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Abstract

Youth sport is a large and influential sector of the sport industry. This sector has received considerable attention regarding issues such as improving participants' experiences and attracting and retaining more participants. Parents are also highly involved in youth sport, yet their experiences are less understood. This study examines the role a youth sport program plays in fostering a sense of community for parents. Using a qualitative interpretative design, participants were drawn from a youth sport program in the United States. The focus group data (*n*= 36) revealed that *The Child's Experience, Clear Logistics*, *Administrative Consideration*, and *Equity in Administrative Decisions* were the most salient elements that influenced sense of community for youth sport parents. Implications for practice are discussed.

Keywords: *youth sport; parents; community; sense of community*

Youth sport has and will continue to play an important role in our communities. In the U.S. alone it is estimated that over 20 million children participate in community-based youth sport programs (Dixon & Bruening, 2011). While numerous scholars have sought to understand and assess the benefits of sport participation for youth (e.g., Fraser-Thomas, Coté, & Deakin, 2005; Warner, Kerwin, & Walker, 2013; Wright & Coté, 2003), it is also important to understand how other stakeholders might also be benefiting from community youth sport programs.

This exploration is important and timely because despite being more technologically connected than ever before, individuals are reporting declining levels of meaningful social interactions and a reduced sense of community (e.g., Heller, 1989; Olds & Schwartz, 2009; Putnam, 2000). This decline has negatively influenced social connectivity indicators such as civic participation, social trust, and the number of reported discussion partners and confidants (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006; Paxton, 1999), all of which are clearly detrimental to individuals' instrumental and socioemotional needs (Lin, 2001; Olds & Schwartz, 2009).

An emerging body of literature supports the assertion that sport, if appropriately designed and managed, can be utilized to build or enhance community among participants and others associated with sport (e.g., Clopton, 2009; Fairley & Tyler, 2012; Swyers, 2010; Warner, 2012; Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011). For example, Clopton (2009) and Warner (2012) have explored the creation of community on college campuses, finding that sport can create a sense of community among sport participants as well as students attending the universities. Both Swyers (2010) and Fairley and Tyler (2012) described how sport could create community for professional baseball fans. In each study, it was not sport itself, but particular facets of the design and/or management of sport that led to the outcomes.

Despite the potential influence on individuals, families, and communities, surprisingly little attention has been given to the design and management of community youth sport programs. This gap is particularly troubling because these programs often play a central role in the lives of both children and parents (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009; Green & Chalip, 1997). Community-based youth sport programs, if appropriately designed and managed, could become a pivotal site for social change, change that builds community and aids in reversing the reported trends of fragmentation in society. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to understand the role a youth sport program plays in fostering a sense of community for parents and to identify the specific sport program elements that create such an environment. This research advances Warner and Dixon's sport and community building theory (2011; 2013) by exploring boundary conditions of existing theory regarding how community is built via sport, particularly for those who are not direct participants. It also offers practical insight on connecting people to communities via sport. Consequently, it advances sport research by demonstrat-

ing how sport can be more inclusive and aid in building stronger community for understudied and indirect stakeholders (Green, 2008).

The Context of Youth Sport

Youth sport is an important context in which to understand the formation of a sense of community because of its prominent role in neighborhoods and the participatory sport sector (e.g., Dixon & Bruening, 2011; Warner, 2012). As previously noted, millions of children annually participate in youth sport, and youth programs vary in scope, size, mission, and quality. Dixon and Bruening (2011) noted a vast array of community-based youth sport programs ranging from Little League Baseball to more informal clubs. Many of these sport programs claim that they foster a *sense of community* for their participants and often offer anecdotal evidence of the benefits of sport participation.

