individuals responded to the initial inquiry; participants who opted out cited personal events. Six participants agreed to participate through electronic return of a signed consent form and scheduled their virtual interview.

Each interview, ranging from 28 to 60 minutes ( $M = 45$  minutes), was conducted collaboratively by two research team members. The first interviewer was an American citizen and doctoral student at the American university who identifies as a White man. He has been passionate about the potential role of sport in promoting positive social change through his experiences traveling internationally, his soccer career, and his continued non-profit work in a

rural community in Ghana. Although he is fluent in Spanish, he acknowledged his role as a cultural ‘outsider’ given his limited immersion in Mexican cultures, customs, and traditions. The second interviewer was a Mexican citizen who completed her doctoral degree at the American university and identifies as a Latina woman. Born and raised in Mexico for 18 years before attending university in the U.S. as a student-athlete, she had personal experience with gender inequity in Mexico both within and outside sport, and openly acknowledged her role as a cultural ‘insider’ given her lived experience as a Mexican citizen. Both were involved in the program development and implementation across the two phases of Deporte y Cambio Social. They attended all planning meetings and provided feedback connecting sport-based activities with program objectives and their alignment with Mexican cultural norms. Each assisted the primary workshop facilitators and served as translators between Spanish and English speakers.

The interviewers stayed in contact with many of the representatives, Mexican and American, who were involved in Deporte y Cambio Social in the time since the program ended. These continued personal relationships primarily consisted of occasional (e.g., bi-weekly) conversations in-person or via text messaging services and social media. The formation of sustained relationships beyond participation in SDP programs has been labeled as ‘friendship potential,’ which is a common outcome stemming from SDP programs involving stakeholders from different cultures (Dixon et al., 2019). Having relationships (e.g., personal, professional) beyond traditional researcher-participant dynamics is not uncommon in ethnographic studies within anthropology. Day (2012) asserted that role conflicts for qualitative researchers are not inherently problematic, as long as the researchers engage in a robust reflexive process to understand their different roles, their impact on the research, and how and when they alternate between multiple, and sometimes conflicting, roles. Other scholars have noted that pre-existing

relationships between researchers and participants can counteract perceived power imbalances, enhance vulnerability and honesty, and foster more meaningful discussions during qualitative interviews (Eide & Kahn, 2008; Råheim et al., 2016).

Following guidance outlined by Whiting (2008) for facilitating semi-structured interviews, the interviewers began each interview by explaining the study purpose, use and dissemination of findings, their rights as research participants, and protection of confidentiality. The interviewers additionally encouraged discussion of concerns or questions to allow participants to explore the prompts freely and interact with the interviewers comfortably. Interview items (See Appendices D and E) were developed to prompt critical reflection related to participants': (a) experiences in the program (e.g., describe your experience participating in *Deporte y Cambio Social*); (b) understandings of power (e.g., what does power mean to you?); (c) perceptions of power within the present intercultural collaboration (e.g., during the program, tell us when you perceived a power balance/imbalance); and (d) additional hypothetical prompts related to intergroup dynamics and power (e.g., would you ever consider coming/returning to the U.S./Mexico to deliver a similar program?).

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and translated into English by a professional editor who is fluent in Spanish and English. Each participant was contacted to complete a virtual, individual member reflection with the interviewers (Smith & McGannon, 2018) during which participants were prompted with questions regarding their initial interview experience (i.e., what was it like for you to critique, with strengths and areas of improvement, the *Deporte y Cambio Social* program?). Participants were then provided with a case summary, developed by the interviewers, with initial interpretations from their first interview and encouraged to question, clarify, or expand. All participants engaged in member reflections,

ranging from 10 to 17 minutes ( $M = 13$  minutes), which were additionally transcribed as data and integrated into the remaining phases of data analysis (Smith & McGannon, 2018).

### **Data Analysis**

The core data analysis team included the interviewers, as well as two individuals with ‘critical friend’ roles, both of whom are American citizens who identify as White women; the first is pursuing her doctoral degree, and the second is the primary author’s doctoral advisor, at the American institution. Neither critical friend was involved in the design or delivery of *Deporte y Cambio Social* and, accordingly, were well-positioned to offer perspectives external to direct programmatic experiences. Given the analysis teams’ variable roles, experiences, and relationships to the participants, reflexivity was prioritized – a critical thinking practice to identify and bring into conscious awareness specific personal, cultural, social, theoretical, and political factors that influence the research so meaning can be understood and evaluated in context (Attia & Edge, 2017; Day, 2012; Georgiadou, 2016; Lazard & McAvoy, 2017). The researchers followed guidance provided by Meyer and Willis (2019) to intentionally engage in a structured and reflexive process using journaling and critical collective discussions to elucidate unconscious biases and tendencies that may influence their interactions with participants and the data (Cunliffe, 2004; Malacrida, 2007; McNair, Taft, & Hegarty, 2008). Prior to data collection, analysis team members discussed their role in the program, identity, and positionality (Day, 2012; e.g., What are your underlying assumptions about the production of knowledge? How does my role/identity/education/experience influence my perspective and interpretation?). They additionally responded to prompts, in written form, related to power (e.g., in my community, power means...) and their views on SDP (e.g., my impressions of SDP work are...). The purpose of the analysis team’s engagement with themselves and each other was to process, clarify, and be

transparent about what each member brought to the analysis and explore how the study, in turn, would be informed by that awareness. This process encouraged exploration of multiple interpretive possibilities while supporting participants' voices as the primary source of meaning derived from the data (Halcomb & Peters, 2016).

