ABSTRACT

We are one: The role of group identity and self-sacrificial leaders on the generation of social capital within youth sport programs

by

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Popular culture often assumes that participation in youth sport has a host of positive benefits, including the ability to generate social capital, spur future occupational success and encourage greater levels of civic engagement (Coalter, 2007). There is, however, little empirical evidence to support this ideal (Coakley, 2011). In fact, little is known about the specific conditions within a sport organization that likely to facilitate youth sport organizations to become more adept at generating, maintaining, and distributing social capital to their members.

Using the Community of Practice framework (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) as a lens, the author investigated the conditions under which youth sport organizations are most effectively able to generate social capital for their members. In doing so, the author explores the relationship between team identification and role identification. This is therefore the first empirical test of the theoretical work of Lock and Heere (2017) that proposed that team identification, driven by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and role identification, driven by identity theory, are unique but interdependent constructs.

Using structural equation modeling, the author proposed and supported a model in which the relationship between team identification and role identification was explored. Furthermore, this model examined the importance of self-sacrificial leadership on the ability of youth sport organizations to generate social capital for its members. The results of this study demonstrate that role identification positively impacts the development of
team identification. Team identification and self-sacrificial leadership behaviors of the organization’s leaders positively impacted the development of social capital within the organization. Role identification does not have a positive impact on the creation of social capital. Implications for youth sport organizations and participants, including suggestions about the importance of fostering team identification are discussed. Finally, directions for future research, particularly with regards to how to effectively develop team identification and how this may relate to athlete retention are discussed.