At the youth sport level, however, two issues arise when discussing the creation of community. First, youth sport does not involve only the youth; it also involves their parents. While much of the youth sport literature has focused on child socialization and child experiences (e.g., Coakley & White, 1999) several scholars have recognized parents as primary providers and interpreters of the sport experience (e.g., Dixon, Warner, & Bruening, 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Green and Chalip (1997) stated:

> Despite the substantial work that has already been done on enhancing the quality of children's sport experience, there has been little work on enhancing the quality of parents' experiences . . . More work is needed on parental socialization into children's sport organizations. (p. 74)

Unfortunately, little research progress has been made since Green and Chalip's assertion. This duality of serving both parents and youth creates a complex sport environment where management of the sport experience and community building is more difficult to understand because it involves multiple stakeholders often with conflicting goals (cf. Cuppen, 2012; Wallace, 1995). For example, parents may be focused on winning while children are more focused on participation and fun, or parents may value the organization and logistics of the sport, while the youth care more about which of their friends are playing.

Second, while some have claimed that sport is a site for parents to meet others in the community and build parent-peer relationships (Dorsch et al., 2009; Lally & Kerr, 2008), youth sport has been heavily criticized for breaking apart, rather than building community among its parents and participants. Violence, cheating, and intense competition permeate many youth sport environments, often resulting in division and fracturing among both children and parents, but particularly among parents (e.g., Engh, 1999; Johnson, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). Thus, it is also highly likely that youth sport, if poorly managed, could become a source of tension and conflict rather than of belonging and community among youth sport parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Hyman, 2012; Rimer, 2002).

Parents play a central role in providing and interpreting the sport experience for their child(ren) (e.g., Byrne, 1993; Dixon et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to examine and better understand the role of youth sport in creating a sense of community for parents, thereby promoting social change that addresses the innate need for and benefits of community (see Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Sarason, 1974).

Theoretical Framework—Factors that Build a Sense of Community

The innate need for individuals to experience a sense of community has been studied extensively, especially within the community psychology literature. Sense of community describes the environmental or community characteristics that lead members to feel a sense of belonging and attachment, and that support is available at the group-level (Sarason, 1974). Sense of community has been associated with numerous life-quality enhancing benefits, such as increased levels of health, civic participation, and well-being (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Olds & Schwartz, 2009). While many of the outcomes of an increased sense of community are clearly desirable, creating such an environment via sport is a timely challenge for researchers as trends indicate more individuals are socially isolated and missing the improved life quality benefits of being involved in a supportive community (e.g., McPherson et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000; Warner, 2012).

Warner and Dixon's Sport and Sense of Community

Based on this challenge to better understand how to increase the benefits of being in community, initial grounded research in sport led to the development of a Sport and Sense of Community Theory (Warner, 2012). This theory contends that Administrative Consideration, Common Interest, Competition, Equity in Administrative Decisions, Leadership Opportunities, Social Spaces, and Voluntary Action were the fundamental factors that fostered a sense of community among university sport participants (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013b; Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2013). Within this setting, the perceived outcomes of a sense of community included participant satisfaction, intention to continue in sport, and a greater attachment to the university community.

Administrative Consideration refers to the feeling that the organization/program cared about participants as individuals, and not just for their contribution to the sport. Common Interest was identified as, "the group dynamics, social networking, and friendships that resulted from individuals being brought together by the common interest of the sport (and combined with a common goal, shared values or other unifying factors)" (Warner, 2012, p. 246). Competition, or the challenge to excel again a rival, also was found to increase an athlete's sense of community. Warner and Dixon (2011; 2013) found that this factor was moderated by gender. Competition enhanced community for males in that it fostered respect and mutual pursuit of excellence. For females, however, Competition, particularly

internal competition (i.e., competition amongst teammates), hurt the community (see Warner & Dixon, 2013a).   Internal competition among females fostered rivalries, bitterness, and personal grudges, which created distrust and destroyed community. Equity in Administrative Decisions was another important factor for athletes' sense of community. Equity, or fairness, appears to be a foundational element for community building because it fosters trust. Leadership Opportunities was the fifth factor in Warner and Dixon's (2011; 2013) sport model. This factor captured the desire of athletes to have responsibilities and ownership of their sport experience. Social Spaces refers to the common physical spaces where individuals can interact, while Voluntary Action refers to instances when members join a community of their own free will and without tangible external incentive or peer pressure. Warner and Dixon contend that these seven factors work in concert with one another to foster a sense of community with sport.

