

Factors Related to Sense of Community in Youth Sport Parents

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Parents play an essential role in the youth sport experience, performing necessary roles such as registering their children, paying registration fees, ensuring that their children get to and from games and practices, and often playing a vital volunteer role in the organization. Despite these crucial functions, research has paid little attention to the experience of the parent and the potential benefits that a parent may accrue as a result of his or her involvement with the program. As parents often spend a large amount of time involved with their children's youth sport experiences and often interact with other parents in those experiences, the development of a feeling of sense of community among the parents is one possible and important component of those experiences. Research has suggested that sense of community is associated with numerous positive outcomes. Although sense of community has been studied in numerous settings, it has not specifically been studied in youth sport with parents. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to better understand factors that predict a higher sense of community among youth sport parents. Participants were recruited from three different youth sport programs: soccer, tackle football, and flag football. Researchers collected data from 122 parents of youth sport participants regarding their level of involvement, perceived choice, identification with the program, and sense of community. Results from this study suggest that parents of youth who participated on a sports team often develop a greater sense of community. Specifically, parental level of involvement and perceived choice were significant predictors of sense of community ($p < .05$), and the association between identification and sense of community was moderated by the number of years the youth was on a particular team ($p < .05$). Several practical implications can be drawn from these results including suggestions for how to involve parents in the program and to increase the parents' perceived choice. Sport teams who implement incentives and recognition for volunteering, and promote the positive experience of the parent in the youth sport program, will likely facilitate an enhanced sense of community. This study makes an important first step in exploring this aspect of the parental experience. Future research may wish to explore the impact of parental sense of community on the youth sport experience as well as the effectiveness of programming interventions designed to improve sense of community among parents.

KEYWORDS: *youth sports, parents, sense of community*

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Parents play an essential role in the youth sport experience, devoting considerable time, finances, and effort to the youth sport program. Functions performed by parents include signing up and paying for their children's participation, providing significant volunteer labor, and being chauffeur, financier, and cheerleader (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Green & Chalip, 1998). In addition, parents perform a number of essential volunteer roles that are essential to the functioning of the organization (Community Development Council of Durham, 2009; Searle & Brayley, 2000; Sharpe, 2006). Often, youth sport organizations highly recommend or require parents to volunteer as part of their children's participation in the program (May, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2010). In addition, parents serve as the primary source of youth sport coaches (Barber, Sukhi, & White, 1999; Silverberg, Marshall, & Ellis, 2001). In one study, Busser and Carruthers (2010) noted that 90% of the coaches were parents. In these various ways, parents become "co-producers" of the youth sport experience (Busser & Carruthers).

In addition to performing necessary practical functions, parents also play a key role in the ongoing experience of the youth sport participant. Research indicates that youth participants perceive parental influence to be much higher than the parent perception of that influence (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). Thus, the experience and resulting attitudes and behaviors of the parent is particularly influential to the experience of the youth participant. For example, parents often view participation as a means to an end; rather than an end of itself (Shannon, 2006). Logically, this may influence youth to seek extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards for participation.

Parental influence can be positive or negative. At a basic level, they influence a youth's decision to drop out or continue participation in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008). Parents who provide unstructured play opportunities, are emotionally supportive, and balance the importance of sport with other activities, are likely to have children who continue in and are more engaged in their sport activity. Youth are also more likely to enjoy youth sport due to the encouragement of their parents (Brustad, 1996; Leff & Hoyle, 1997), and the expectancy of success and the value that a youth places on sport participation is strongly influenced by the values of his or her parents (Brustad).

In contrast, youth whose parents coach from the sideline during games or provide rewards for performance are more likely to drop out of youth sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Negative sportsmanship behavior of parents is also strongly related to negative sportsmanship behavior of youth participants (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreness, 2009). Further, parents' behavior as spectators can also negatively impact their children's experiences. For instance, background anger, even if not projected directly at the youth participant, may cause undue stress on the youth participant (Omli & LaVoi, 2009). It is clear that the role of the youth sport parent is pivotal to the experience of the youth. Research, however, has largely focused on the experience of the *youth participant*. Given the pivotal role that parents play in the youth recreational sport experience, however, it is critical to also examine the experience of the *parent in the youth sport experience* (Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Conceptualizing Sense of Community

One potential component of the experiences of a youth sport parent is the development of a feeling of sense of community. The existing literature abounds with varying constructs related to community including social cohesion, social capital, social resilience, and sense of community (Kramer, Seedat, Lazarus, & Suffla, 2011). One of the most commonly used theories emerged from the field of community psychology and the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986) who defined sense of community, or psychological sense of community (SOC) “as a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). For McMillan and Chavis, SOC develops through the interaction of four elements: membership, needs fulfillment, influence, and a shared emotional connection. These four elements are presented in further detail below.

