



Youth Perceptions of Police at the Manchester Police Athletic League (MPAL)

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Introduction

The purpose of my study is to explore youth perceptions of police, with particular attention to certain social elements that influence these perceptions. Critical Positive Youth Development seeks to center the voices of youth—particularly youth who are marginalized by society (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Understanding youth perspectives is critical to better conceptualize their unique lived experiences, environmental stressors, and protective factors. CPYD recognizes one's privilege and power and how systems and institutions are designed to produce inequities through oppressive policies, programs, and practices; thus, is grounded in the educational praxis known as critical pedagogy (i.e., critical consciousness; Friere, 1973).

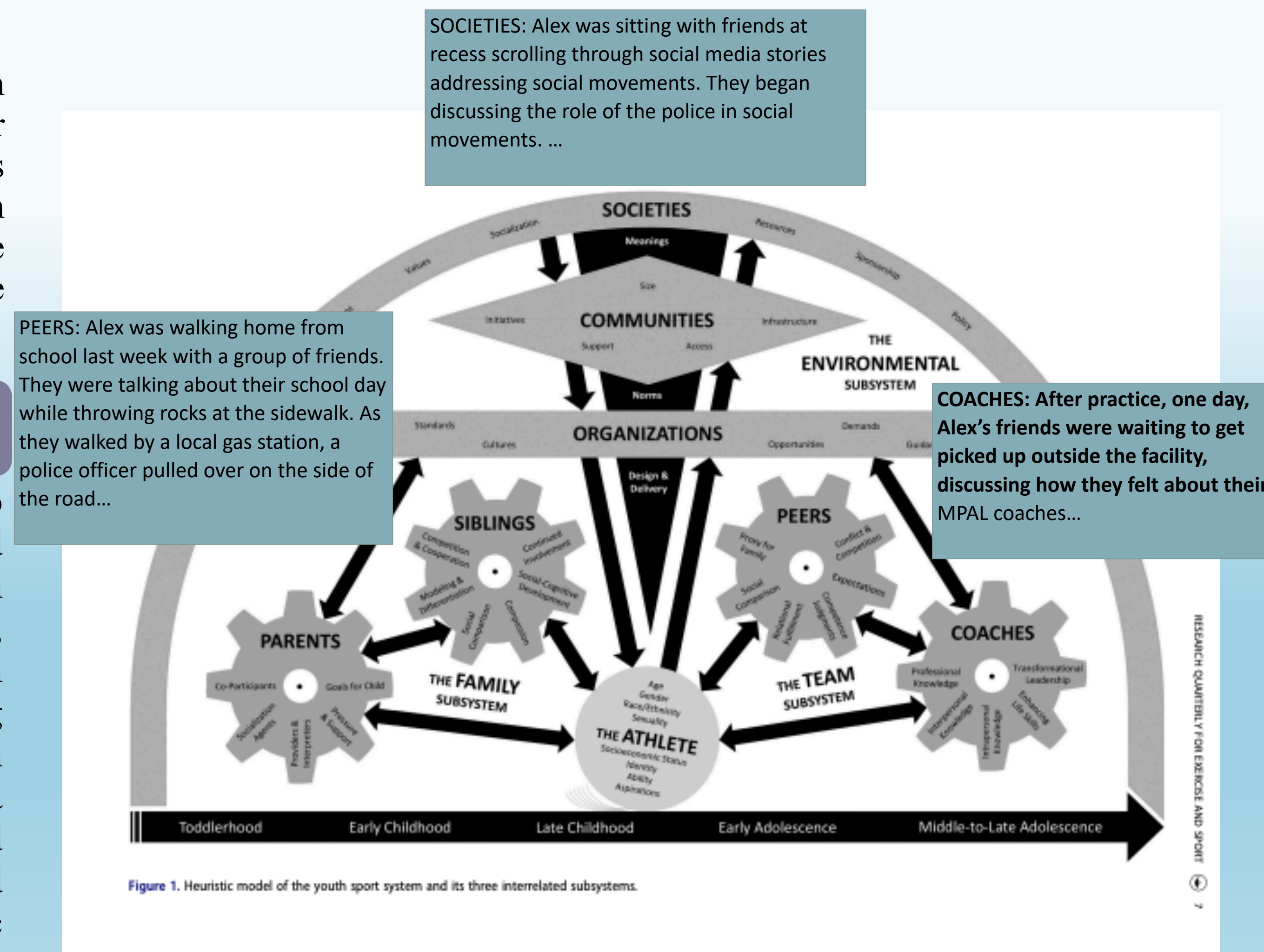
Using a CPYD perspective, the current study will explore how youth perceptions of police throughout different instances in their lives.. Prior research on PAL programs from around the country demonstrates PAL provides a safe and accessible environment where participants could be open to learn new things and have fun (Bean & Forneris, 2014). However, even given the positive youth outcomes associated with PAL programming, there has yet to be research related to youth perceptions of police.

Manchester Police Athletic League

MPAL is a non-profit, community-based youth sports program that seeks to enhance community-police relationships. The program serves youth identified as being socially vulnerable, commonly defined as youth confronted with an accumulated number of negative experiences throughout societal institutions, such as the educational and justice systems (Hermens et al., 2017). Such youth populations often include youth of color and youth experiencing poverty, which is representative of most—if not all—of the youth involved in the MPAL program. The goal of the organization is to provide youth with a safe, positive environment where police officers serve as coaches and mentors. aims to foster positive relationships between the police coaches and youth participants. In addition to this, they also aim to instill three specific life skills through its sport-based program: **respect**, **responsibility**, and **community**

The Current Study

The study uses an ecological lens to explore how youth interpret different scenarios in their lives in which they may encounter police. Youth participants (ages 14-17) were identified by program staff. Specifically, staff will be asked to identify youth who have expressed strong opinions and/or feelings towards police officers, regardless of what these views may be. There were specific qualifications in terms of gender identity, sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, and ability.



Method

Data Collection

1. Youth will engage in a one-on-one semi-structured interview using a story completion method designed to explore the perceptions of police participating in the MPAL program. The story stems were rooted in eight different social domains, including society, community, parents, siblings, peers, coaches, organizations and the individual.
2. Upon viewing the story stems (some example stems references on model) the youth will complete the stories about police however they see fit.
3. After writing down their answers a discussion will be held about the reasoning behind their responses to further delve into their perceptions of police.

Data Analysis

Interview and photograph data will be analyzed using a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). First, the researcher will read the interview transcripts to become familiar with the data. Second, initial codes will be inductively generated from the data. Third, after initial codes are constructed, codes will be organized deductively using broad categories from collating the data. Fourth, within each category, themes will be inductively constructed from the data. Fifth, themes will be given a specific name and definition, identifying the essence of the theme. Finally, the findings will be extrapolated. Findings will be further enhanced by iterative member check, discussions with critical friends, and peer debriefing.

Implications

Findings will be used to improve MPAL programming, such as identifying meaningful staff/youth relationships that promote the youth perceptions of police. Additionally, findings will be used to enhance staff practices, for instance, fostering of positive or negative relationships.