Beyond Economic Impact: The Psychic Income Received by a College Town Community from Intercollegiate Athletics

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College athletics are often praised for their intangible ability to help forge town and gown partnerships by uniting universities with their students, community, and alumni (Hyman & Jura, 2009; Ingrassia, 2012; Kirwan & Turner, 2010; Oriard, 2012). Fall Saturdays breathe excitement and camaraderie into college towns all across America as college football takes center stage. In the spring, NCAA March Madness grabs the attention of fans young and old as they painstakingly attempt to pick the perfect bracket and cheer their team on to the Final Four. The social, cultural, and economic effects of college sport are undeniable but “scholars have long struggled on how to distill and operationalize these impacts so that decision makers can make use of this research” (Chapin, 2002, p. 9).

The purpose of this study is to measure the psychic income residents of a college town receive from a local university athletics teams and department. Psychic income, as defined by Crompton (2004), is the emotional and psychological benefit residents perceive they receive from a local sports team or event, even though they do not physically attend sports events, and are not involved in organizing them. Crompton’s definition recognizes seven contributing factors of psychic income: (a) community pride resulting from increased visibility, (b) civic pride from being a sport event/host city, (c) pride in efforts to resuscitate deteriorated areas, (d) enhanced collective self-esteem, (e) tangible focus for social bonding, (f) excitement from the event visitors and (g) emotional involvement with a sport event/team (Crompton, 2004; Walker & Kim 2012). This theoretical framework will guide research into research questions explored within the context of a college town with a population of roughly 60,000 and a big time intercollegiate athletics department consistently in the top-25 of the Learfield Sports Directors’ Cup (NACDA, 2016).

RQ1: Which elements of psychic income are most significant within a college town community / collegiate athletics department relationship?

RQ2: How does psychic income of college town residents vary based on (a) gender; (b) ethnicity; (c) level of fan identity, and (d) highest level of education completed?

Thus far, psychic income has almost exclusively been used to help justify the public subsidy of new sport facilities in a community or the cost of bringing a professional sports franchise to a new city (Chema, 1996, Sanderson 2000). Recently, it was also applied to measuring the social impact associated with major sporting events in a community. Kim and Walker (2012) created a scale of psychic income (SPI) to measure the social impact of Super Bowl XLII in Tampa Bay, Florida. This study modified Crompton’s seven-factor psychic impact paradigm into their own survey that allowed the researchers to quantify the psychic income for Tampa Bay residents (Kim & Walker, 2012). This instrument will be utilized in the present study.

Methods
The target population for the study included residents of a college town, age 18 and up, who were registered to vote by Election Day 2016. A systematic sampling technique was used to select participants: every 10th resident was approached as they left their designated polling place and was asked to take a survey at a refreshment tent after casting their vote. Residents who agreed were invited to take a survey on an ipad or via pencil and paper. Surveying was conducted at three polling sites; one on an early-voting day (November 1st, 2016), and two on Election Day (November 8th, 2016). Data collection is in-progress at the time of abstract submission.
The survey was developed directly from the scale of psychic income (SPI) used in Kim and Walker’s 2012 study “Measuring the social impacts associated with the Super Bowl XLIII: Preliminary development of a psychic income scale”. Kim and Walker (2012) generated a list of items for each component of Crompton’s (2004) psychic income framework to arrive at their measure of psychological impact (SPI) which has strong measures of reliability and validity. The Kim and Walker SPI survey was pared down for the purposes of this study from its original 42 items measuring 7 factors to 21 items measuring those same 7 factors. The factors and items were adjusted from the original Kim and Walker SPI survey to better fit the context of assessing the social impact of a collegiate athletics department instead of a Super Bowl. Face validity of the adjusted scale was established by a panel of experts, and internal reliability measures will be reported upon completion of data collection.

Significance
The results of this study will be able to shed light on the actual psychological and emotional benefits that city residents receive from their local university athletics department. Given the findings of Chapin (2002), Sanderson (2000) and Johnson & Whitehead (2000) that outline the need to consider non-economic benefits created from public subsidy of sport investments, it is clear that economic impact is no longer a strong enough justification for public subsidy of collegiate athletics. This is particularly true in the current era of heightened public scrutiny (Weight & Cooper, 2015), unprecedented spending (e.g. Knight Commission, 2009; 2010), and academic scandal (Enlinson, 2013; McCormick & McCormick, 2006) of college athletics program.

In addition to the gaps in the literature this study addresses, this study has the potential to provide collegiate athletics administrators with alternative justifications for using public dollars to maintain college sport on campus and will be able to help collegiate athletics administrators make decisions better tailored to fostering their relationship with the community.