The data were analyzed using a reflexive thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2020). Importantly, Braun and Clarke (2020) asserted their guidance is not meant to be followed rigidly, as the process should be fluid, recursive, and flexible. Prior to reading transcripts, the analysis team met to discuss, establish, and clarify norms, roles, and expectations for the coding process that were subsequently revisited at the start of each analysis meeting. These initial conversations included sharing from each member's reflexive journals (e.g., What thoughts and feelings emerged for you as you read the data this week?); invitations to respectfully dissent with another member's perspective (e.g., Could this interpretation more deeply consider the sociocultural context?); and acknowledging insights from each team member as equally valuable regardless of their role (e.g., What was it like as a student to receive that feedback from me, as your doctoral advisor? What resonates? What doesn't?).

Each member of the analysis team reviewed the data individually and pre-coded, one transcript at a time, using open coding (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2006) and an analytic memo to document impressions before discussing as a group. Together, the analysis team deductively organized the codes according to all facets of the study purpose and inductively organized them according to meanings generated. Over several months, the organization of codes, drafted in text form and via conceptual mapping, were iteratively revised, refined, and re-defined as new transcripts were read via constant comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2020) as well as throughout the writing of the study in which all research team members were consulted for clarity,

interpretation, and context based on their unique role in the program and the study. In the following narrative, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality (i.e., Mexican participants were Fran, Guillermo, Mariana, and Miguel; American participants were Jennifer and Jeremy).

### **Results and Discussion**

The following narrative begins with participants' broad impressions of the program. Understandings of power and culture that shaped their experience are then examined and interpreted to inform recommendations for SDP engagement. Within each section, main ideas generated from the data are italicized for emphasis. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality (i.e., Mexican participants were Fran, Guillermo, Mariana, and Miguel; American participants were Jennifer and Jeremy).

#### **General Impressions of the Short-Term SDP Experience**

*Mexican and American participants expressed significant enjoyment of, and deep gratitude for, their experience* in Deporte y Cambio Social. Participants reported sentiments such as: "...Everyone who travelled, based on what I saw, they really enjoyed the trip. They really had a great cultural experience" (Jeremy); "This trip was an example of how relationships that are formed in sport can be lifelong and life changing" (Jennifer); and "...we still talk on some occasions about the subject of [state]. The truth is we loved the treatment we received from all of you. What happened is that a very nice, very fraternal integration was made" (Miguel). Miguel elaborated: "The truth is that it is an experience I will cherish throughout my life." Participants' gratitude for their rich intercultural experiences was deeply rooted in their belief that sport can be used as a powerful, unifying mechanism that can "...teach that sort of balance and responsibility" (Jennifer). Miguel shared: "Sport moves masses. Sport prevents crime. Sport



unites cultures...Sport creates values. If I am a child, a six-year-old or seven-year-old, and I learn teamwork, communication, friendship, honesty, tolerance, respect, companionship, etc., society is going to be better.”

Such positive reflections of participants’ overall experience are much like those reported in response to similar SDP programs conducted between, for example, the U.S. and China (LeCrom & Dwyer, 2013), Jordan and Tajikistan (Blom et al., 2019), as well as countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Baker et al., 2018). Although belief in the power of sport to support positive and productive social change is hopeful, Coakley (2015) cautioned against overcommitment to the Great Sport Myth that assumes participation in sport is automatically good. According to Coakley, policymakers and others in positions of power have historically taken advantage of this assumption, particularly because sporting endeavors generate significant popular and financial support. While describing the positive “impact on society” that sport can have for “all the problems that currently exist in terms of violence, drugs, dropping out of school, etc...,” Miguel also emphasized “it all depends on the people involved.” Germane to Coakley’s (2015) assertion and Miguel’s poignant perspective, sport does not inherently ‘do good;’ its potential depends on how people within a socially and culturally-informed sport context, are positioned to promote positive change. In turn, though often unexplored in broad stroke assessments of participants’ impressions of SDP programs, astute consideration of ways to acknowledge and address power-related disparities within SDP partnerships are additionally vital to the integrity and sustainability of SDP work (Darnell et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2019; Svensson & Loat, 2019). In the following sections, we share insights from participants of Deporte y Cambio Social with respect to the dynamic intersections of power and culture that are foundational to the impact of SDP programs and, based on the data, explore how these programs

can be approached to maximize cultural understanding, and minimize the reproduction of inequities, while acknowledging the constraints under which SDP work is often conducted.