The tenets of this initial Sport and Sense of Community Theory would suggest that there are underlying factors relevant to the creation of community across contexts. However, to date the empirical support for this theory has only focused on direct sport participants (i.e., not fans, coaches, parents or others involved in creating or consuming sport), and it was developed based on data from university sport settings. This emerging theory clearly would be strengthened by exploring its boundary conditions (Bacharach, 1989) and understanding how it may operate differently for other stakeholders and in a community sport setting (cf. Hill, 1996; Puddifoot, 1996). The current study explores these boundary conditions, with the purpose of understanding where theory needs modifications based on contextual factors.

In summary, youth sport remains one of the largest and most central community sport contexts. It is complex because it involves multiple stakeholders including youth participants and their parents. Parents play a pivotal role both in providing and interpreting their child's sport experience; therefore, it is important to understand parents' experience in sport, especially how their sense of community develops as a result of this experience. This understanding can aid not only in developing better community youth sport programs, but also in creating better community connections, building healthier communities, and decreasing fragmentation and alienation in society. An initial theoretical model of sense of community in sport has been developed (i.e., Warner and Dixon's Sport and Sense of Community Theory), yet additional testing of its boundary conditions and applicability of the theory to multiple stakeholders and in a community sport setting is needed. Toward that end, this study is guided by the following research questions:

Does the youth sport experience positively contribute to parents' overall sense of community?
What specific elements of youth sport foster or detract from a sense of community for parents?

Method

This study utilized a qualitative interpretive approach. This approach "relies as much as possible on participant views of a situation" and is useful for gaining insight into participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 25, see also Benzies & Allen, 2001; Jacob, 1987). It is particularly helpful in understanding how individuals make sense of experiences, while also gaining insight into the environmental factors that contribute to specific experiences (Creswell, 2013; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Thus, a qualitative interpretative approach was ideal for exploring the factors that foster parental sense of community within a youth sport setting.

Participants

Parents from an Upward Sports youth basketball league served as participants for this study. Upward Sports is a faith-based youth sport organization focused on "providing a fun sports experience based on healthy competition" (Upward Sports, 2012). Over a half a million 5-12 year-olds compete annually in Upward Sports leagues throughout the U.S. and Canada. Upward Sports partners with local churches to operate the leagues at various community sport and recreation facilities throughout the year. While this study focuses on basketball, Upward Sports also offers flag football, soccer, and cheerleading. The league in this study was managed in a similar fashion and format (same registration process, rules, regulations, etc.) as Upward Sports Leagues across U.S. The league was open to all children aged 5-12 in the surrounding communities, was primarily advertised through flyers distributed at local schools and churches, and carried a nominal participation fee.

Procedure

Parents of children participating in the Upward Sports basketball league were recruited for the study via a flyer announcing the purpose of the focus groups and offering a small incentive ($15 gift card) for participation. Willing participants were placed in focus groups that were conducted at a convenient time and location for the parents. Six focus groups consisting of 4-8 parents were held; a total of 36 parents participated in focus groups. Of the 36 focus group participants, 20 were mothers and 16 were fathers.

Although the participants had children in the Upward Sports league, all of the participants also had experience with at least one other youth sport league. As a result, the parents' responses were reflective not only of this league specifically, but also of a more generalized youth sport environment. The parents were able to compare and contrast these different experiences with their Upward Sport experience. Two primary researchers led the audio-recorded focus groups, which lasted 48 minutes to 1 hour and 18 minutes. The focus groups were held until both researchers felt that data saturation was reached (i.e., the point where no new themes were emerging).

