

Enhancing the experience: Understanding sense of community from an athlete's perspective

Stacy Warner, University of Texas at Austin

Marlene Dixon (Advisor), University of Texas at Austin

Student Competition Finalist

May 30, 2009

25 minute oral

Abstract 2009-145

11:00 AM

(Lexington A)

Community development is one of the most common ways to justify the need and value of sport (Chalip, 2006a). Numerous sport organizations' mission statements show that indeed their programs are charged with creating a sense of community (SOC), and it is thought that doing so will enhance the participant experience. Since SOC is setting specific (Hill, 1996) and most research has been conducted outside of sport, the literature has yet to demonstrate how and when SOC is created within a sport context. Utilizing a grounded theory and phenomenological approach, this study investigated the mechanisms for creating SOC. Twenty former college athletes were interviewed regarding their sport experiences. The results revealed that Administrative Consideration, Leadership Opportunities, Equality in Administrative Decisions, Competition, and Social Spaces were the most salient factors that fostered SOC. The results contribute to community development theory, and provide practical solutions for enhancing the participant experience.