Membership

Membership refers to the general feeling that one belongs as part of the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The feeling of membership is developed through the interplay of multiple sub elements including boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging, and a personal investment. Boundaries clearly denote who is and who is not part of the group and may be formed by barriers to membership or symbols of membership. Within the boundaries of membership, the group member feels emotional safety to speak honestly and to be vulnerable. A sense of belonging includes not just a feeling of belonging, but also an awareness of being accepted. Finally, one’s personal investment in the group may represent a form of dues that are paid to be part of the group (McMillan, 2011).

Influence

The second element of SOC is *influence* (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) or trust (McMillan, 1996). Similar to membership, influence is achieved through a personal investment. This personal investment represents a sacrifice given to belong to the group and also makes the individual member more attractive to the community (McMillan, 2011). Within a community, influence operates bi-directionally; that is, the community influences the member through community norms and shared values and the member also influences the community (McMillan, 2011).

Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

Put simply, individuals are attracted to communities that help them fulfill their personal needs. Those needs may be physical, emotional, social, or psychological, and include rewards such as status, success, and demonstrated competency (McMillan, 2011). When an individual perceives that his or her needs are met within a community, that individual is more likely to feel SOC within that group.

Shared Emotional Connection

Finally, a *shared emotional connection* contributes to a SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). A shared emotional connection develops when community members spend time together around events that have value, closure, and that honor members. This shared time also becomes symbolized in rituals, common symbols, traditions, and stories (McMillan, 2011).

Sense of Community Research

The existing research points to several factors that predict SOC and are particularly relevant to parents of youth sport participants. These factors include level of involvement, choice, and social identification (see, for example, Brayley & Obst, 2010; Breunig, O’Connell, Todd, Anderson, & Young, 2010; Obst & White, 2007). Level of involvement appears to be one of the strongest predictors of SOC in a number of settings including recreational activities (Breunig et al.), and community organizations (Obst, Smith,

& Zinkiewicz, 2002). Specifically, Breunig and colleagues noted that participants in an outdoor recreation program experienced an increase in the four elements of a sense of community as they participated more in group activities (Breunig et al.) For parents of youth sport participants, numerous opportunities, as spectators, volunteers, or fellow fans, exist to be involved with the group of parents and thus develop an increased SOC (Busser & Carruthers, 2010; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; May, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2010). In addition, the connection between level of involvement and SOC is theoretically consistent, as level of involvement represents a personal investment of a group member that enhances both feelings of membership and influence (McMillan, 2011). This personal investment may come in the form of time investment or financial investment. Further, McMillan suggested that community members must share time in order to experience as shared emotional connection.

Another factor that appears to influence the level of SOC is the degree of choice that the individual had in choosing to participate in the community. Previous research demonstrates links between the perception of choice and a number of psychological variables including overall well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Specific to the sense of community literature, Obst and White, (2007) found evidence that choice in group membership may impact social identification and SOC in communities of interest. In the youth sport setting, participation is voluntary, therefore a parent would appear to always have a choice. However, parents often feel pressure to put their children's needs above their own personal needs even if doing so sacrifices their own personal choice and enjoyment (Choi, Henshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005; McGannon & Schinke, 2013). Thus, whether a parent perceives that he or she has completely freedom of choice or is simply sacrificing to the needs of his or her child is likely to be an indicator of SOC.

