The Black Girl Hockey Club (BGHC) is an organization striving to unite Black women in the hockey community. With an active social media presence and lively online community of members, BGHC represents both a virtual sport fan community and an advocacy group working towards racial justice and greater representation within hockey fan culture. Given the “Race Forward” focus of NASSM 2021, we view BGHC as an ideal opportunity to examine the intersection of sport management theory and social advocacy.

The current research answers recent calls to develop a more holistic understanding of Black fans—a market that shows high levels of team identification and passion (Brown, 2020). Theoretically, we seek to advance current discourse in sport consumer behavior and the developing research around sport fan networks (Katz et al., 2020; Naraine, 2019; Yan et al., 2019). The current study applies Theory of Networks (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) to examine why the BGHC network has the structure it does and investigate its antecedents—not just the consequences of that structure. Practically, we explore how the BGHC network developed into an influential network. Our results can help amplify the voices of Black sport fans, by better understanding how to promote inclusive communities within the sport fan space.

To examine BGHC, we will utilize a social network approach using the BGHC Twitter account and followers. Examining Twitter networks is a common approach in studying sport fans and sport organizations (e.g., Hambrick et al., 2010; Naraine et al., 2019). BGHC currently has a Twitter network of approximately 18,000 members, which represent the starting point of our study. We developed R code to access follower lists through Twitter’s Application Programming Interface (API). Using this code, we generate lists of BGHC followers, followers-of-followers, and friends-of-followers to establish the network of followers surrounding BGHC.

Our analysis will utilize both Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGM) and Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP) correlations. ERGMs are an advanced social network technique for explaining the structure of networks. Rather than merely describing the entirety of the network in a single cohesion statistic, ERGMs explain the underlying structure of the network by examining lower levels of network configuration.

At the node-level of analysis, we plan to use four attributes: 1) In-Degree Centrality; 2) Out-Degree Centrality; 3) Chronology of Group Membership; and 4) Egocentric Heterogeneity. The centrality measures are standard measures of a node’s outgoing ties and incoming ties. Chronology refers to the order in which node i joined the BGHC network; the lower the chronology, the earlier node i joined the community. Heterogeneity refers to the percentage of node i’s friends and followers that also follow BGHC. We will include the node-level attributes in the ERGM and QAP correlations to better understand how the BGHC network structure evolved.

Our research is ongoing, and we are excited about the opportunity to provide theoretical and practical insights based on our results. BGHC represents an understudied sport fan community (i.e., Black women and their allies), and one that promotes both sport consumption and social advocacy.