Instrument

A semi-structured focus group interview format was used to collect data. This more informal format allowed the researchers to start by asking a broad question and follow the conversation to a more focused set of questions (Munhall, 2007). Building off the previous work of Warner and Dixon (2011, 2013b), a modified interview guide was utilized. This format was selected because it provided the structure for understanding how a sense of community develops in a sport setting. Sample guiding questions that were used to assess the factors that contribute to sense of community included: "Some people have said that they've felt a sense of community when they are around sport. Have you ever felt that way with the Upward program? Can you tell me about a time, you did and didn't feel that way?"

Analytic Strategy

After transcription of focus group data the researchers, with the aid of Nvivo 9, independently located themes and assigned codes in an attempt to condense the data into categories (Munhall, 2007). Through an iterative process, the researchers discussed the emergent codes and deductively compared their findings with the data until complete agreement was reached as to the meaning and content of the themes (Neuman, 2000). To ensure trustworthiness of the results member-checks for interpretations and conclusions drawn were conducted with select focus group participants throughout the coding process. At the conclusion of the coding process, focus group participants were again given the opportunity to review the coding results to further ensure trustworthiness and accuracy. While the results cannot explicitly articulate *all* participants' comments, quotations that were representative of the entire sample and/or noted deviations from the sample are provided (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Overview: Youth Sport as a Place for Building Community

Our first broad research question asked if youth sport positively contributes to parents' sense of community. After analyzing the data, it was clear that the youth sport league studied served as a major connection point or social anchor for parents and that youth sport is fostering a sense of community for parents. For example, several of the parents explained that "sport connects you." When prompted as to why it connects, one mother candidly explained, "Well, for me it [sport] does, because I'm unlikely to make a new friendship up at the grocery store. Everybody wants to feel included, be a part of something. And I think that sports gives you that." A father added, "You spend a lot more time with people sitting, watching games, than you would just come in for some meeting, or something going on."

It was evident that the time spent and their involvement in youth sport provided a place for "meeting new people" as well as an outlet for connecting to

people and building relationships. One father said, "Each year you see the same families, and that is how that sense of community grows." These connections were often also transferred outside of the sport. For example a mother noted:

> When you are in areas where you're being exposed to other parents who have kids that are the same age as your kids, you are all interested in the same things. It makes it real easy to spark up friendships. And then even go beyond that being limited just to basketball. And get together outside [the sport].

Sport seemed to draw together people with a common interest. The data clearly indicated that youth sport is playing an important role in the lives of parents and that it is a pivotal site for fostering a sense of community both for participants and parents.

Youth Sport Elements that Foster Sense of Community

After establishing the importance of youth sport in creating overall sense of community for parents, the next aim of this research was to determine what elements within the youth sport experience helped foster (or detract from) parental sense of community. The analysis of the data revealed that the relevant elements were: The Child's Experience, Clear Logistics, Administrative Consideration, and Equity in Administrative Decisions. Each of the elements will be defined and representative quotes provided. The elements are organized in order of saliency in the data (i.e., most commonly emphasized themes appear first).

The child's experience. The most frequently occurring theme that the parents felt influenced their sense of community was The Child's Experience. This theme highlights the importance of their child(ren) being happy with the overall sport experience. It was unmistakable from the data that the child's experience drove the parent's experience. One parent summarized, "It's all about the kids." Several of the participants further relayed the idea that, "If your child is happy, you're happy."

One father further clarified this idea and how a parent's experience all hinges on The Child's Experience:

> We didn't sign up so that *we* could be happy. I've been in leagues where our kids were able to have a good time, while the parents were still frustrated. So, the kids can have still have a good time, and the parents still be frustrated. But, if the kids are not having a good time, their parents are *definitely* going to be frustrated.