Finally, the degree to which a parent identifies with a particular community is likely to influence his or her feeling of SOC. The relation of social identification to SOC has been of particular interest to researchers with results suggesting a significant relationship between the two constructs (e.g. Brayley & Obst, 2010; Obst & White, 2005, 2007). Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Cameron's (2004) work further distinguished three factors of social identity: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties. Centrality represents the salience of group membership (Cameron). That is, is the group membership important to the individual? Ingroup affect represent specific emotions that arise from group membership (Cameron). For example, youth sport parents may experience happiness as a result of their relation with other youth sport parents. Similar to sense of community, ingroup ties are the psychological connections between an individual and the group (Cameron). Indeed, parents of youth sport participants appear to strongly identify with their child's youth sport experience (Peter, 2011). Although overidentification can be negative, it is clear that this elements often exists in youth sport parents (Omli & LaVoi, 2012).

SOC may be an important component of the experiences of a youth sport parent as evidence suggests it is associated with a range of positive outcomes. For example, individuals who feel strong SOC are more likely to be engaged in healthy activities (Peterson & Reid, 2003), experience decreased feelings of alienation (Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994) and negative moods (Roussi, Rapti, & Kiosseoglou, 2006), have increased self-confidence and emotional connections (Goodwin, et al., 2009), have improved coping skills (Greenfield & Marks, 2010), and experience increased feelings of empowerment (Peterson & Reid, 2003). Communities that have members with strong feelings of SOC benefit from increased civic participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), prosocial behavior, and volunteerism (Omoto & Snyder, 2009). Thus, the development of SOC within sport fans may be an important and beneficial outcome of their experiences.

The Youth Sport Parent Community Setting

Although there has been considerable research related to SOC in various communities, the community of youth sport parents is unique. For example, while parents often have a high level of involvement in the program, it is also possible for a parent to simply drop his or her child off and use the youth sports program as a de facto babysitter. Additionally, while parents are ultimately the ones who decide on their children's participation, that choice is strongly influenced by their children's desires, which may determine the degree parents perceive they had a choice in participating in the program. Finally, the community of parents is not as clearly identifiable as communities defined by geography or participation around a common interest. For example, in a geographic community, there are clear physical boundaries to the community. For a community of youth sport parents, although it is clear who is a youth sport parent, the degree that this is a community may not be readily apparent. Thus, the degree to which parents identify with the community may not be clear. Indeed, no specific study has been completed to confirm the development of SOC among youth sport parents. Hence, particularly given the importance of parents to the youth sport experience, there is a need to explore factors that may relate to SOC in this particular setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test the relationship of three factors with the development of sense of community in the youth sport setting: 1) level of involvement in the youth sport setting, 2) identification with the youth sport experience, and 3) degree of choice in enrolling a child. The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Higher levels of time involvement in the youth sport setting will be a significant predictor of SOC.

H2: Higher levels of financial involvement in the youth sport setting will be a significant predictor of SOC.

H3: Higher levels of identification with the youth sport experience will be a significant predictor of SOC.

H4: Higher levels of perceived choice from parents in participation in youth sport programs will be a significant predictor of SOC.

H5: The association between identity and sense of community will be stronger for parents who have had their children involved in youth sport programs for many years compared to parents who have had their children in a youth sport program for only one year.

Method

Participants and Procedure

IRB approval as an exempt study was obtained prior to the collection of any data. Participants in this study were parents of youth participants in three recreational sport programs located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Parents of children who participated in a youth recreational soccer program, a youth flag football program, or a youth tackle football program were recruited to participate via an e-mail invitation to complete an online questionnaire. Each league administrator sent the questionnaire directly to potential respondents. Data were intentionally collected near the end of each respective season to allow for SOC to develop. These three particular programs were chosen both to represent a diversity of sports and because program administrators suggested they believed a high sense of community existed.

Prior to the start of the study, researchers contacted the league administrators to obtain their agreement and willingness to participate in the research project and then researchers obtained IRB approval. At this point, potential research participants received an electronic invitation to complete an online questionnaire. Two of three participating organizations sent

an e-mail from the league administrator directly to potential participants. Approximately 600 youth participated in the youth flag football league, and e-mails were sent to 480 households. Participants ranged in age from 6 to 14. The 9-to-11 age group represents the largest age division with 266 players. Exact numbers for the youth tackle football program were not available; however, it is estimated that e-mails went to approximately three-fourths of the roughly 400 participating families. Youth participants ranged in age from 6 to 16. The third organization invited potential participants to complete the questionnaire through an article in a weekly e-mail newsletter. Each questionnaire remained open for approximately two weeks to allow interested participants ample time to respond.