### **Understandings of Power and Power Relations with the Short-Term SDP Experience**

*Mexican and American participants described power as a paradoxical concept.*

Guillermo reported:

If you want to know a person, you give them power. It's going to give us the best of themselves or it's going to give us the worst of themselves. Power...is a great responsibility that can lead us to a positive or negative side with a very thin line.

When used appropriately, power was characterized as involving the “capacity to influence others” (Jeremy); a “basic need” that “defines our safety overall” (Jennifer); and a “tool” that can “break barriers and help other[s] grow alongside you” (Miguel), allow one to “do things for others...or society” (Fran), and “reach your goals” (Mariana). Two participants, both of whom were Mexican women, further described power as an aspiration; that is, “a strong word that we should all have in our minds as a value” (Mariana) because it can lead to “more educational and economic opportunities” (Fran). Although acknowledged by everyone, only Mexican participants robustly elaborated on the negative potential of power with contextual examples (i.e., “...in Mexico, power means to do what you want whether it is right or wrong...Many powerful people do things only for them and their family and not their community. I think it's wrong” [Miguel] and “power in the Mexican context can be understood as an abuse” and a “negative authority” [Guillermo]).

Within Deporte y Cambio Social specifically, power dynamics between Mexican and American stakeholders were informed by a complex intersection of privileges rooted in nationality, language, culture, race, sex, and gender. Foundationally, *Mexican and American*

*participants acknowledged that SDP programs involving a partnership between a country from the Global North, like the U.S., and a developing country, like Mexico, are inherently built upon a pre-existing power imbalance.* Jeremy shared: “I think the imbalance of power started from day 1...you’re an American university, so you are automatically considered good.” In reflection of a mandated visit to the U.S. Consulate during the first program phase in Mexico, including its “nice” appearance, “ready to respond” formalities in case of emergencies, and resources “had I needed anything,” Jennifer shared: “I think that just speaks to the power that Americans have and also think we’re entitled to...” Miguel explained:

Maybe I’m a little biased because personally I’m a big fan of American culture. I can say that I grew up with their philosophy that I learned through their movies, through their sports, their leagues, but I think that the university issue is amazing; how they live, how they get to campus, how doors are opened for people to be able to be in these institutions of such high prestige.

Deference to Americans and other Global North actors and institutions regarding knowledge, ideals, and expertise is well-documented in the SDP literature (i.e., Dao & Chin, 2021; Hansell et al., under review; Hayhurst et al., 2021d). Such deference fuels a foundational imbalance of power on which SDP programs are often built that, despite intentions to facilitate equitable partnerships, nonetheless influences the process through which SDP programs are designed and delivered (Dao & Chin, 2021; Harris, 2018). In the present study, Jeremy shared: “I think we sort of like were dictating the program...the program was in our, the ball was on our side.” Concordantly, Mariana observed: “I noticed Americans had a lot of power.”

*Mexican participants, however, did not perceive the control that Americans had over the program and its implementation as problematic.* Mariana elaborated: “I did not notice any

[power imbalance]. It was more like [Americans] reached an agreement, you talked about it and told us, and we had to do it no matter what. It was not like an option.” Fran similarly acknowledged the American constituent as the leaders who arrived to “present” while Mexicans “participate,” but only problematized the observed power imbalance between Americans who could and could not speak Spanish: “When you [Americans] came [to Mexico], you were the ones who were organizing everything. So, it could be a number one imbalance, the language, because [American] spoke Spanish and English and had more decision-making power on that side.” Together, these findings suggest that, as an identified world power, ‘American expertise’ and leadership were expected (Collison et al., 2016; Darnell et al., 2018).

Further, *Mexican participants reported they were treated as equals by the American constituent, which strengthened their cultural perceptions.* Feelings of equality were observed most when Mexicans and Americans were jointly engaged in the program’s functions (i.e., “When we were doing the activities in the field I believe that was more of a power balance” [Mariana]; “...in all the activities, those that were done in classrooms, when you shared a talk with us, when we had practices on the fields, when we were in the camp” [Miguel]). Fran reflected positively on Mexicans’ homestay experiences during the program phase in the U.S., which she believed were met with not only equality, but also consideration:

I told them that we Mexicans must eat together at least once a day, and what they did was to invite their son to dinner so that I wouldn't feel so out of my house. They told me ‘We have dinner together on a few occasions, but we are inviting him for you to see what a family dinner is like because we do not really have them often.