The parents were also clear in that they wanted The Child's Experience to be one that was encouraging, fun, less structured, and safe. Furthermore, several parents explicitly pointed out that they wanted a "teacher" rather than a "coach." "All the coaches my kids have had—they don't focus on the winning, they just focus on teaching them," one parent noted. Another echoed this idea when asked about

how sense of community develops for him, "They [the coaches] actually want to teach them. That's important to me." A father added:

> When you watch the games, when the kids do something that's wrong, they don't just get a whistle blown, and it's done. There's an explanation, you watch the referees, and they come and talk to them. 'I blew the whistle, because you dribbled twice. Or, you walked with the ball.' They explain it to them, so they're learning the sport. But, for an adult to get down on their level, and talk to them like that makes them feel important too.

Many of the parents added that having this kind of positive atmosphere for their child clearly impacted their own sense of community. In fact, they noted that such a positive atmosphere was one of the most attractive elements of the Upward Sports program. As one dad stated, "Everyone wants to see their child have fun, improve. Here you get that and it makes everyone feel better."

One example of this positive atmosphere was the commonality of cheering for both teams. "We're cheering on each other's kids, whether they're on your side, or not. Whenever somebody makes a goal, it doesn't matter if it's your kid, or the other team. And that just feels awesome." The parents also noted the coach welcomed this as coaches were frequently observed "high fiving with the kids on the other team, too." Another parent said, "When you see your kids coming together as a team there is a sense of pride in that for the parents, so we are connected that way."

The parents suggested that when their child had a positive experience with the sport organization, they as parents felt a stronger sense of community. When a positive experience was lacking, however, it detracted from their felt sense of community. One mother explained:

> I wear my heart on my sleeve, and people can tell when I'm upset. And I just come out frustrated, and I really don't want to talk to anybody. We couldn't just sit down, and talk, and communicate—because we were all frustrated. And we all weren't enjoying it because our child wasn't.

Essentially, she and others felt that it was nearly impossible to meet new people and/or create friendships when frustrated and angry. Consequently, The Child's Experience was fundamental to fostering sense of community for parents.

Clear logistics. The next theme that emerged was Clear Logistics. This element was comprised of the league's scheduling, policies, availability and quality of coaches and referees, and level of communication. If the league was perceived to be "organized" this has a positive impact on the parents' sense of community. In contrast, if the league was disorganized there was a negative influence on parents experiencing a sense of community. While Clear Logistics may often be a taken for granted element, over 46 references were made to level of organization or disorganization our participants' experienced. One mother explained the need for Clear Logistics this way:

And I think if you're not organized from the top down, I mean, that whole thing, it just trickles all the way down. For me, just cause I'm a teacher, I think [like the] classroom. If I'm not organized, and I don't know what my plan is for the day, and have it together, well the kids are not going to get optimum results. Just like here, if it's not organized, and whoever is in charge doesn't have it all together, and passing that down--the kids aren't going to get what they should be getting from it. There has to be some organization.

It appeared that Clear Logistics was related to community building largely by creating a general feeling of comfort with the league; administrators could be trusted and parents did not have to constantly worry about logistics. Thus, parents could spend time and effort on building relationships, rather than worrying about if they were going to have to "jump in" and help for a coach or official who did not fulfill their responsibilities. For example, one mother said that the quality of Clear Logistics started at the sign-up/skills evaluation night. She argued that because the event was organized, parents could focus on people and relationships, rather than logistics. Thus, a sense of community was established in the Upward Sports program from the very beginning due its high level of organization.

Conversely, when asked when he didn't feel a sense of community one father stated:

The only time that I felt that way was when it [youth sport] isn't organized. You know, whoever is coordinating it, the parents involved, or whoever is coordinating it, and if they don't organize it well. And then there's frustration on that end. But as far as Upward, it's always been a great experience.

When describing the reasons for a lack of a sense of community another parent relayed, "I had an issue with them, the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. And more organization to find out who is who [is needed]." These parents conveyed that disorganization puts the emphasis on scheduling, personnel, safety, and logistics at the expense of community building. As one mother said, "When it is not organized it makes you disconnect from the whole thing because everybody is just mad."