Participant recruitment yielded 122 respondents (53 parents of children who played flag football, 36 parents from tackle football, and 33 from soccer). The sample was largely female (73%), White (81%) and had a household income of over \$100,000 (86%). The majority of participating parents had two (52%) or three (30%) children.

Measures

Sense of community. A comprehensive questionnaire assessing a multitude of factors was designed to meet the specific objectives of the study. Sense of community and identification characteristics were evaluated using two scales that were embedded in the larger questionnaire. The Sense of Community Index 2 (SCI-2; Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008) was used to assess the overall strength of sense of community (SOC) among a community of parents of sports participants. The SCI-2 uses 24 items on a 4-point Likert-type scale to measure participants' feelings on how well the statements represent a specific community (e.g. their soccer or football league). Examples of statements include "I get important needs of mine met because I am part of this community," "I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community," and "Members of this community care about each other." Responses ranged from 1 (*Not at All*) to 4 (*Completely*). Previous research found this scale to have high internal consistency ($\alpha=.94$) across a large diverse sample (Chavis et al., 2008). Based on these 24 items, a mean summary score was created from each participant (range, 1.29-3.83; $M = 2.42$; $SD = .57$). The summary score was found to be normally distributed (skewness = .28; kurtosis = -.33) and similar to previous studies (Chavis et al., 2008), this measure was found have very high reliability ($\alpha = .95$).

Social identification. Identification was evaluated by the Three-Dimensional Strength of Group Identification Scale (TDSIS; Cameron, 2004). This 12-item scale examines three distinct elements of identification: centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties. For purposes of this study, however, only a summary score was evaluated. The summary score was calculated by taking an average of Likert-type responses (1–5, *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) to 12 statements regarding parents' level of identification with the community (e.g., I have a lot in common with other members of this community.). The summary score was found to be normally distributed (range, 2.33-3.58; $M = 2.87$; $SD = .20$; skewness = .25; kurtosis = .84) and similar to previous studies (Cameron, 2004; Obst & White, 2005), this scale was found to have strong psychometric properties ($\alpha = .90$; Cameron; Obst & White, 2005).

Participation. The study also aimed to determine what other factors may influence sense of community including level of involvement and degree of choice. To measure level of involvement the questionnaire asked open-ended questions about the average number of weekly hours that the respondent spent with the community during the last year (time involvement) and approximate average annual expenditures related to participation within this community (financial involvement). To measure degree of choice, participants were asked to rate their level of choice on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-*No Choice* to 5-*Complete Choice*. Finally, parents were asked how many years their children had participated in their community (i.e., years on the team). This was believed to influence the degree to which identification is associated with sense of community.

Covariates. It is important to adjust for individual differences that may influence individuals' responses but may not be directly relevant to the research questions at hand. For this reason, gender was included as a covariate due to previous findings suggesting

that men and women may report differences in SOC (Lambert & Hopkins, 1995) and the number of children in each family was included as a covariate because we believed that families with more children may have less time and fewer monetary assets to invest in each child's team, potentially limiting their sense of community.

Results

Eighty-nine of the 122 individuals that participated in the study had complete data for all variables in the model. Missing data on one or more items on the SOC scale corresponded to the greatest amount of missing data ($n = 21$), followed by individuals that had missing data on one or more items on the identification scale ($n = 8$) and data missing on the perceived choice item ($n = 6$). Individuals with missing data compared to those with no missing data were very similar along all demographic variables (e.g., gender, income, number of children). Additionally, no significant differences were found between individuals with complete data compared to those without complete data in their levels of parental time involvement ($t = .90, p = .376$), financial involvement ($t = -.09, p = .931$), identification ($t = .40, p = .693$), perceived choice ($t = .11, p = .910$) or SOC ($t = .58, p = .572$). Therefore, as missing data appeared to be completely random, all missing data were handled using listwise deletion.