*Despite positive interpersonal connections with the American contingent in the program, Mexican participants also candidly described, with expectation and acceptance, experiences of racial discrimination while in the U.S.* Guillermo explained:

...when we were at [name] airport, there was a dark-skinned policeman who just noticed that we were Mexicans and threw our bags. Then I said, 'I will do it and put it up.' He saw what I did, returned it, and threw it back again. It seems to me that there was an abuse of power from an authority there. He wanted to show, here I command...However, I insist, we are in the process of social development, and we must be tolerant of this type of action and just understand the reasons why these things occur, only that. But I'm not talking about a generality, it was simply an isolated event that that occurred on that trip, but at least in Deporte y Cambio Social we were treated wonderfully.

Fran shared:

...we have an idea of the profile of the nationalities in Mexico. Unfortunately many times we see racism, that you are not being loved, that they don't see you as equal, but we see that in this type of program, it was super good, and this perception was not in it...this paradigm that many people have was changed...Many Mexicans think that Americans are not interested in us. But, they were quite interested in knowing our culture, in knowing our food, how we thought and how we interacted with each other. I saw it as a good thing...I see that in this type of program, nationality does not matter, the important thing is people...

While intercultural interactions within the insulated context of SDP programs are positive, they also serve as barriers to meaningfully identifying, discussing, and working through authentic intercultural conflict in real world settings. Jeremy, for example, cautioned that the American

contingent who partook in Deporte y Cambio Social was largely comprised of individuals who were already educated with significant travel experience:

...I really would have liked to actually take kids that actually maybe think that Mexicans are rapists, Mexicans are bad people. These are the people that actually we should have selected to really go there, because that's the aim of the program, the people to people.

Although defaulting to university-affiliated professionals and students is a convenient recruitment tool, it prevents the expansion of SDP opportunities to a more diverse group of Global North participants without prior access to this type of exposure and learning and who might benefit most. Further, other literature cautions that marketing SDP volunteer positions to college students as opportunities to enrich their educational experience and boost future employment prospects detracts from the intended purpose of these programs to serve with another cultural community (Clarke & Norman, 2021; Giulianotti, Collison, & Darnell 2021).

*Specific to sex and gender, Mexican and American participants observed when biases were perpetuated, and at other times challenged, amid program execution.* Jennifer shared:

...sexism showed up in the management of our trip in that it was too hot for the women's event to happen, so we didn't get to connect with just women only...It's like we're here for [women's empowerment] and you're telling a bunch of women that it's too hot for us to play instead of asking us if we want to do it.

In observation of the American constituent group, Mariana reported: "In the case of [American woman], who was with us a lot, she would say something and then later it was changed to what [American man] wanted; then yes, I saw two unequal powers." Other scholars have described how, although SDP programs are intended to facilitate positive social change, often unseen biases, specifically with respect to sex and gender that are deeply entrenched in our sociocultural

worlds, still manifest in program execution. For instance, del Socorro Cruz Centeno (2021) reflected on ways in which the prescribed curriculum of an established SDP program that used soccer to target gender equity and environmental stewardship in Nicaragua subtly reinforced existing gender norms in the local context. Specifically, women program participants assumed cleaning and organizational tasks (traditionally feminine) while men program participants neglected these chores to play soccer (traditionally masculine). Chawansky (2015) used autoethnographic vignettes to similarly reflect on ways in which her identity as an American White woman influenced her experience and interactions as a Global North SDP researcher; specifically, she recounted experiences of gender bias and sexualization while aiming to empower girls and women in a Global South context.

Parallel to these types of experiences were instances in which sex and gender disparities were contemplated and challenged. Mariana explained how, in response to a training received in the U.S., the Mexican girls reflected on the differences in societal norms regarding the legal protection of girls and women:

...the girls were saying, ‘so, here, if somebody turns to see you, it is almost a felony, if somebody touches your hair, it is a felony.’ They didn’t know that. Some had the openness to tell me some very strong things that happened in their community [in Mexico], and I think it doesn’t happen here in the United States, not even half of it, because you would be taken to jail or arrested...

Such reflections suggest that takeaways for Mexican participants from this training included being more conscious observers of their surrounding environment as well as an awareness of differences in gender protections across cultures. However, although the presence of institutional systems intended to protect the rights of girls and women was both surprising and inspiring,

these structures have been frequently criticized for operating under the guise that they protect girls and women, when, that is not always the case. For instance, critics of Title IX, which was designed to provide institutional protection for girls and women within higher education, assert that navigating its policies can be complicated, traumatic, and unsuccessful for many survivors of sexual violence. Instead of taking firm, no tolerance stance on sexual misconduct, administrators, and others in positions of power often maintain a silent, neutral position to protect their own public image as well as their institution's (Cruz, 2021; Delaet & Mills, 2018). Thus, Mexican participants may have been left with an incomplete idea of the effectiveness and procedures for complex institutional policies designed to protect girls and women in the U.S.

