

Connecting It All: Creating Community in Sport and Entertainment

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There is a growing concern that many individuals are no longer living in and experiencing *community* like previous generations. Today for many Americans, it is common for someone to have thousands of online Facebook friends without knowing his or her neighbors' names. Despite the technological advances in communication, individuals receive less social support than in the past and are becoming less connected as a result of these shifting societal trends. Overall, individuals are reporting that they have fewer confidants and people they discuss important matters with (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006; Putnam, 2001). Even within families, traditional American family dynamics are also changing as fewer individuals are raised in two-parent households. This is important because social relationships and connectedness are linked to health and overall well-being (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Olds & Schwartz, 2010). Experiencing a strong sense of community is fundamental to one's overall life quality, well-being, and health, which makes the shift away from living in and experiencing community concerning, as people do not have a lessened need for belonging to communities. Thus, if we can find better ways for more individuals to feel strong social support at the group level, then it is possible to improve overall life quality and ensure that this growing need for community is met. Yet it is not only individuals that are well served by communities. Because of this inherent need to feel a sense of belonging to communities, organizations can take advantage of this need by offering the opportunity to their consumers and/or stakeholders to become a part of their community. Doing so would increase the engagement of their stakeholders, and consequently, the commitment to the organization.

If individuals are not finding a strong sense of community in traditional settings (e.g., neighborhoods or families) then

other avenues in which individuals can experience community and this group level support are needed (Putnam, 2001). Sport in many instances has been filling this gap for individuals who gravitate toward the excitement surrounding athletic feats and accomplishments. In fact, some have argued that sport is one of the few remaining social institutions in which people regularly gather around and experience community (e.g., Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1997; Warner, 2012). For example, recent work in this area (our work and others') has highlighted community being formed among collegiate football tailgaters (Katz & Heere, 2013), student spectators (Clopton, 2009), sporting event volunteers (Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015), youth sport parents (Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015), sport camp participants (Warner & Leierer, 2015), fitness participants (Berg, Warner, & Das, 2015; Pickett, Goldsmith, Damon, & Walker, 2016) and even referees and officials (Kellett & Warner, 2011; Warner, Tingle, & Kellett, 2013).

For many years, sport managers have noted the strong connection that sport teams have with their immediate fan base and their extended community. Heere and James (2007) explored this and suggested that many sport teams in Europe were "founded as an instrument for groups to strengthen the bond between the organization (church, company, etc.) and members of that organization" (p. 325). In spite of this foundation and potential, many sport franchises have insufficiently built a strong sense of belonging within the larger communities in which they operated. Thus, Heere and James proposed an extensive model of how sport franchises could do a better job of building both internal and external communities through sport. We suggest that the same kinds of community building that is being conducted in sport could also be developed in a broad array of organizations with a consumer base—including organizations related to arts, music, and entertainment. For example, one could easily envision a sense of community built around the annual Shakespeare Festival in Oregon, the Telluride Blues and Brews Festival in Colorado, the Friends of the Long Center for the Performing Arts in Austin, Texas.

The richness of building sense of community in a broad array of sport and entertainment organizations is that there are multiple layers of outcomes. First, at the individual level (i.e., for the individual consumer), building a sense of community is a positive end in itself. As mentioned, increased sense of community is associated with positive outcomes such as greater well-being, positive self-esteem, and enhanced mood (e.g., Wann, 1995). In addition, sense of community also could be leveraged by organizations to promote consumer behaviors such as increased fan community engagement, repeat purchase behavior, satisfaction, and positive word of mouth (Katz & Heere, 2013; Madrigal, 2000, 2001; Masayuki, Gordon, Heere, & James, 2015). Finally, at a broad level, Chalip (2006) challenged sport and tourism event and festival organizers to plan for and intentionally foster social

interactions and feelings of celebration to enhance the sense of community that would extend to the entire host community residents. Consider, for example, the national identities explored and celebrated annually at festivals like Carnival or Mardi Gras. These events not only bring individuals together in community, but create a collective sense of celebration that, when properly leveraged, endures beyond the festival itself.