A three-step hierarchical regression was conducted in order to determine whether predictor variables were associated with SOC (see Table 1). Step 1 regressed SOC on five independent variables: parental time involvement in the youth sport setting (Hypothesis 1), level of financial involvement in the youth sport setting (total dollars/100; Hypothesis 2), level of identification with the youth sport experience (Hypothesis 3), perceived choice from parents in participation (Hypothesis 4) and gender and number of children in the home (covariates). Results from this step accounted for a significant amount of variance in SOC ($R^2 = .30, p < .001$) and supported a significant association for time involvement (Hypothesis 1: $b = .039, p = .012$), financial involvement (Hypothesis 2: $b = .02, p = .037$)

Table 1

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Sense of Community

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Gender	-0.07	0.11	-0.06	-0.11	0.11	-0.09	-0.06	0.10	-0.05
Children	-0.15**	0.06	-0.25	-0.10	0.05	-0.18	-0.08	0.05	-0.14
Hours a week	0.04*	0.02	0.26	0.04**	0.01	0.28	0.04**	0.01	0.29
Money spent	0.02*	0.01	0.21	0.01	0.01	0.12	0.01	0.01	0.13
ID	0.25	0.25	0.09	0.32	0.24	0.12	0.10	0.25	0.03
Choice	0.12*	0.05	0.24	0.12**	0.05	0.24	0.11*	0.05	0.22
Years with team				0.09**	0.03	0.30	0.07*	0.03	0.25
ID X Years with team							-0.41*	0.17	-0.24
R^2	.30			.38			.42		
<i>F</i> for change in R^2	5.91(6)**			9.65(1)**			5.98(1)*		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and perceived choice (Hypothesis 4: $b=.12, p=.013$). A significant association between level of identification and SOC was not supported (Hypothesis 3: $b=.25, p=.335$). Additionally, being male (compared to female) was not found to be a strong predictor of respondents' SOC ($b=.069, p=.536$) but the number of children in the home was ($b=-.146, p=.010$), suggesting additional children in the home was associated with lower reports of SOC.

In order to further determine whether the lack of an association between level of identification and SOC was due to the length of time a youth had been on a particular team (Hypothesis 5), an interaction between level of identification and *team time* was tested. Following recommendations by Aiken and West (1991), moderation was tested by entering the main effect for the number of years on the team in step 2 (e.g., for six years, $b=.100, p<.001$), and the product term of level of identification by years on team in step 3 of the regression model. The full regression model accounted for a large amount of variance in SOC ($R^2=.42, p<.001$). Results from step 3 found a significant association between the interaction term and SOC ($b=-.41, p=.017$). This suggests that the association between identification and SOC is dependent upon how long a child has been on a particular team. Probing of this interaction revealed that if a child had only been on a particular team for one year, identification was significantly associated with SOC ($b=.64, p=.020$), and if an individual had been with a team between two and six years, there was not a statistically significant association between identification and sense of community (e.g., for two years, $b=.97, p=.335$), and if they had been on the team for six or more years, there was an inverse relationship between identity and SOC (e.g., for six years, $b=-1.61, p=.037$). A graphic display of these interactions appears in Figure 1.

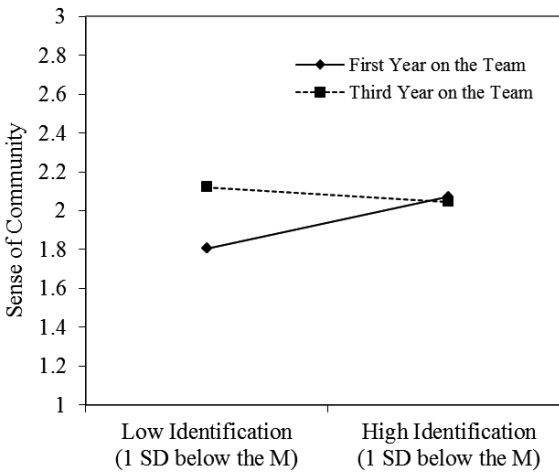


Figure 1. Association between Identification and Overall Sense of Community. This figure represents the association between identification and overall sense of community for individuals that have been on the team for one year and three years. Low identification represents one standard deviation below the sample mean and high identification represents one standard deviation above the mean.

Interpretation of Results and Implications for Practice

This study makes an important contribution to the literature by expanding on our understanding of the experience of youth sport parents. A number of researchers have noted a gap in work related to the youth sport parent experience (e.g., Brustad, 1992; Fredricks

& Eccles, 2004; Omli & Weise-Bjornstal, 2011; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Although recent studies have stepped in to that gap, the primary focus remains on how the parent influences the youth experience, rather than purely on the experience of the parent (e.g., Fredricks & Eccles; Omli & LaVoi, 2009). In contrast, this study focused solely on the experience of the parent.