The parents felt that the Upward Sports league was one of the most organized they had experienced, and further the Clear Logistics helped foster a sense of community. Especially in comparison to their previous experiences with disorganized leagues, in this particular youth sport league Clear Logistics played a highly important role in fostering sense of community for parents.

Administrative consideration. Also playing an important role in creating a sense of community for parents was Administrative Consideration. This element is best described as the care, concern, and intentionality of coaches and administrators. The parents in this study indicated that it was important for Administrative Consideration to be expressed; when it was, their sense of community was

enhanced. One parent illustrated this, "Especially at sign-up night, nobody was alone on sign-up night. And everybody is like, 'Hey, I'm glad you're here'. They actually knew who we were and cared."

This experience with Upward Sports was in contrast to other sport experiences the parents had, where they felt that they were not cared about. As one mother said, "The other programs I've been in, it was like they just really wanted my money, and didn't care." Another mother said, "In the [other sport program] they didn't care if my child learned the sport or not, and they don't care about my child as a person. You know, and this [Upward] is really different."

When asked to describe why they felt a strong sense of community, one mother summarized the feeling of many of the parents, "I think that the people in charge do a really good job being extremely friendly." Thus, this friendly and welcoming demeanor of administrators helped comprised Administrative Consideration, which the parents felt was fundamental to cultivating a sense of community. In fact one parent stated that because of this friendliness of administrators she felt "like Mom's role, and Dad's role [became] be nice, and say, 'Hello', and you don't feel like you're sitting at the court all by yourself, not knowing anyone." The effects of Administrative Consideration were aptly summarized by one father who said, "I see all the kids glow, and they look forward to coming together." The parents suggested that the considerate, caring attitude made their whole family want to come, and to be a part of the community.

Equity in administrative decisions. Another sport element that influenced parental sense of community was Equity in Administrative Decisions. This element was simply about perceived fairness and equity; if parents felt that their child was being treated fairly, a sense of community was enhanced. When discussing the felt sense of community, a number of parents commented on what that meant to them and how it impacted their experience. For example, one mother said, "It's about, were they all treated fairly? Were they valued as a team member?" Another parent said, "They treated all the girls as equals." And another added, "This league is more fun. Everybody gets an equal opportunity to play."

Again, many of the parents' positive experiences in regards to fairness within Upward Sports were contrasted with unfairness they experienced in other leagues. Several parents discussed how other leagues stacked their teams, and it created anger and frustration rather than community. One mother stated, "In another league, we ended up having all the older kids on one team and they dominated the league. That completely impacted the season." Another mother explained how other leagues favored certain children, leading to tension and anger rather than community. "Their kid is always on first base; their kid is always on the mound. It's favoritism."

It was obvious that the parents felt that community youth sport programs should be competitive yet balanced. Equality in terms of playing time and teams' abilities were highly important to them. If the sport program was perceived to be unfair, community could not be built. One father summarized:

I think the teams being balanced out, you know, as far as, the aggressive kids and the less skilled kids. It helps the feeling of community. 'Cause I've seen other youth programs where it is a real slack. You feel slighted.

The parents also relayed that several of the built in rules and policies of Upward Sports, such as equal playing time and matching players based on skill level, were especially relevant to foster community. These regulations were key to promoting Equity in Administrative Decisions and consequently, contributing to parental sense of community.

Discussion

While considerable anecdotal evidence continues to focus on the over-bearing and negative images of parents in a community youth sport setting (e.g., Engh, 1999; Hyman, 2012), this study provides empirical evidence of a benefit of sport for parents in this setting. The results of this study indicate that youth sport *can be* an important site to foster a sense of community for parents. In fact, sport programs seem to play a role in fostering community not just by creating comfort and belongingness within a sport organization, but also by creating connections for people to other parts of the community.