### **Explicating the Realities of SDP Programs with Recommendations Forward**

Despite perceptions of *Deporte y Cambio Social* being generally “well-designed” and “super well-organized,” time was a significant barrier (e.g., “...it was just too much to fit into a week” [Jennifer]; “...everything was in a hurry” [Mariana]). Mexican participants reflected on the busy daily itineraries developed by the American cohort. Miguel shared:

...honestly, nobody wanted to go back home. We all wanted to stay a few more days because a very good atmosphere was created...Why do I tell you more time? Because almost every day was very busy and went by very fast.

Mariana echoed: “Take it more slowly, only that. I know it was tight since you had to fulfill a lot. But you can give them time to relax or do their own things and let them be with each other.”

Mexican participants' observations of the program itinerary, which largely aligned with American cultural norms on productivity and punctuality, are one example of the problematic discordance between meeting the demands of a grant originating from a Global North context and norms of local culture in many Global South communities (Hayhurst et al., 2021c; Oxford &



McLachlan, 2018). Within the noted time constraints, participants also explained they had limited role clarity (e.g., “I feel like if [my role] was a test question, I would probably not get it correct” [Jennifer]; “I believe that knowledge, to know what we were going to do and why, would have facilitated everything that happened” [Mariana]).

Concordantly, Jeremy described the coordination of lodging, meals, budgeting, and transportation as a significant constraint on time and resources that made for an “intense” experience. He further acknowledged significant investment from the Mexican constituent group: “We were just asking them to be partners, collaborators without any cost, but of course they had costs... not only during the event but prior to the event...if you put money into the time of the people.” Thus, the very structure of the funding opportunity and its associated demands were believed to significantly complicate the ability to more meaningfully engage with the Mexican stakeholders during the program’s design. Jeremy added:

...it was not a program that I would say was totally built with them...at the very beginning, we talked about ‘we need to build this program with them, so it’s going to be more inclusive’...I think it was more a logistics issue...I think we had the intentions to build something with them, but it was so complicated to really have a clear idea of what we want to do...we were moving, right? Because of the logistics, because of the time...

Managing complex logistical barriers, including navigating the landscape of SDP funding sources, has been discussed extensively in the literature as a competitive, detailed, and exhausting process (e.g., Darnell et al., 2018; Svensson & Loat, 2019). Scholars have identified considerable discordance between the primary, outcome-focused objectives of funders (e.g., to demonstrate evidence of pre-post change and positive experiences) and additional, process-focused objectives of SDP researchers and practitioners (e.g., empowering communities and

building sustainable programs; Giulianotti et al., 2019). To this point, Jeremy explained: “It’s a little bit artificial...when you create this positive feeling. And by creating these positive feelings, I think you are achieving in a certain way the [funder’s] purposes...” He elaborated: “...They require a lot of time and involvement into setting up the programs with all these demands, but sometimes you lose focus of what is the core problem.” Jennifer reflected on the broader implications of a short-term SDP program: “With more time and experience we could have made this a richer experience about women, coaching, social change, and sport.” She added:

...I don’t really think we impacted another generation of women. We just impacted the women that were there. So, I would have liked to be able to encourage females more specifically to take and apply what they learned. I thought we were kind of able to encourage the group generally, but I would have liked more in that.

Although a subsample of Mexican participants designed and implemented abbreviated workshops with pupils at two Mexican high schools following their own workshop participation, there may not have been sufficient opportunity for participants to apply and/or share their knowledge and experience from the program.

Indeed, Mexican participants described their cultural learning, including site seeing, as their “favorite” or “best parts of the trip.” While cultural learning is foundational to any SDP initiative, coupling an immersive, first-time cultural experience with a social change program simultaneously is a known challenge of short-term SDP endeavors (e.g., Dao & Chin, 2021; Giulianotti et al., 2021; Whitley et al., 2018). Scholars have also problematized the frequent prioritization of funding new investigators that make learning from experience and sustained careers in SDP difficult (Coalter, 2010; Harrison & Boehmer, 2020; Kidd, 2008). Jeremy

explained: “I think I would like to really take the time to understand how people have done it. Because I think many of the programs probably experienced the same as we did.”

Accordingly, participants offered their ideas toward SDP programs that can reasonably accomplish their central purposes to support meaningful intercultural engagement while fostering culturally relevant learning and reflection of key social issues. Among these recommendations, *members of the Mexican contingent suggested SDP programs be longer in duration and that the experiences across countries be increasingly parallel.* Fran explained:

I saw how an American family lived. I realized the great differences. Maybe if you had stayed with a family when you came to Mexico, you would have also realized it too. You would not only have seen it from the outside...I would not change anything more than to see the way that, when you come, you could stay in the house of Mexicans and not in a hotel because it is very different.

Guillermo similarly reported:

[I wish] that Americans had more time in our country, that it was at least balanced. Because we stayed two weeks and it seems to me that you were only six or seven days. Then I would like it to be the same time so that it was wider, be calmer, and we could enjoy it a little more, and that this opportunity could be used to present more things about our country...of its people who are wonderful, that you could live it in a better way...