One notable exception to this gap is a recent qualitative inquiry into the experience of youth sport parents. In this exploration, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) indicated that interaction opportunities with other parents were a benefit of being a youth sport parent. The current study expands on that preliminary finding by analyzing specific factors that results in a sense of community in youth sport parents. As the results of this study demonstrate, certain characteristics of the parental experience in a youth sport program can increase the feeling of sense of community within those parents. Given the important potential outcomes of a feeling of sense of community, including benefits to the individual, the program, and the broader community, it is important for youth sport administrators to consider programmatic elements that can enhance those characteristics.

As hypothesized, level of involvement was a significant predictor of sense of community. Parents who spent more time in the program and parents who spent more money on their children's youth sport experience were likely to experience higher sense of community. This result is consistent with qualitative findings in other recreational settings where participants stated that the more involvement they had in activities, the more they experienced SOC (Breunig, et al., 2010). For program administrators who wish to increase parental SOC, therefore, a logical step would be to encourage parental involvement.

Numerous opportunities already exist for parental time involvement within youth sports programs, including coaching, league administration, field maintenance and numerous others tasks (Peter, 2011). Parents are often essential to the execution of these tasks and the success of the overall program. The question for administrators then becomes how to encourage parents to get involved. Parental involvement serves a practical function of simply getting tasks done, while also increasing the parent sense of community, which then has a snowball effect of parents wanting to contribute more to the community. Research on the motivations of youth sport volunteers points to personal values being a primary motivator to volunteer (May, Zhang, & Connaughton, 2010). Further, although parents have a practical reason to volunteer for the benefit of their own children, they are also motivated to benefit children in general (Busser & Carruthers, 2010). Thus, in order to encourage parental involvement and subsequently increase SOC, it behooves program administrators to promote the benefits of overall positive youth development. By promoting the benefits of volunteering to parents, the sport administrator can increase parental involvement in the program, thereby creating numerous benefits to both the parent and the program.

A related finding that emerged from this study is that the number of children in the home is inversely related to SOC within the youth sport program. In other words, parents who have more children experience a lower sense of community within the youth sport program. This is a logical result, as parents with multiple children are more likely to have their time and energies spread thinner across the activities and various communities of all of their children. Although this may seem like a logical and irrelevant finding—after all, administrators cannot control how many children a parent has—there are possible administrative implications from this finding. Many youth sport programs often run entirely separately from each other, despite the fact that the participants in these programs are often many of the same families or even same youth. For example, in this study, the soccer program and youth flag football program are run by two different organizations. Many, of the families, however, likely have children participating in both programs. Thus, it benefits administrators to find synergies among the programs that will offer not only practical advantages, but may create a wider and more diverse community identity, rather than a sense of community that is tied only to one specific program. For example, multipurpose recreational facilities are popular settings for physical activities, including sports (Finch et al., 2010). Indeed, in this study these programs use many of the same fields. Having parents

from both programs join together to assist in field maintenance may allow parents to be simultaneously involved in both communities, while also creating one larger community of youth sport parents.

Another relevant finding for the youth sport administrator is that the degree of perceived choice is a significant predictor of sense of community. This finding is consistent with research in other settings (Brayley & Obst, 2010). That is, parents who perceive that they had a higher amount of choice to participate in the program, experience a higher sense of community. Although parents are ultimately the ones who enroll their children in the program, in many cases parents feel pressured to sign their children up for activities beneficial to the child (Choi, Phenshaw, Baker, & Tree, 2005; Coakley, 2006). Thus, parents may or may not perceive that they had a high degree of choice in the decision. Additionally, although many parents willingly volunteer to help with the program, in other cases, the volunteering may be a result of pressure from the organization or other parents when the team is in desperate need of a coach or other volunteer position. It may, therefore, not be immediately obvious the degree of choice versus a sense of obligation that a parent perceives that he or she has. Hence, it is incumbent upon administrators to allow for that choice, while simultaneously encouraging the parental involvement. For example, program marketing materials may highlight not only the experience of the child, but also the experience of the parent. Kanters (2002) suggested that a social marketing strategy that highlighted the benefits to the target audience and society as a whole may be most effective for discretionary activities such as sports and recreation. Therefore, market materials should highlight potential benefits to parents, including the development of a community. Also, as noted previously, given motivations to contribute to overall youth development (Busser & Carruthers, 2010), marketing materials could highlight the important role parents play in that process. This is also consistent with Kanters' suggestion of promoting the benefits to society as a whole. By demonstrating that the program may be a positive experience for the parent as well as the child, the parent may feel he or she has a higher degree of choice in choosing to participate in the program.