Consistent with existing research, however, youth sport does not automatically create community (cf. Chalip, 2006; Warner, 2012). The results of this study also indicate that youth sport can create quite the opposite and destroy community. Numerous comments from parents about other youth sport programs (i.e., not Upward Sports) show that poorly designed and implemented youth sport can be a source of anger, frustration, and disconnection. Parents with some common ground (e.g., a common interest in sport, children of the same age) are initially attracted to youth sport, as it has the potential of meeting parents with a shared interest. Their subsequent experience in the organization, however, will determine if community is built or not. Therefore, we must continue to examine the elements of youth sport that help promote a sense of community.

In sum, the results highlight the importance of the management and design of youth sport toward community building. Many sport organizations have responded to hostile sport atmospheres by trying to manage specific behaviors. For example, organizations offer pre-season meetings, creating spectator rules (e.g., no cheering allowed), and even in some cases banning all parents from attending events (e.g., National Alliance for Youth Sport, 2008; Powell, 2004). Although these efforts are well intentioned, they are focused on modifying specific parental behaviors without giving consideration to the underlying issues that are likely promoting such behaviors. This study examines the sport design elements that relate to both the youth and parent experiences, and are the building blocks for community among parents. The results indicated that The Child's Experience, Clear Logistics, Administrative Consideration, and Equity in Administrative Decision

were all viewed as essential to fostering a sense of community for parents. These factors generally support the previously proposed Sport and Sense of Community Theory. More importantly, the factors focus on the elements needed to change the youth sport environment as whole, rather than just temporarily modifying an individual parent's negative behaviors. That is, this work points to specific factors that can be managed such that parents experience a strong sense of community and ensuing life quality benefits.

While perhaps not surprising, The Child's Experience emerged as the most important element for building community among youth sport parents. It makes sense that sport managers should aim to cultivate a good experience for the child participant. What was surprising was the strong and persistent influence the child's experience had on the parents' sense of community. Simply, the data suggest that it was difficult, or perhaps even impossible, for a parent to achieve any social benefit of sport if their child was not having a good experience. It was clear from the focus groups that both the parent and child wanted an experience that was encouraging, fun, less structured, and safe.

From a practical standpoint, this includes a "developmental" rather than "outcome" oriented program (i.e., finding any way to win), where children are taught sport skills and strategies, and encouraged to try them in a safe context (cf. Duda, 1996). This focus provides an appropriate foundation for developing athletes and can also lead to greater persistence in sport as the athlete ages (Coté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). As our community sport systems become more specialized and more often geared towards elite athletes, it is important that we continue to provide skill-development focused programs that are fun and practice (or mastery) oriented. Not only do these engage youth, but they build community for parents as well.

Clear Logistics of the program was also an important element for fostering a sense of community among parents. The saliency of this factor was somewhat surprising. In most cases, it is expected that sport will be organized. However, it was clear from the results that this is not always the case. One reason the Upward Sports program was effective in creating community among parents is because the parents felt it was well organized. Clear Logistics helped increase parents' comfort level and trust with the organization, making it more attractive to be involved with the sport program. The high-quality level of organization also fostered community by removing barriers to relationship building. If parents did not need to worry about logistics (e.g., is the coach going to show up for practice?), they could instead focus on meeting and building relationships with others.

Both Administrative Consideration and Equity in Administrative Decisions also have been noted as components that foster sense of community within a sport setting in previous research (Kellett & Warner, 2011; Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013). The current study provides further evidence of their importance in the community youth sport context. Showing concern (i.e., Administrative Consid-

eration) and ensuring a just and fair environment (i.e., Equity in Administrative Decision) are often perceived as foundational components for community building, but their importance and power to influence an environment should not be taken for granted. The parents in this study indicated that fairness and concern for their children were absolutely essential to their own sense of community in a youth sport setting.