Other Mexican participants added, “...it would have been better if it would have been more days, obviously. I know it is not simple to be accepted one month” (Mariana) and “at least four weeks instead of two” (Miguel).

*Relatedly, participants reflected on the importance of follow-up opportunities for continued, long-term engagement with program stakeholders and the programming.* Mariana

shared: “I believe there should be a follow up...Let’s see what we did or how this has impacted.” Jennifer similarly explained: “...had there not been a global pandemic, I would have really hoped that there was some sort of follow-up, because I think that would have been where we saw how sustainable this was or how to make this sustainable.” Interpersonally, Miguel noted Mexicans and Americans “are still in contact” and “developed a very nice friendship.” As an indicator of the importance of sustained engagement, several Mexican participants expressed sincere appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their experiences toward the present research. Mariana reported: “...you are considering me in something that maybe can be of impact on the next generation, then I feel great; I feel considered.” Without strategic and intentional continuity, however, the ability to transfer ownership and responsibility of the program to local communities is compromised. Fran explained: “Since we came back, 80% of participants asked if there was going to be something similar and if they could volunteer for another program or another visit...We told them ‘We did not bring the program, it isn’t ours.’”

*Participants further described the importance of engaging in considerable introspection, reflection, discussion, cultural preparation, and relationship building prior to travel and throughout the experience.* Jennifer explained: “When we design programs, we have these great ideas, but we don’t know the participants yet. I see more successful mentoring programs being more organic where there’s possibility for connection.” Fran stated:

Maybe [more preparation] on what our culture is like. Although you do not know a person well, even if they have just been introduced to you, we greet with a kiss and a hug...Telling Americans this would have been useful so they wouldn't be scared...

Guillermo added:

It probably would have been good if the [Mexicans] who visited knew more about [the United States]. Maybe 80% had never visited the United States before. Many had never left Mexico before. The ones for whom it was the first time did not know practically anything about it...Maybe if they knew a little about the cultural aspect before going. Jennifer, in her interview, reflected upon her experience as an English-speaking American in Mexico that serves as an example of the type of critical reflection that is warranted throughout the SDP experience from beginning to end:

I was in the middle of a group, and I suddenly could not remember anything in Spanish. I had been speaking in Spanish, I mean not well, but at least enough that the group understood me. And as I kept talking, I was like ‘yeah...I don’t know anymore’ (laughter). It’s just this silly example but in that moment, I felt a distinct shift in how much power I had and how much I could help. I pretty much felt worthless to the group and to the project.

She added: “This expectation that we went there and didn’t have to speak Spanish speaks so much to our power and privilege. People wanting to learn from us regardless of if they can understand us is pretty amazing.”

*Central to the core purpose of SDP programs, women participants across cultures recommended considerable attention to understandings of sex and gender and the intentional construction of representative leadership teams.* Specifically, Mexican and American women participants discussed the prominent role of women within the project, but also wished more had been involved given the program’s emphasis on women’s empowerment. Fran shared:

I saw when you visited Mexico that most of the visitors were women; both the girls who coached soccer, the organizers, and many of the researchers who came were women, so I

think it was already focused on women's empowerment and all the activities that were done were usually led by women.

Mariana added:

I would have liked more women teachers and not as many men teachers. Also, more people from the sports arena, because if your goal is to use sport and empower women through that sport, more sport professionals should have been [involved]...there were teachers that had nothing to do with that sport and they were men. I don't mean that only women should be included, but I think that if we want to empower girls, we [the Mexican constituent group] should have taken more women teachers.

### **General Discussion**

Although our findings suggest that Mexican and American participants valued their experience in Deporte y Cambio Social, our subsequent analysis underscores the importance of engaging in critical and constructive reflection as a vital component of the SDP experience for all stakeholders. Indeed, garnering participants' perspectives on some of the common challenges and related power dynamics within the SDP sphere is a noted strength of the current study, as is the significance of the candid accounts shared by participants and the humility of those engaged in the project who were willing to critique their own work and experience. To create dissonance with the potentially unsettling data shared in this study, it is easy to perceive the challenges discussed herein as unique and isolated to Deporte y Cambio Social. However, the alignment of the present data with a preponderance of recent conceptual critiques of SDP work (Darnell et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2019; Hayhurst et al., 2021a; Whitley et al., 2018) suggest the conclusions are indeed transferable to a larger body of SDP programs that have, and continue to be, conducted. Following a process of critical and admittedly difficult introspection and

reflection, we encourage others associated with SDP programs to engage in a similar reflexive experience as a solution toward greater awareness, understanding, and increasingly effective navigation of known challenges. Indeed, the purpose of this study was not to dismiss the important potential of SDP programs and the overwhelmingly positive experiences that have been described here and in other literature (Baker et al., 2018; Blom et al., 2019; LeCrom & Dwyer, 2013), but rather to suggest that the broad stroke impressions of SDP programs capture only one chapter of a much longer and more nuanced story that will meaningfully inform the future of SDP work, if told.