In terms of encouraging additional time involvement, the reality is that sometimes it is simply a case of administrators asking for involvement. In one study of youth sport volunteers, researchers noted that sometimes simply being aware of a need and being asked to help motivates volunteers (Community Development Council of Durham, 2009). The report also noted that institutional barriers such as finding out about needs or need to complete burdensome processes also limited involvement (Community Development Council of Durham). Thus, to encourage parental involvement, administrators need to make the needs clearly known and make it easy for parents to get involved by removing as many institutional barriers as possible.

One of the more complex findings is the interaction between identification and number of years spent with a team. Although identification with the program was not an overall significant predictor of sense of community, further probing revealed a significant interaction between identification and number of years on the team. Specifically, identification is a significant predictor of higher SOC in the first year of participation, but is not significant in subsequent years, and then is actually a significant predictor of a lower SOC after six or more years with a team. Upon reflection, this is not necessarily a surprising finding. Parents with children who are in their first year of a program are not likely to have spent the time in the program or have built the relationships that would create identification with the program. Thus, administrators need to find other ways for parents to identify with the program. This could take the form of team shirts for the parents, or in connecting parents electronically through social media. In contrast, after six years with a team, higher identification actually predicts lower SOC. This may be a result of the parent now having older children who were more self-sufficient with their participation in the league.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study conducted in an applied setting, limitations existed that may minimize the generalizability of the results. Participants in the study were overwhelmingly female (73%), White (81%) and had a household income of over \$100,000 (86%). Therefore, it is unclear if the results would apply to more diverse or lower income populations.

Further, SOC may be influenced by a number of other factors that were not measured by this study. For example, individual personality traits also appear to influence sense of community. Personality traits such as extroversion/introversion (Deneui, 2003; Lounsbury, Loveland, & Gibson, 2003), agreeableness/disagreeableness and openness/guardedness (Lounsbury et al., 2003) all appear to affect an individual's SOC. While a number of studies have focused on the personality types of recreation and competitive athletes as well as coaches (Coetzee, 2010; Miner, 2009 for example), there is a void of research related to personality types of parents of athletes. Additionally, even though one might speculate that parents who choose to engage in the youth sport experience of their child are more likely to have these characteristics that lead to feeling a sense of community than someone who is not engaging in the community, it is unclear from these data whether the youth sport experience or the personality of the parent is most influential in leading to SOC.

Implications for Future Research

This study represents an initial stepping stone for future researchers hoping to understand the experience of the youth sport experience and the impacts of that experience. Future research should focus on the impact of SOC in this setting. For example, if parents develop a higher SOC how does that affect their behavior during games, or how does a higher SOC affect interactions with other parents outside of the youth sport experience? Further, if a parent develops a higher SOC within the youth sport setting does that lead to a higher overall quality of life for the parent? Gaining insight into these questions will help administrators design programs that facilitate positive experiences of parents.

Additionally, there are some logical implications for administrators by testing the relation of specific program elements (e.g., registration discounts for volunteering) in an intervention approach. This could help administrators better identify specific elements that could enhance a sense of community among parents.

In addition, as noted above, this research was conducted with a relatively homogenous group of participants. Parents from different backgrounds may have varying capacities to be involved with the program or different expectations. As such, future research should explore if these findings apply to samples from varying demographics.

Conclusion

This paper represents an important step in research that seeks to understand the experience of the youth sport parent. Although SOC has been examined in multiple settings, the experience of a youth sport parent is unique, and thus, it is important to begin by testing common predictors of SOC to see if they applied to this setting. The results indicate that, indeed, a SOC does appear to develop consistent with hypothesized predictions. These results further lead to practical implications for the youth sport administrator who wishes to develop a SOC among the parents of participants. As parents play an essential role in the youth sport experience, it is hoped that by adding a focus on the experience of the youth sport parents, the administrator will be able to improve the experience for both the parents and the participants.

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