The Role of Community in Athlete Deviance

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Despite the growing evidence that developing a sense of community in sport programs leads to benefits of improved life quality, well-being, and retention in sport (Warner & Dixon, 2011, 2013), there is a negative side of sport that seemingly fosters deviant behavior. Popular beliefs about sport participation tend emphasize the positive consequences of sport and sport headlines showcasing deviance continues to disappoint the sport community. As issues involving athlete doping, unsportsmanlike conduct, gambling, and domestic violence continue to capture media attention, little research exists specifically on the role that sport managers can play in preventing or addressing such behavior. Some have called for policy changes or better standards/consequences for those that partake in deviant behavior, but deviance is far too complex (Atkinson & Young, 2008). Athletes adhere to the sport ethic and ideas like ‘win at all costs’ and ‘second place is the first to lose’, which can lead athletes to take unnecessary risks that can be harmful to themselves and others (Coakley, 2016). Whether it is on-the-field concerns, like performance enhancing drugs or tactics that physically harm the other team or off-the-field violence, gambling or hazing it is important for sport managers to explore the role that the community formed via sport contributes to or detracts from such deviance. In doing so, a better understanding of how a sport manager might promote the positive behavior and mitigate deviance can be gained. Therefore, this study will seek to explore how a sense of community influences deviant behavior in sport.

Popular beliefs as well as current research, tends to focus on the positive outcomes of sports and often assume a sport evangelist perspective (Coakley, 2011; Giulianotti, 2004). A nascent line has focused on how a sense of community develops in various sport settings further supported this trend by position sense of community as a positive outcome of sport (Warner, 2016; Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012). Work in the community psychology realm also reinforced that increases in sense of community should lead to improved well-being along with less drug use and delinquent behaviors (e.g., Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Battistich & Hom, 1997), and further, a lack of community leads to deviant behaviors (Hirsch, 1969). While sport is frequently cited as an arena that bonds people together and fosters community, critics have also cited this same arena as one that promotes deviant behaviors (Carter & Carter, 2007; Chalip, 2006; Coakley, 2001; Irwin, 1973; Kleiber, 1983). Currently a dearth of information exists on how this sport community may promote or deter deviant behaviors. For example “Bounty Gate” was a tactic the New Orleans Saints implemented where team members could earn bonuses for intentionally injuring opposing players. The norms and culture of this team seemingly supported deviant behavior as part of their community. As more scandals and deviant behavior surfaces, it is important to understand how the sense of community developed in sport can contribute to or mitigate deviant behavior. Because the outcomes of sport are clearly dependent on multiple factors including type of sport and context (Chalip, 2006; Coakley, 2011), it is also important to explore this and take into account competitive level of athletes.

Thus in order to better understand the role of community formed via sport affects deviance, the overarching research questions that guided this study were: What is the relationship between athlete’s sense of community and deviant behavior? And, does this vary by competitive level?

In an effort to determine the relationship between athlete’s sense of community and deviance, university varsity athletes and club sport participants (n=562) completed an online survey. Both varsity and club athletes were surveyed because although both fall under the purview of a U.S. colleges, varsity athletes participate in a higher competitive level, well-funded formal sport structure while club athlete are involved in a less competitive and more informal sport structure. After IRB approval, the survey was distributed via athlete listservs and participants were informed that survey was voluntary and anonymous. The instrument included the 21- item Sense of Community in Sport Scale (Kerwin et al., 2015; Warner et al., 2013), 42-items regarding deviance, and demographic information. More specifically the deviance were comprised of 8- items from the Moral Disengagement Sport Scale (MDSS) to
address sportsmanship (Broadley & Kavussanu, 2008), 8-items from Performance Enhancing Attitude Scale (PEAS; Petrócsi & Aidman, 2009), 9-items measuring General Delinquency (GD), and 7-items measuring violence toward partners (VP; Dahlberg, Toal, Swahn, & Behrens, 2005).

Statistical Analysis
Descriptive analysis was conducted on the demographic data. Data analysis included preliminary assessments of reliability and validity for the SCS, standard regression analysis to examine SOC influences on both positive and deviant outcomes, and MANOVAs were run to examine group differences in SOC based on demographics.

Results
Of the 562 returned surveys, 389 were completed and analyzed. The sample was 63.8% female, 83.1% white, 50.6% intercollegiate athletes with 30.8% on athletic scholarship, and 84.1% participating on team sports. The questionnaire was used to measure different, underlying constructions. All four scales were found to be reliable with internal consistency, as determined by the following Cronbach’s alpha results: SOC (.95), MDSS (.87), PEAS (.82), GD (.89), and VP (.82). Overall, the participants had a high SOC (M=3.39, SD=.56) and did not indicate high levels of deviance (MDSS: M=1.53, SD=.63, PEAS: M=1.42, SD=.54; GD: M=1.43, SD=.50; and VP: M=1.24, SD=.42). The results of the two-way MANOVA show that there was a statistically significant interaction effect between gender and age on the combined dependent variables, Wilks’ Λ = .935 F(7, 381) = 1.709, p = .044, partial η² = .022. Analysis of univariate results will be discussed in the presentation. The second two-way MANOVA shows an interaction between sport type and competitive level, Wilks’ Λ = .969, F(5, 381) = 2.428, p = .035, partial η² = .031. Analysis of univariate results will be discussed in the presentation.

Discussion
Generally, all athletes scored relatively high on SOC measures, with men scoring higher across all scales, demonstrating both a higher sense of community and deviance – especially as it relates to violence against a partner and performance enhancing drugs. Team sport athletes demonstrated a higher SOC, MDSS, and GD scores. While it must be cautioned that, overall, deviance scores were generally low, the results indicate that male athletes in a strong team sport community are likely to report higher levels of deviance. Interestingly, individual athletes scored higher for PEAS. Perhaps individual athletes feel greater pressure to succeed given they do not have the support of or are competing against teammates and, therefore, their behavior reflects this pressure and a more positive attitude towards performance enhancing drugs. Additional findings and their implications will be discussed.