To begin, while the Mexican participants in this study reported enjoying and appreciating the opportunity to interact with and learn from Americans and engage in American culture, at a deeper level, these cultural experiences also served to reinforce a neoliberal view of Americans as experts and the U.S. as ideal compared to Mexicans and Mexico (Hansell et al., under review). In fact, when Mexican participants were asked whether they would consider leading a similar program in which they would share their expertise with Americans, they responded with repeated confusion over the question to suggest this possibility was difficult to conceive. As a world power, Americans assuming the role of deliverers of expertise and experience, mostly in English, was expected, which reflects the larger power disparities upon which this, and other SDP programs are built. While positive interpersonal exchanges with those directly in the American constituent promoted feelings of value, worth, and equality, discriminatory experiences while abroad were also expected and viewed as a normal aspect of human existence and development. Other research has highlighted understandings of power as core foundations of SDP programs (e.g., Hayhurst et al., 2021a). Our findings suggest that conceptualizations of power can differ across stakeholders and cultures, which underscores the importance of explicitly discussing

power (im)balances both within and across cultural groups and how they will be addressed, potentially as part of the relationship-building and familiarization process early on. As one example, understanding that others may come to know power as abusive comes with tremendous responsibility to attend to power dynamics so as not to reproduce harm.

Participants' responses further suggest that the most rewarding elements of the program were the cultural experiences and the person-to-person activities. Interestingly, Mexican participants' responses related to their experiences during the second program phase in the U.S. were almost entirely about the cultural activities, which included excursions to local landmarks, tours of the university campus, spending an entire day in a major American city where participants were given money to shop, and tours of professional baseball and American football stadiums, all of which were included as part of the program's itinerary. Mexican participants' responses suggest what was unaddressed was a truly parallel experience in Mexico that would have allowed Americans to similarly engage and learn about Mexican culture more deeply.

Aligned with contact theory (Allport, 1954) and SFDT (Dixon et al., 2019; Lyras & Welty-Peachey, 2011), the person-to-person interactions within the program seemingly helped members of each group connect over shared human experiences, which resulted in the formation of personal and professional interpersonal relationships across cultures, many of which have been sustained since the program ended. Admiration of American ideals such as work ethic and motivation were described by Mexican participants in focus group interviews conducted immediately after the first program phase in Mexico (Hansell et al., under review), and findings from the present study suggest the cross-cultural experiences were valued by both Mexican and American stakeholders within Deporte y Cambio Social. Yet, while the program's emphasis on cultural activities emphasized by the funder is an important part of intercultural engagement, it



also served to distract from the program's emphasis on women's empowerment in attempting to accomplish both simultaneously. Such distraction is evidenced across participants' responses that were largely devoid of commentary about the program itself and is an important indicator of how to position SDP work differently in the future.

### **Practical Implications**

Participants' recommendations for future endeavors to have longer-term opportunities to engage with program stakeholders and materials corresponds with a common critique of SDP programs and their typical short duration. Limited information exists regarding the long-term implications of SDP programs, and researchers have asserted that collecting follow-up data over time is a major challenge due to barriers such as misunderstandings of the role of data collection among community members, logistical constraints for Western researchers in the balance of other professional responsibilities such as teaching, and limited professional and financial support for long-term objectives (Blom et al., 2015; Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Welty-Peachey & Cohen, 2016). Within the present study, and particularly in the member reflections, participants' expressions of appreciation and gratitude toward the researchers for including them in the present study demonstrates a willingness to, or even desire for, such opportunities as well as acknowledgement of the significant logistical barriers (e.g., costs, travel, time, etc.) that accompany longer-term endeavors. Collectively, our experiences underscore the importance of allocating more time and resources toward relationship-building, cultural learning, and examination of power across intercultural stakeholders and a prolonged period through which organic intercultural connection, collaboration, and sustained involvement can truly occur.

Approaching SDP work differently is largely dependent upon significant transformation of the strategic priorities and structure of dominant funding mechanisms. Other researchers have

suggested, for example, that funding opportunities move away from short-term programs with aims to demonstrate positivist evidence of ‘impact,’ which has been critiqued as an extension of neoliberalism, and toward more comprehensive and holistic approaches that acknowledge power and culture as core components of the SDP experience (Darnell et al., 2018; Hayhurst et al., 2021b; Giulianotti et al., 2019). Multi-year funding that supports seasoned professionals, who mentor early career professionals and students to conduct SDP with prolonged intercultural engagement, would facilitate such efforts. Open eligibility with respect to geographical region would additionally allow relationship development to precede the project (versus initiating or further nurturing relationships based on the global regions to be eligible in a given funding cycle). While external funding constraints are largely beyond the control of professionals engaged in SDP work, institutions of higher education are well-poised to provide opportunities that would better position researchers and practitioners for SDP experiences, including relevant training in local culture and self-assessment and introspection related to effective intercultural engagement, such as cultural humility, competence, and empathy. Sociohistorical understandings and traditions of certain sports in specific cultural contexts are additionally necessary; the use of sports traditionally dominated by men as a site for women’s empowerment, for example, should be carefully contemplated. Such preparedness would allow for meaningful processing of, for example, discriminatory experiences and conflict to assist in preventing the manifestation of biases with respect to nationality, race, socioeconomic status, sex, and gender. Given many professionals involved in SDP from the Global North are affiliated with institutions of higher education with competing job responsibilities (Schulenkorf et al., 2016), administrators must provide workload space to fully engage in the tedious and time-consuming preparation required for SDP programs to be done well. This need is compounded by the reality that most terminal