The growing need to understand how a sense of community is created and the compelling evidence that sport, music, arts, and entertainment organizations and events could help foster a sense of community has led to extensive study of the factors that lead to sense of community. One of the results of this inquiry has been a Sport and Sense of Community theory (Warner, 2012, 2016; Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013; Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012). While the theory was developed based on data from current and former athletes and was intended to provide practical solutions to sport managers, the theory, concepts, and ideas behind the theory can be applied much more broadly to include social and entertainment organizations and events. The original theory was based on interview data from more than 80 participants. Additional work expanded well beyond considering actual sport participants, as research continues to demonstrate the utility of the theory in other settings (e.g., Kerwin et al., 2015; Warner et al., 2015). In the following sections we discuss six recommendations for sport managers that they can use to build their own communities in sport and entertainment. While most of the examples originate from the world of sport, there is very little evidence that suggests that these recommendations do not apply to other forms of entertainment, as the phenomenon of communities is not limited to sport teams, but manifest themselves in the world of music (e.g., the Grateful Dead), film (e.g., Star Wars), and books (e.g., Harry Potter) among others.

Administrative Consideration

When trying to create community, the effect employees and administrators have in any sport or entertainment setting should not be overlooked. It has long been understood that the care and concern that any visible frontline employees and personnel express to others matters when trying to foster a strong sense of community and a quality sport or entertainment experience. That is, any type of intentional and genuine consideration of others that is expressed makes a difference when trying to build community.

Studies using the Sport and Sense of Community theory demonstrate that even simple, taken-for-granted gestures such as asking a person's well-being or checking on the quality of their experience fosters a sense of community, which then leads to both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. In our study of college athletes, the athletes consistently stated

that when their coaches and athletic support staff expressed concern about their lives or their school work (elements outside of their athletic performance), they felt a greater sense of belonging (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013). To give another example, we found that for youth sport parents even simple gestures such as greeting the parent or child by name and asking about or remembering details about their lives built a sense of community and contributed positively to the parents' and the children's experiences (Warner et al., 2015). In entertainment settings, expressions of care and concern can start at the box office and continue through food service, pre-event, the event itself, and post-event expressions of appreciation. Encouraging frontline personnel in a sport or entertainment organization to genuinely express and realize their role in fostering community through caring about the people that they serve is important to building community.

Common Interest

Another assumption that is sometimes taken for granted is that the individuals in a community will have a common interest. Obviously, if a group of residents are attending a community play, they likely have a common interest and appreciation for performing arts or supporting their local theater. However, this is not capitalized in many cases such that it actually fosters a sense of community. In an effort to enhance the experience and build a sense of community, sport and entertainment managers should emphasize and leverage any unifying, shared values and/or beliefs whenever possible. In fact, Chalip (2006) outlines five ways that organizations can leverage an event to create communities: (1) enable sociability (e.g., tailgating, on-site picnics); (2) create event-related social events that extend beyond the event itself (e.g., the Super Bowl includes a week-long cadre of parties leading up to the event itself); (3) facilitate informal social opportunities (e.g., the fan festivals surrounding the event create opportunities for non-event goers of all ages to participate in the event); (4) produce ancillary events (e.g., the Governor's Ball Music Festival in New York boasts music, food venues, photo and demonstration booths, as well as lawn and other games); and (5) theme widely with intentional use of colors and symbols that extend to the greater community.

In our own work with referees, the activity/job of working the games was a common interest that brought referees together. Once they were introduced to others through their referee experience, they often would socialize outside of the events, gathering at a local pub or restaurant after the games or on other occasions. We also found that volunteering at a sporting event could build community (Kellett & Warner, 2011; Warner et al., 2013). Volunteers at a small-scale sport event were initially introduced through their common interest in the event. As they worked together, the volunteers found that they had shared values with the other volunteers

and built a stronger community (Kerwin et al., 2015). Additionally, in our study of club sport athletes on college campuses, the sport that they played was an initial common interest that brought them together, but only when they found additional points of connection was community truly built. Teams would solidify through meeting together outside of sport, wearing team-themed clothing, and extending the sport experience through traveling together and/or socializing after the sport events or practices (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013). Through emphasizing and capitalizing on common interest, stronger communities can be built.