There were several factors in the previously proposed Sport and Sense of Community Theory that did not emerge in this study of youth sport parents. This provides initial evidence that factors that build community in a youth sport setting, especially for parents, are different than factors needed to build community in other sport settings (i.e., college athletics). It seemed, for example, that the previous noted Social Spaces, Voluntary Action, Competition, and Leadership Opportunities were not nearly as important in the community youth sport setting for non-participants. Social Spaces may not have emerged because the people live in the community and already interact in these spaces where the practices and games were held. This factor may be different than college students who create new social spaces surrounding activities and people.

Voluntary Action and Competition most likely did not emerge because this was a highly "voluntary" and low in competition setting. In fact, in Upward basketball scores are not kept until the 3rd/4th grade level, so competition is intentionally minimized. It is possible that parents self-select in or out of this program based on their values regarding competition. If that is the case, then our sample likely contained mostly parents who would not necessarily value competiveness and see high competition levels as being related to community. Future work that compares low and high competition settings would be important to the continued development of the sport and community theory.

Surprisingly, Leadership Opportunities, a strong factor toward community building in previous studies (Warner & Dixon, 2011; 2013), was not an identified factor in this study. Two explanations are offered for this finding. First, it is possible that the sample did not contain highly involved parents so they did not see leadership opportunities or involvement as important. Second, it is also possible that high involvement for parents actually impedes community building with other parents. For example, a parent who volunteers as the announcer for the games would be positioned at the scorer's table and may not be afforded the opportunity to interact with other parents, which could inhibit community building.

This finding contradicts previous literature on Manning Theory (Wicker, 1968) and on sense of community and civic participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Both of these literature-bases argue that more involved individuals feel a greater sense of community because of being needed in the organization and feeling central to its operation. Future research should further test this factor, perhaps among individuals who have multiple connections to an organization (e.g., parent and volunteer, parent and coach, etc.).

Limitations

This study makes strong practical and theoretical contributions. The findings are limited, however, to a particular community sport environment, league, and one that is faith-based. One might argue that a context of this nature makes it somewhat difficult to disentangle which elements of the youth sport experience have to do with the faith-based nature of the organization and which ones are applicable across sport organizations. However, it seems likely that any community youth sport program can improve with a greater focus on *The Child's Experience, Clear Logistics, Administrative Consideration,* and *Equity in Administrative Decisions.*

Further, this study contributes to the boundary conditions of the Sport and Sense of Community theory and demonstrates areas that are distinct based on context. Additional comparative youth sport contexts are needed to further test the ideas and mechanisms presented. Quantitative testing and refinement of the theory is also warranted for future research, specifically the development of reliable and valid instrument to measure the strength and direction of relationships between *specific* program elements and sense of community (cf. Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015).

Conclusion

In summation, this study challenges scholars and sport managers to break down assumptions about parental involvement in youth sport. Specifically, assumptions that parents should be uninvolved and should not benefit from youth sport. Youth sport can be a vital site for social change in a community whereby life quality is enhanced through increased sense of community. Though potentially counter-intuitive, it is essential to focus on both the parent's and child's experience rather than just the child's experience, as both are important to building a sense of community. This conclusion does not mean this research is advocating for a parent-centered experience, but rather to shift our thinking toward solution-orientated management that addresses the youth sport environment as a whole. Such an approach further recognizes the need for important social change, in this case, addressing a fragmented and isolated society. Understanding how to create a sense of community is fundamental to achieving such community-level or environment changes. In other words, emphasizing the elements that create a sense of community aids sports managers in concentrating "on forming healthy communities, and rely on the communities to form the healthy individuals" (Hill, 1996, p. 435). By understanding the parents' perspective and needs in a fragmented and disconnected society (McPherson et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000), ultimately sport can be used to make a greater and timely contribution to society while fostering a better experience for both the parent and child. Youth sport will continue to have a prominent role in our communities; accordingly, its impact should be managed so that it maximizes the positive social benefits and social change for all.

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