degree programs do not provide the breadth of formal training needed to engage in SDP work, which is inherently multidisciplinary. A professional trained in sport psychology, for example, must necessarily engage with other areas like sport sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, international relations, and global affairs.

Relatedly, SDP programs originating in the Global North that are implemented in the Global South are often marketed as volunteer opportunities to local college students and young adults to build their resume and develop a sense of global responsibility and citizenship that can be a rewarding personal experience while boosting future employment prospects (Dao & Chin, 2021; Giulianotti et al., 2021). Such marketing, however, can position volunteers as the primary benefactors of the SDP experience, which can directly conflict with overarching program objectives within the local context where the program operates (Clarke & Norman, 2021). Thus, although we acknowledge the barriers of diversification of SDP volunteers and the ease of access to college populations for SDP professionals affiliated with higher education, we encourage more robust stakeholder selection processes and the establishment of clear guidelines and expectations about cultural norms and expectations in the partnering Global South context.

Importantly, the reproduction of known challenges in conducting SDP work has and will continue to persist with a siloed approach. Developing a community of practice among SDP stakeholders who, together, can engage in more robust advocacy (e.g., negotiations, conversations) with funders, community members, and others to support increasingly meaningful SDP work is a necessity, and asking questions about the constraints across stakeholders is an important part of that understanding. Such a community of practice would similarly require consistent examination of power among individuals engaged in SDP work based upon, for example, levels of experience, self-perceptions as ‘knowers’ or ‘experts’, and professional status

and roles (e.g., academic, community, student), to facilitate opportunities in which individuals are invited and encouraged to learn, co-construct, and collaborate in the sharing of ideas.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

Purposive sampling and maximum variation approaches were a strength of this study in that diverse perspectives were garnered relative to the intersection of culture and power and how these influenced experiences within the program. The sample was limited, however, to those with reliable access to internet – an interview modality decision made in response to the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that prevented travel and data collection efforts as originally intended. Thus, although we acknowledge this limitation, we also recognize the potential utility of virtual programming and research efforts where such methods are accessible and appropriate.

Despite efforts to promote candid responses by welcoming insight on programmatic critique in addition to strengths, and co-conducting interviews in Spanish with a native Mexican woman along with the primary author, it is still possible not all experiences were shared given understandings of power. Thus, response bias and social desirability may have influenced participants' responses, particularly given their pre-existing relationships with both interviewers. Although some response bias is inevitable, establishing intercultural research teams that are solely focused on evaluation efforts and have equitable representation across cultures could help mitigate the potential for response bias during program evaluations.

Although it would have been logistically difficult to garner perspectives from all stakeholders involved with Deporte y Cambio Social, incorporating additional qualitative methodological approaches such as observation and/or document analysis could yield additional insights not captured in interviews alone. Further, while recruitment was limited to a small pool

of eligible participants, we nonetheless encourage garnering perspectives from an even broader and culturally diverse group of stakeholders, including those affiliated with the funding source. In our study, our sample largely included Mexican participants. Although a noted strength of the study, additional voices from Mexico and the U.S. (and across cultures in the literature more generally) would be useful toward collaborative solutions in SDP work.

### **Conclusion**

The present study sought to critically explore the concepts of culture and power using the voices of various program stakeholders within an SDP program that was designed and implemented as part of an intercultural SDP partnership. Through semi-structured individual interviews with six program stakeholders (four Mexican and two Americans), their responses suggested that both Mexican and American participants enjoyed their experience and found the program to be valuable, yet also offered recommendations for future programs upon critical reflection of their experience. Participants recommended that programs be less intensive and longer in duration, have clearly defined roles and expectations, and have more long-term opportunities to engage with the program beyond the initial experience. Our findings suggest that SDP programs, as well as the field itself, are not insulated from societal imbalances of power, and stakeholders should be proactive in acknowledging, navigating, and disrupting such imbalances by engaging in a robust reflexive process prior to, during, and after their engagement with an SDP program. Infusing reflexivity into the SDP experience would benefit all stakeholders in helping them identify, discuss, and challenge preexisting biases that may influence their own, and others,' experience and role. This is particularly relevant for Global North stakeholders within Global South contexts, as neoliberal biases and values imposition is a known critique of the SDP landscape.

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