Competition

One of the more interesting findings in sense of community research within sport is the role that competition plays in community building. While some people might argue that competition is limited to sport settings, it is possible that it can also be leveraged in non-sport settings to build sense of community. In sport settings, the challenge against external rivalries aids in strengthening community (e.g., Spurs vs. Mavericks rivalries strengthen San Antonio and Dallas community ties through identification with their sport team; Heere & James, 2007; Warner & Dixon, 2015). For example, in our study of college athletes, we found that competition against other teams actually strengthened their sense of "we" and built community against a common opponent. This was consistently a powerful mechanism for bringing a team together.

While it may be easy to see how this would work in sports in which rivalries have evolved over the years, other industries could also capitalize and be concerned with competition when trying to build community. It is possible that non-sport organizations could identify healthy external rivalries that would help them build an internal sense of community. For example, notorious musical rivalries such as Nirvana vs. Guns and Roses, or Madonna vs. Lady Gaga have created communities around the artists, a style of music, and a sense of competition against the other camp. Considering and leveraging such external rivalries through marketing and media is important to managers in arts and entertainment that want to build stronger communities.

Equity in Administrative Decisions

Next, evidence from community-building research has revealed the importance of equity in administrative decisions. Quite simply, an organization must ensure its policies and procedures are fair. Equity in decisions matters in community building, regardless of whether or not it affects an individual directly. This means all decisions made by an organization need to be perceived as being fair and equitable to everyone or it will negatively affect the community. In

our study of referees, for example, the referees were highly concerned that they were treated fairly in terms of the quality of the games they were assigned, travel distance to sites, and partners with which they were assigned. When they felt they were treated fairly, community was strengthened. When they felt it was unfair, the community was strongly undermined and people felt bitter and angry (Tingle, Warner, & Sartore-Baldwin, 2014; Warner et al., 2013). In youth sport contexts, parents could only build community in settings in which they felt their children were being treated fairly. They said that fairness was the foundation of trust, and communities were built on trust (Warner et al., 2015).

In an entertainment setting, fairness and trust are just as important. For example, if an individual is removed from an event or given an upgraded ticket, it needs to be done in a fair and equitable way. Clear procedures for event elements such as pricing, seating, ticket refunds, and customer service should be clearly stated and equitable. Community building will be enhanced as long as an organization or an event's actions are thought to be fair and equitable to everyone. By clearly putting forth policies and procedures and articulating these to their consumers, administrators and managers can ensure that this is accomplished.

Leadership Opportunities

Creating opportunities for individuals and consumers to have a say in an organization's decisions and direction is also essential to community building. Both the formal and informal roles given to members, customers, or constituents are key to building, enhancing, and strengthening community. If individuals are given various roles and responsibilities, they are more likely to buy in and become attached to the community (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Wicker, 1968). For example, in our work with college athletes in both varsity and club settings, creating opportunities for individuals to be team captains, organizing team events or outings, or taking charge of the whole team (e.g., in club sports) builds buy-in for the athletes and not only strengthens their personal sense of community, but aids in empowering them to be community builders on their teams (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013). Among event volunteers, those who feel they have a say in what goes on at the event or leadership in their position report a greater sense of community (Kerwin et al., 2015).

Creating leadership opportunities can be as formal as creating a volunteer fan liaison position or as informal as asking individuals to participate in a poll to help determine an event date or location. This element helps increase individuals' involvement and will ultimately play a key role in enhancing the sense of community they experience with an organization or event.

Social Spaces

The importance of social spaces or places where individuals can freely mingle and engage with others is essential in building community (Chalip, 2006; Katz & Heere, 2011; Warner et al., 2011). In fact, this element is so important that many newer sport, music, and entertainment facilities and venues are purposely designed to include social spaces, and organizations are beginning to understand how to leverage these not only toward enhancing the consumer experience, but also toward building community. Creating designated "meet-up" spots and areas where patrons do not feel rushed out after an event is over is essential in creating an environment that is fostering a strong sense of community. For example, in our work with varsity athletes, their social spaces were often the training room or cafeteria, where they could extend conversation and relationships beyond the playing field. College club athletes often gathered after practice or games at one of the team members' houses. This created a spot where they could socialize for an extended period of time and could invite others to join the experience. It was not rushed or formal, but relaxed and open. As Chalip (2006) argued, social opportunities that extend beyond the event, so that non-event goers can also attend, can also help the event link to the broader community. The key to these spaces is that they are "open," which creates the right atmosphere for creating or continuing conversation before or after an event.

For many individuals the event or facility will be the third location that consumers look to gather beyond their home and work space (Fairley & Tyler, 2012). For example, our study of referees showed that the bars and pubs where they gathered were often considered their third place. These "third-place" venues includes social surroundings outside of home and work setting for socializing and can have a tremendous impact on one's social and psychological well-being (Olds & Schwartz, 2010; Putnam, 2001). In sum, social spaces are perhaps the initial fundamental element in fostering community in sport and entertainment events and venues. Building and leveraging such spaces is paramount when trying to foster community.

Tying It All Together

Through challenging the notion that sport builds community, and building upon the work of others who have argued similarly, our research has highlighted the necessary factors for a sense of community to develop. While this work was grounded in sport, the preceding sections emphasized how each of the factors could be planned for and addressed within music, theater, arts, or live performance settings. Work within sport has demonstrated that increased levels of sense of community lead to favorable participant and employee outcomes (e.g., Kellett & Warner, 2011; Masayuki et al., 2015;

McCole, Jacobs, Lindley, & McAvoy, 2012). Clearly, music, theater, arts, or live performance settings are also working toward fostering a strong sense of community and likely reaping at least some of the benefits of returning customers and faithful followers because of it. However, understanding the role that administrative consideration, common interest, competition, equity in administrative decisions, leadership opportunities, and social spaces could play in improving the multi-level outcomes of community can be beneficial to all administrators and managers.

Because sport continues to be perceived as one of the few remaining social institutions that foster a sense of community in our society (Warner et al., 2015; Warner, Kerwin, & Walker, 2013), businesses and the entertainment industry have the potential to learn from this sport-based research on how to intentionally create and build a sense of community. Likewise, sport can learn from music, theater, arts, or live performance settings on what factors are key to community building. The key and overarching goal is to understand the environmental factors that are making a difference in strengthening the community experienced by consumers, fans, and followers. Overall, strengthened community within any organization benefits not only employees and consumers through improved health and well-being (Berkman et al., 2000; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Deflem, 1989), but benefits the overall organization as well. The literature demonstrates that there are financial benefits to the organization if the organization acts a certain way (Margolis & Walsh, 2001; Walker & Kent, 2009).

Contemporary American society has also evolved from individuals reaping the benefits of community in geographical neighborhoods to individuals that obtain community benefits from common interest groups and/or work-related groups (Durkheim, 1951; Warner, 2012). Thus, understanding how a sense of community develops can benefit managers working in sport, music, theater, arts, or live performance, since these are all avenues that can help fill the void of a lack of community that individuals are experiencing. Filling the void will not only improve the quality of life for various individuals, but it will also better position these various entertainment avenues in the communities in which they reside. It is probable that many of these avenues already are contributing to strengthening community, as entertainment avenues are clearly an outlet for social bonding. While research has yet to clarify if an improved sense of community leads to a greater entertainment experience, or a greater entertainment experience leads to a greater sense of community, it is clear that enhancing and/or maintaining a strong sense of community is beneficial to all. The overarching goal of Sport and Sense of Community theory is to highlight the factors that have been shown to enhance community. By giving attention and consideration to these factors, a stronger sense of community can be achieved.

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